

UW study: Teens don't need parents as 'drinking buddies'

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Parents who let their kids drink when supervised – because they think it's safer than an outright ban on underage drinking – may want to rethink their approach due to a new study in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

Co-authored by University of Washington professor Richard Catalano, the study (PDF) found that teens who drank with adult supervision had more drinking-related problems than teens raised with a zero-tolerance attitude.

"Kids need parents to be parents and not drinking buddies," Barbara McMorris, the study's lead researcher, said in a statement. McMorris is a senior research associate at the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota.

"Adults need to be clear about what messages they are sending."

Researchers looked at 1,945 adolescents in Washington state and Australia and compared two approaches to underage drinking: Zero-tolerance attitudes and "harm minimization."

Harm minimization is the view that alcohol is a normal part of growing up, and youths, if they drink, should be encouraged to drink responsibly in supervised settings. Advocates think such alcohol use can ward off later problems like binge drinking and DUIs.

The Washington kids reflected America's general zero-tolerance attitude, which includes the under-21 drinking ban. The other group represented Australia's more relaxed view, in which more parents let their kids drink with them than do American parents, researchers said.

The study found that the Australian youths reported more drinking, more drinking around adults, and more drinking that led to fights, blackouts, regrettable sex and addiction than did the Washington youths.

"Findings challenge the harm-minimization position that supervised alcohol use or early-age alcohol use will reduce the development of adolescent alcohol problems," the study said.

Read the study [here](#).

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