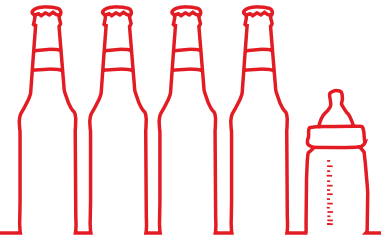




# Fact sheet for families worried about alcohol misuse



## BOTTLING IT UP

This fact sheet provides information for parents and families about the impact that alcohol misuse can have, and where they can go for help.

### What is alcohol misuse?

Alcohol misuse is not just about the amount or type of alcohol a person is drinking. It is also about the effect drinking has on someone and how it impacts on their children and family.

Sensible drinking limits are defined as 2 to 3 units per day for women and 3 to 4 units per day for men. These daily benchmarks apply whether you drink every day, once or twice a week, or occasionally. For pregnant women, the recommended 'sensible' limit is 1 or 2 units once or twice a week. However, many doctors believe that drinking any alcohol during pregnancy may harm the baby.

Alcohol misuse does not lead automatically to harm. However, it does lead to an increased risk of harm. This depends on a range of factors, including: the amount drunk on a particular occasion and/or frequency of heavy drinking, an individual's genes, life experiences and personal circumstances, the extent to which the individual has other substance misuse problems, and the environment in which the alcohol is drunk.

People are said to be dependent on alcohol when it affects their physical or mental health, yet they are unable to stop

drinking. Dependent drinkers have a compulsion to drink and lack control over their levels of drinking. Other features include a narrowing of the drinking repertoire, increased importance of alcohol to the drinker, increased tolerance of alcohol, repeated withdrawal symptoms and drinking to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Alcohol related harm is where alcohol use is causing harm to the individual and their family. This may be physical, mental, or social.

Alcohol misuse can be damaging to families, impacting on relationships, family finances, and the ability to maintain a secure and stable environment for children. It can also be the cause of families becoming isolated from their family and the local community. Children can be particularly affected.

Alcohol misuse can cause problems for the individual including physical damage to the liver, digestive system, the heart and circulatory system, the bones, skin and muscles and the brain and nervous system. It can cause problems with mental health, including anxiety and depression. It can also increase the likelihood of becoming involved in crime, high risk behaviour, and becoming aggressive or violent.

### What are the effects of parental alcohol misuse on children, parents and families?

Alcohol misuse can impact on parents' ability to care for their children, how the family functions, and affects children from pre-birth to adulthood. For example:

- Drinking during pregnancy can cause premature birth, low birth weight, damage to the central nervous system and physical abnormalities. Alcohol misusing parents are less likely to attend ante-natal appointments or consult medical staff if they have concerns. At the extreme, drinking during pregnancy can cause Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. Physical problems can continue into childhood and beyond and include tremors, seizures and epilepsy. Over 50 per cent of child protection case conferences include parental alcohol misuse. There is an increased risk of a younger child being harmed through poor hygiene, lack of safety precautions or being left unsupervised for long periods of time, in the care of an older sibling, or with someone outside the family who may not be appropriate. 360,000 reported incidents of domestic violence are related to alcohol, with a significant proportion of these being witnessed by children.
- There are strong links between parental drinking and the child's emotional development and well-being. Children describe feeling angry, frustrated, anxious, sad and depressed. Eating disorders are also common, as young people struggle to assert control in their lives. Marriages are twice as likely to end in divorce where there are alcohol problems.
- 22,000 deaths each year are attributable to alcohol. This means that children of alcohol misusing parents are at increased risk of suffering the trauma of losing a parent. In our report, *Bottling it Up*, children told us of the guilt and distress that they experienced when a parent became ill or died because of alcohol, and the lasting impact this had on them as they grew older.

### Why is Turning Point campaigning about the effect of alcohol misuse on children, parents and families?

Turning Point is aware of the impact that alcohol misuse can have on children, parents and families because we have listened to the experiences of people who use our services.

