



*Small glasses...*

*Big consequences!*

**Teenage drinking: A guide for parents**

**Does your child drink alcohol?**

Children often start drinking alcohol at a very young age. This is a serious problem because drinking, especially at an early age can lead to a variety of problems. There is much to know about the consequences of alcohol, how to deal with teenage drinking and how to prevent or delay drinking. This brochure offers a guide for parents on teenage drinking.

## *What is alcohol?*

Alcohol is a drug that affects us in how we think, feel, perceive things and in how we behave, it also affects our breathing and heart rate.

When someone consumes alcohol it is absorbed from the stomach into the bloodstream and as a result the alcohol spreads all through the body. In this way alcohol affects functions of the body and mind. Alcohol has a narcotic effect. It makes you feel less pain and it decreases your eyesight and reactivity. Alcohol makes your natural borders fade away and makes it harder to judge situations.

Consequences of alcohol use are more serious for younger people. The brain of young people is still developing and the consumption of alcohol can disrupt this process. Brain activity decreases as a consequence of heavy and frequently drinking. As a result this can create a reduced ability to learn, focus and remember.

Alcohol also creates dependence; youth that starts drinking at a young age have a serious risk of becoming addicted to alcohol when they are older. Since a lot of Pitești teenagers fall in this risk category, now is the time to act.

## *Teenage drinking*

Teenagers are still growing and developing, so they are very vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. Parents need to set rules to prevent teenage drinking.

There are dangers that come with teenage drinking. Even experimenting with alcohol on one occasion can create problems because they are so vulnerable to it. Teenagers are more likely to suffer unintentional injuries after drinking. Most young people are also smaller than adults, so alcohol can have a greater effect.

Because teenagers are so vulnerable to alcohol teenage drinking needs special attention. Teenagers need clear messages from their parents that underage drinking is unacceptable. This reduces the risk of problem drinking in adult life.

The earlier a young person begins drinking alcohol, the greater the risk of alcohol-related problems in later life. This is troubling, because 80 percent of young people drink alcohol in Romania.

*Youth that start drinking at a young age have a serious risk of becoming addicted to alcohol.*

# Youth alcohol consumption in Pitești

The problem of teenage drinking in Pitești needs to be taken very seriously. Pitești youth starts drinking at a very young age and can buy alcohol everywhere they like.

Before the age of thirteen 37 percent of the Pitești youth drank their first glass of beer. 15 percent of the youth even admits they have been drunk before the age of thirteen. Only 12 percent of Pitești youth does not drink alcohol, this means that 88 percent of youth drinks alcohol now or in the past. Also, more than 50 percent of the Pitești youth are regular drinkers.

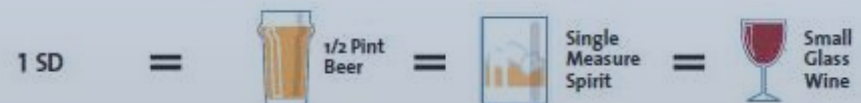
Not only is the amount of alcohol teenagers drink in Pitești a problem, also the availability of alcohol. While sale of alcohol to anyone under the age of 18 is forbidden by law, it is very easy for teenagers to buy alcohol in Pitești. Under aged youngsters who attempt to buy alcohol in shops and bars almost always succeed.

Teenagers are also not always good informed about alcohol. There are many myths and wrong ideas about use of alcohol, like:

*'Everybody drinks and that is why I should drink too'.* Teenagers often think friends drink more than they actually do and young people often drink just to 'fit in'. Teenagers should learn it's ok to say no to alcohol.

*'A glass of beer does not have the same percentage of alcohol as a glass of liquor.'* When a 'standard drink' alcohol is served it contains the same amount of alcohol. In this way beer is not less harmful than spirits.

1 standard drink contains 10g of pure alcohol



*'Alcohol is healthy for your heart and blood vessels.'* This is not the case for the majority of people. It applies only to people over 45 years old. There is no safe level of alcohol use for teenagers, especially those under the age of 18.

*88% of the youth drinks alcohol now or in the past*

# Consequences of alcohol use

The use of alcohol, especially by youngsters can have big consequences.

## *Short term consequences:*

### *Hangover / alcohol poisoning*

When teenagers have a hangover they are experiencing a type of alcohol poisoning. They become dehydrated and feel sick, have headaches and become irritable. More serious alcohol poisoning appears when the amount of alcohol in the blood gets so high that someone can pass out or even get in a coma.

### *Poor school performance*

Teenagers who use alcohol may remember less of what they have learned. Alcohol consumption can be the result and cause of difficulties at school. It can even cause your teenager to drop in educational level. Alcohol not only hinders the development of learning skills, but also decision-making, personal and social skills.

### *Black out*

Older people can cope with more alcohol than young people, this increases young people's chances on a black-out. A black out causes loss of short term memory. Frequent black-out can cause permanent brain damage.

### *Unsafe sex*

There is a definite link between drinking alcohol and not using contraception. This can lead to unplanned pregnancy and an increased risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

### *Accidents and fights*

Alcohol is a narcotic, when you use it your responsiveness decreases, it's harder to focus and it blurs your observation. This increases the chance of getting in a (traffic) accident. Also, alcohol can be the cause of aggression, because you are less aware of your natural boundaries and alcohol can make you overconfident and emotional.

*Teenagers can drop in educational level as a result of alcohol consumption*

# Consequences of alcohol use

## Long term consequences:

### Addiction

Someone is addicted to alcohol when he/she has a compulsive need for alcohol and is dependent on having it. If teenagers that start drinking under 16 the chance of addiction in later life is four times bigger. When children start drinking young, not only the chance at alcohol addiction increases, but also chances at other kinds of addiction, like smoking or drugs.

