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## Does Drinking With Parents Help Teens Drink More Responsibly? Not Really

*alcohol, underage drinking, binge drinking*  
By ALICE PARK Friday, April 29, 2011 | [31 COMMENTS](#)

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When I was in high school, my parents laid down a few ground rules about exactly how “liberating” my teenage emancipation was going to be. No driving without an adult in the car past dark, no staying out past 11 p.m., and no, absolutely no, drinking.

Well, it turns out Mom and Dad were on to something (don't you hate it when that happens?). A new study by researchers at the University of Minnesota found that teens who drink under their parents' supervision — the occasional sip at dinner or during holidays — are more likely to become problem drinkers a few years later than those whose parents, like mine, adopted a zero-tolerance policy.

When it comes to underage drinking, there are two schools of thought. Some are convinced that teens are too young and inexperienced to handle alcohol, and not ready to make decisions about how much is too much or how to drink responsibly.

Then there are those who point to cultures where alcohol isn't so taboo for adolescents, where adults allow their children to drink a little in their presence, and where alcoholism rates are no different from those in countries where underage drinking is illegal. By incorporating alcohol into youngsters' lives from an early age, and not making it a forbidden fruit, they argue, teens are less likely to abuse it as adults.

Turns out that may not be the case. Barbara McMorris, lead author of the study published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, compared seventh graders from the U.S., which prohibits underage drinking, and Australia, where adult-supervised drinking for teens is allowed. By the ninth grade, 36% of the Australian teens had problems with binge drinking or other alcohol-related issues such as getting in fights and having blackouts, while only 21% of the American adolescents did. In fact, regardless of where they lived, youngsters who drank in front of adults were more likely to have drinking problems several years later than those who abstained.

“Our main message is that adults really do need to pay attention to what they are allowing their kids to do, and what they are giving them permission to do in their presence,” says McMorris. “Actions speak louder than words.”

What's happening, says McMorris, is that instead of incorporating responsible habits by drinking with their parents, teens, being teens, are more likely to think they are mature enough to handle any situation involving alcohol. “If a parent or adult introduces a child to alcohol, it sends a message about how to drink in that type of social setting,” she says. “But that message doesn't translate to the unsupervised setting, so teens won't necessarily know how to cut themselves off after one drink when they are out with friends. There isn't a carryover effect.”

That's the revelation of McMorris's study, and it contradicts the intuitive sense that watching parents drink responsibly at dinner must send some message about moderation to teens about how to use alcohol. Instead, in the teen's mind, adult supervised drinking may be interpreted in almost the opposite way, as a license to imbibe. “As adults, we send a pretty clear message when we are permissive about the type of behavior we allow to happen right in front of us,” says McMorris. “We say that it's okay to drink.”

Setting limits by making it clear that adolescents are too young for alcohol may help teens to learn how to avoid drinking while underage, and develop more responsible drinking habits as adults. Mom and Dad may have known what they were doing after all.

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**David**  
I don't understand how a study can make any conclusions comparing people in the US and Australia which have very different alcohol cultures too complicated to control for. The tests would have to be with Americans of similar blah blah blah. Even that is hard to do with the different family structure and upbringing that may go with each. As an example, practically every Orthodox Jew worldwide, including the US, is brought up drinking with parents (more wine, sometimes hard liquor, than beer, and only twice a week generally), but our rate of alcoholism, while definitely significant, is much less than the general population. Very hard to control for things like culture.  
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**ignacio sanabria**  
The situation is actually quite simple: If the underage teenager is prone to become an alcoholic, that is if he/she inherited his/her parents `alcoholic` genes, and she encounters a favorable drinking environment, he/she will have great chances to become an alcoholic. But if she does not carry the `alcoholic` genes, she could drink the entire distillery and suffer from a light headache, at the most. (Well, not exactly). So, the rule of thumb is to stay away from alcohol, like the plague! Easy! www.tangledsynapses.com



**Jennifer White**  
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**Alejandra Alonso**  
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**Natalie Jacobs**  
There's also the legal issue concerning parental responsibility and social host laws. If an accident occurs or worse case scenario an accidental death, the parents that were "supervising" the kids drinking can be held responsible. Check out #9 of the following post: <http://www.askthejudge.info/top-ten-new-laws-affecting-teens-and-parents-in-2011/8260/>



**GWU CADE**  
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