

DELAY THE ONSET OF PARENTAL SUPPLY OF ALCOHOL TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The Issue

Research clearly indicates that delaying the age at which young people are introduced to alcohol reduces their risk of alcohol related problems.

Adolescence is a rapidly changing time of development. There is now significant evidence around the impacts that alcohol has on the adolescent brain. These directly relate to:

- Short term risks – such as increased risk of being involved in car accidents, assaults and injuries, unwanted sexual activity, impaired learning;
- Long term effects – proven links with criminal behaviour, depression, alcohol abuse and dependence in adulthood, deliberate self-harm and suicide, increased risk of life-threatening diseases including certain types of cancer.

Research now overwhelmingly asserts that the age at which someone starts drinking really does matter. For example:

- The younger they are when they start to drink, the greater the chance that they will have alcohol-related problems or other substance abuse in adulthood.
- A study found that children who had sipped alcohol before they were 10 years old were almost twice as likely to be drinking by 15 years.

Adolescents who have parents who usually know where they are, what they're doing and who they're with, are likely to drink less.

The Concern

'Many parents wanting to support their teens think that they can teach them to drink safely by giving them alcohol and watching over them. Although this is well-intended and commonly believed, many studies now show that parent approval of any level of drinking and parents supplying alcohol is linked to worse, not better outcomes. **Most parents are not aware of this.**

The advice to parents/caregivers has now changed from supervising “moderate” teen drinking to delaying the on-set of drinking for as long as possible to support brain development and reduce the risk of alcohol-related problems.

Purpose of this Project

This project proposes to work with the caregivers/whānau of intermediate-aged students to raise awareness about the benefits of delaying consumption of alcohol to young people

Project objectives

Involve parents and caregivers in the co-design of key messages and strategies based on existing evidence

Trial communication and support strategies for caregivers and whanau to delay the consumption of alcohol by young people

Working with Schools and Next Steps

- Gain agreement with up to 5 schools in New Plymouth District with Year 7 & 8 students to engage with their caregivers/whānau
- Raise awareness of teachers and caregivers/whānau of the benefits of delaying consumption of alcohol. This would involve us providing a brief overview of the project to teachers and school staff/BoT and the school advising us on communication channels to reach caregivers/whanau.
- Hold free events for caregivers/whanau of participating schools with a key speaker to inform them of the evidence and raise their awareness of the benefits of delaying the on-set of drinking in adolescents. We would seek the school's advice on event promotion and how to maximise caregiver/whanau participation.
- Use the event as a catalyst to establish a focus group of whanau and caregivers at each participating school. Each focus group will be facilitated and asked to meet twice, and participants will receive a koha.
- Through the focus groups, identify communication and support strategies for whanau and caregivers to delay the onset of consumption of alcohol by young people.
- Share strategy ideas with school staff for feedback
- Trial and evaluate the strategies with the wider community of caregivers/whanau of intermediate aged students.

Funding and Management of the Project

Funding for the project has been granted by the Health Promotion Agency.

Delivery of the project is being managed by a collaborative group made up of representatives of New Plymouth Injury Safe Trust, Bishop's Action Foundation, Taranaki District Health Board and ACC.

Timeframe

Letters of Agreement with up to 5 schools by April 2021

Three presentations by key speaker May 2021

Two focus groups facilitated at each participating school during terms two and three

Review meeting with school staff in October 2021

Concept test strategies in term four

The strategies will be trialed and evaluated in 2022 (subject to approval of a second round of funding).

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