### Permanent brain damage

Until after the age of twenty the brain is still developing. The young brain is very vulnerable to alcohol damage. When your teenager starts drinking at a young age it can disrupt the developing of his or her brain functions. Heavy drinking can lead to difficulties in making complex decisions, problems in focussing and a reduced ability to learn. It can even influence the development of the personality or cause permanent brain damage.



The image above shows the brain activity during a memory task. You see two boys of 15 years old. One boy doesn't drink and the other drinks frequently and heavy. Both, they are not under the influence of alcohol during the memory task. The colours show which parts of the brain are active. It is obvious that the brain of the boy who drinks shows less activity.

*Heavy drinking can cause permanent brain damage*

## Role of the parents

As a parent you have a very important and direct influence on your child's life. Parents should therefore actively try to protect their children from the harm alcohol can cause and set clear rules for their children.

If children are getting older, parents may feel they are no longer an important influence in their teenagers' lives and that their children's decisions about alcohol use are beyond their control. This is not the case. While you are not the only influence in your teenagers' lives, what you do, what you believe and what you say to your children has an important influence on their decisions.

Parents in Pitești understand the responsibility parents have over their children. A study about parents in Pitești shows that parents think alcohol can be harmful and parents should protect their children from these risks. Parents say twenty is a responsible age to start drinking. Also, 71 percent of the parents say that they don't accept their children drinking alcohol before the age of eighteen.

However, most of the teenagers in Pitești start drinking alcohol far earlier than the age of eighteen. So, as a parent there is an important task of actively trying to reduce or delay your child's alcohol consumption.

A good relationship with your child is important to keep him/ her informed about the risks of alcohol and to keep yourself informed about his or her drinking habits. However, 15 percent of the Pitești parents say that they never talk about alcohol with their children. Also, 34 percent of the young people say that their parents do not know what they drink, or they have at least never discussed this with them. Parents are a primary influence in a child's life. No matter what teenagers say, they need parents to inform them and to set rules about alcohol.

*34% of the young people in Pitești say that their parents do not know what they drink.*

# Prevention and action

There are several things to do in trying to delay or reduce your teenagers drinking. Children might say otherwise, but they want their parents to be informed, know the facts, and set limits for them.

## Set rules

If you want to prevent your child from drinking alcohol: set clear rules! Research shows that it is effective when parents set clear norms about alcohol: No alcohol as long as you are not 18 or no alcohol in combination with learning, sport and during the day. Children drink less when parents set strict rules about alcohol consumption. It is also important to inform your child before he/ she starts drinking alcohol why he/ she shouldn't drink alcohol regularly. Rules and information from the parents can delay when a child starts drinking alcohol.

Children are under heavy influence from their environment, so it's important to understand your role as a parent. In a good and open relationship with your child you can communicate information and rules about alcohol.

## Set an example

Parents must set a good example for their children! Children learn by watching their environment, this is also the case for alcohol consumption. The more parents drink, the more children also tend to drink. Parents who allow in-house drinking and don't set rules stimulate alcohol consumption of their child. Remember, what you do will be seen by your child and it will influence the messages you give him/ her about alcohol.

## Reduce availability

To reduce or delay the alcohol consumption of your child it is important to reduce the availability of alcohol in your home! It has become clear that the more alcohol is available at home, the more alcohol children drink.

*Teach your children that they should not drink alcohol before the age of 18*

## *Laws about alcohol*

There are laws which will support you as a parent in preventing or reducing your child's alcohol consumption. In order to teach your child about these rules and to check if your child lives by these rules you should be informed about the rules applied in Romania.

*Sale of alcohol to youth under 18 is forbidden.*

Only 54 percent of the Pitești parents know that it is forbidden to sell alcohol to youth under the age of eighteen. This is probably the result of the fact that young people have no problem at all to buy alcohol in shops and bars. The shop, disco or bar owners are not allowed to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18, but in reality they do not ask for the age nor do they ask to see their identification card.

Because many people are not aware of this rule there is an important task for you as a parent to point out to your child that this is forbidden.

*In public places consumption of alcohol beverages by persons under 18 years old are strictly forbidden.*

When your child is under 18 and consumes alcohol in places like restaurants, bars, and discos the police is permitted to give him or her a fine. You should inform your children about this law in order to prevent and delay alcohol consumption of under aged children.

*It is forbidden for persons who have consumed alcohol beverages to drive on public roads.*

Alcohol reduces your reactivity. If you are driving while being under the influence of alcohol you are a danger for yourself and others on the road. Inform your child about this risk and about this law. If your child is out with friends check or ask how he/ she gets home, if there is someone that stays sober to drive the car or make sure he/ she has enough money to order a taxi.

*Sale under 18 is forbidden, but teenagers in Pitești can buy their alcohol anywhere they like*



# *What to do as a parent?*

1. Don't allow alcohol consumption under 18!

2. Don't buy alcohol for your teenager!

3. Discuss teenage drinking with other parents!

4. Don't drink alcohol in front of your children!

## The DRAIN project



This brochure is developed as part of the DRAIN (Dutch Romanian Alcohol policy Implementation Network) project. It is composed mainly with information drawn from scientific research done for this project in Pitești, Romania.

The DRAIN project aims to reduce the availability of alcohol for under aged youth in Romania. The DRAIN project addresses harmful alcohol consumption, which is a real threat to public health, wellbeing and welfare. Romanian and Dutch experts are working on the DRAIN project. The DRAIN project intends to develop and implement local alcohol policies.