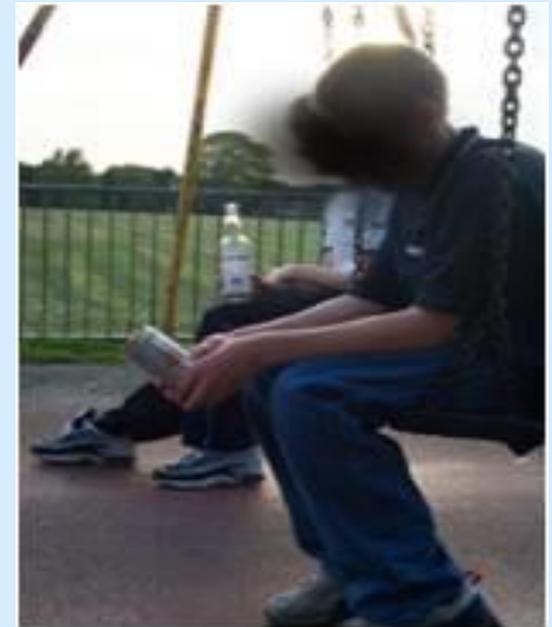


*Teaching our children to drink: assimilating
cultural norms about alcohol
development of a workshop for parents
and children*



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Overview of presentation



- A pragmatic research project that aims to bring children, parents & schools together to promote sensible attitudes to alcohol and to dispel myths
- Phase 1: Exploration, feasibility & development
- Phase 2: Implementation & evaluation

Specific project aims



1. To establish the potential for promoting safe and sensible attitudes and beliefs to alcohol in children in school years 5, 6, 7 & 8 (ages 9-13).
2. To develop a home/school partnership in relation to alcohol awareness
3. To explore the role of alcohol in the context of the family
4. To develop an intervention to promote understanding of alcohol as a drug and thus influence the broader public health agenda
5. To generate discussion and awareness about the issues (such as alcohol effects and harm) and dispel myths and stereotypes through workshops and seminars.

Focus groups with parents and children in participating schools

- 24 parents
- 170 children
- 100 children also completed a questionnaire on hobbies and general life style.

First phase evaluation of materials

- 60 children
- 10 parents

In total 4 high schools & 3 primary schools participated

key findings from focus groups: children

- Children as young as 9 and 10 appear to be drinking on a fairly regular basis (more than sips)
- Access to alcohol is often through parents
- A clear understanding of the central position of alcohol in our culture
- The transition to high school appears to be a demarcation zone in attitude formation
- Teachers confirm that alcohol is an issue that needs debate before high school

Key findings from focus groups:

Parents



- False confidence in knowledge
- Are resistant to engaging in school-based alcohol education initiatives
- Parents' 'job' to teach children about drinking
- Do not want their children criticising their own drinking behaviour
- Feel pressure to supply children with alcohol at parties and sleepovers
- See other drugs as much more of a threat to their children

Primary children's perceptions of why people drink

Negative affect:

- *Sometimes you feel depressed and you want to forget things*
- *If they get divorced or something*
- *To solve their problem*
- *To calm their nerves sometimes*

Positive affect/social reasons:

- *When they're out partying*
- *It's if they go out and it's like being in another world and having good fun*
- *To celebrate*
- *For a laugh and they go to a party and they drink there as well*
- *Makes you forget all your worries*

Children's perceptions of alcohol effects



- **Drinking behaviour:**

- *Drinking through a straw increases the effect (12 year old said she learned this from her mother)*
- *5.4% doesn't touch me and that's all Bacardi Breezers are just 5% and it just don't touch me (14 year old girl)*
- *The boys don't drink alcopops – they like stronger stuff like lager (12 year old girl)*
- *So, how much vodka **is** it safe for me to drink then? (10 year old boy)*

Quotes from parents



- **Acceptance of drinking behaviour:**
 - *There are 10 and 11 year olds drinking in sleepovers, and I'm not saying they are irresponsible parents, but you know it happens (mother of primary school child)*
 - *I've bought alcopops for my daughter (13) for barbeques*
 - *I buy alcopops for my 14 year old because he doesn't like the taste of alcohol... (a mother)*
 - *I had to go around confiscating alcopops from year 6 children (a Primary head talking about the school barbeque)*
 - *I just thanked God he hadn't taken drugs (mother whose son was on life-support after drinking)*