We are concerned that alcohol is affecting parents and the lives of their children. We are also concerned that this problem is often not recognised by others and that services are often not available to help families. There are approximately 3.8 million people in England dependent on alcohol, and 1.3 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol misuse. We calculate that one in eleven children live in a family with alcohol problems.

Visit [www.turning-point.co.uk/bottlingitup](http://www.turning-point.co.uk/bottlingitup) to find out more about our Bottling it Up campaign.

## I am a parent who is worried about my drinking. What should I do?

- Talk to your partner or other relatives, who may be able to offer you and your child support. Developing support networks for both you and your children will give you practical and emotional support during difficult times.
- Counselling services can also give you advice on issues that may trigger drinking problems and how to better manage stressful events and hard times in the family.
- Individual or group counselling can help you to discuss the underlying problems that may be encouraging you to drink, the effect that your alcohol misuse may be having on your children, and work towards changing your behaviour in the future. It may also help you deal with any feelings of stigma and shame.
- You can receive support to improve communication skills between you and your children, partners and other family members. This can reduce the arguments witnessed by your children.
- Think about the impact of your behaviour on your children and whether you would benefit from support for your parenting skills. Many people believe parenting should come naturally - that you understand a lot by instinct and pick up the rest as you go along, with help from family and friends. But it can be valuable to learn parenting skills in a more structured way. Parenting classes can help you learn how to handle behaviour problems, the best ways to discipline your children, how to handle teenagers, information about schools and education. You'll also have the chance to meet other parents, reflect on how you are bringing up your children, think back to how you were parented, discover new skills to make family life happier and learn how to manage stress and anger.
- If running your home is difficult for you to manage, there are people who can help you improve your budgeting skills to help you to manage your finances, and you can learn about nutrition to improve the health of your family.

## What can children do if they are worried about their parents drinking?

- Many young people are concerned about their parents coming to some harm whilst drinking or are struggling with feelings of anger or frustration. Children should be encouraged to talk about their feelings with an adult they trust. This could be for example a relative, a family friend, or a teacher.
- Some children may benefit from time away from the family environment, perhaps when parents are finding it difficult to deal with their drinking, or when they are attending treatment. Identifying a family member or trusted friend who the child knows well and is comfortable spending time with can be helpful.
- Children may benefit from support and counselling. In some areas, specialist services are available which can support children, help them to cope with their situation, and provide opportunities for them to meet with other children in similar situations. In other areas, counselling services for children are available. Contact numbers are listed below.
- Children benefit from having structure in their lives so steps should be taken to provide a routine including attending school, mealtimes, and bedtimes. Children should also be allowed time and space to socialise with friends, complete schoolwork etc.

## Further help and advice

**Turning Point** works with children, parents, families and friends affected by alcohol misuse. To find your nearest service go to [www.turning-point.co.uk](http://www.turning-point.co.uk)

**Adfam** is a national charity working with families affected by drugs and alcohol. The website has a database of local family support services. Tel: 020 7928 8898 or visit the website [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

**Drinkline** is a free and confidential helpline for anyone who is worried about their own or someone else's drinking. Tel: 0800 917 8282

**Parentline Plus** offers support and information for anyone parenting a child. Tel: 0808 800 2222 or visit [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**ChildLine** is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. You can call to talk about any problem –counsellors are always there to help you sort it out. Tel: 0800 1111 or visit [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Al-Anon** helps families and friends of alcoholics recover from the effects of living with the problem drinking of a relative or friend. Tel: 020 7403 0888 or visit [www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)

## About Turning Point

We turn lives around every day, by putting the individual at the heart of what we do. Inspired by those we work with, together we help people build a better life.

Turning Point is the UK's leading social care organisation. We provide services for people with complex needs, including those affected by drug and alcohol misuse, mental health problems and those with a learning disability.

### Turning Point

New Loom House  
101 Backchurch Lane  
London E1 1LU  
T: 020 7702 2300  
F: 020 7702 1456

[info@turning-point.co.uk](mailto:info@turning-point.co.uk)  
[www.turning-point.co.uk](http://www.turning-point.co.uk)