



Addiction, Adolescent Health/Medicine

Study looks at why parents supply alcohol to adolescents

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Parents may be more likely to let adolescents have a sip of alcohol if they believe their child's friends are drinking, according to a new study.

"Parents may be supplying sips of alcohol in response to believing their child will be exposed to unsupervised alcohol use with their peers. However, they may be wrong in their belief, and may be prematurely introducing their children to a behavior that may have marked risks," researchers said in the study "Parents who Supply Sips of Alcohol in Early Adolescence: A Prospective Study of Risk Factors" (Wadolowski M, et al. *Pediatrics*. Feb. 26, 2016, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/02/24/peds.2015-2611>).

Roughly 60% of adolescents have tasted alcohol by age 13, according to the study. Sipping may be a stepping stone to additional drinking by minors, which is associated with delinquent behavior and poor health. Parents are a "major supplier" of alcohol, including sips, the study said.

To look at predictors of parents providing sips of alcohol to adolescents, researchers surveyed more than 1,700 families with seventh-graders in Australia. They asked parents about supplying tastes of alcohol, family demographics, house rules, alcohol access and their child's peers. They asked adolescents about alcohol use and externalizing and internalizing behaviors. They followed up with the families a year after the initial survey.

The study found 24% of parents in the follow-up survey had supplied their child with a sip of alcohol in the past year, typically in the context of a family gathering.

In an unadjusted analysis, more than 10 variables were associated with providing sips. However, when adjusting for demographics and other factors, the only significant variables associated with higher risk of providing alcohol were increased parent perception of their child's peers using substances, increased access to alcohol in the home and lenient rules about alcohol.

The study said "the associations between lenient alcohol rules and home alcohol access on parental supply may increase adolescent perception of parental alcohol permissiveness, which increases the risk of early drinking initiation."

Resources

- [AAP policy "Alcohol Use by Youth and Adolescents: A Pediatric Concern"](#)
- [AAP policy "Substance Use Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment for Pediatricians"](#)
- [AAP News story "'Kids do listen' when parents tell them not to drink"](#)
- [Information for parents on talking to teens about drugs and alcohol](#)
- [Information for parents on alcohol use by adolescents](#)