Phase 2: the workshop



- Evidence based (informed by phase 1 & other research)
 - ✦ Fun, interactive, non-threatening, strengthening families approach
- Encouraging parents and children to explore alcohol issues together
- Exploring knowledge and myths
- Highlighting age appropriate behaviours
- Understanding and countering peer pressure & pester power

Preliminary Results

Trialled in 4 schools thus far

- 50 children and 40 parents & teachers
- Immediate evaluation was positive:
- All teachers requested copies of the workshop pack
- The majority of parents gave a score of 5/5 for usefulness
- Many parents were surprised at how misinformed they are in relation to alcohol and their own consumption

Actual & estimated consumption (parents)



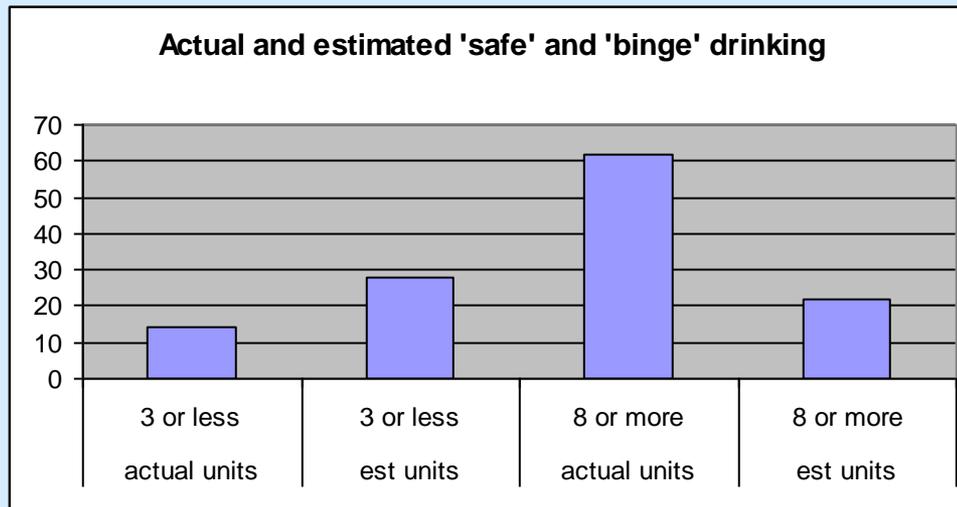
Categories of drinking (using government guidelines)

safe drinking levels

- 14% were drinking 3 or less units
- 28% estimated that they were drinking 3 or less units

binge drinking

- 61% were drinking 8 or more units
- 22% estimated that they were drinking 8 or more units





- Information & knowledge
 - ✦ *'information was good....it's very good for the kids to know [about alcohol] early on'*
 - ✦ *'Lots of people think they know about alcohol but they don't'*
 - ✦ *'I enjoyed it, it gave the kids an idea of what is safe, even parents learned something, I know I did'*
- Changing behaviour
 - ✦ *One hour definitely makes a difference – certainly makes you question pre-conceived ideas. I sometimes nag my husband now*
 - ✦ *It makes you think, especially when you're driving. Once you know what you are drinking, it makes you more careful*



- Understanding units

- ✦ *I now think about what I'm drinking [in terms of units], before it never occurred to me*
- ✦ *putting drinks in order of how strong they are was really useful....what was amazing was that none of us knew...we all got it wrong*

- Increased communication with children

- ✦ All participants said that the workshop had led to further discussion in the family about alcohol.
- ✦ *I can talk to them now, but when they become teenagers their friends influence them....it's difficult to talk to teenagers, they think they know everything*

To conclude



- This research demonstrates that parents seriously underestimate both their own consumption and the dangers of introducing spirit-based sweet drinks to children
- The way forward has to be to raise awareness of the strengths of alcoholic drinks and to challenge the government's mixed messages in terms of drinking guidelines
- This study demonstrates that a brief intervention can lead to better informed parents and more open family discussions about alcohol