



Poor parenting increases likelihood of binge drinking.

Parenting Postures and the need for loving discipline.

A study of over 15,000 children by the think tank Demos shows parenting style is one of the most important and statistically reliable influences on whether a child will drink responsibly in adolescence and adulthood. Demos found that 'tough love' parenting, combining consistent warmth and discipline, was the most effective parenting style to prevent unhealthy relationships with alcohol right into the mid-thirties age range.

8/28/2011

Poor parenting increases likelihood of binge drinking.

A study of over 15,000 children by the think tank Demos shows parenting style is one of the most important and statistically reliable influences on whether a child will drink responsibly in adolescence and adulthood.

Demos found that 'tough love' parenting, combining consistent warmth and discipline, was the most effective parenting style to prevent unhealthy relationships with alcohol right into the mid-thirties age range.

The report *Under the Influence* found that:

- Bad parenting at age 10 makes the child twice as likely to drink excessively at age 34
- Bad parenting at age 16 makes the child over eight times more likely to drink excessively at that age
- Bad parenting at age 16 makes the child over twice as likely to drink excessively at age 34

The report also found that high levels of parental warmth and attachment at an early age and strict discipline at the age of 16 are the best parenting styles to reduce the likelihood that a child will binge-drink in adolescence and adulthood.

While 'tough love' was the best parenting style to ensure against children becoming binge drinkers, less effective parenting styles were 'authoritarian', 'laissez faire' and 'disengaged'.

Binge-drinking figures in the UK have officially been dropping since the early 2000's, but the culture of a binge-drinking minority that has become more extreme, and more public, has fed the media's infatuation with a boozed-up Britain.

Demos stresses that the lead role in how to deal with an entrenched binge culture needs to be taken by parents and government must support parents to do this. Without the active involvement of parents, policy to deal with binge-drinking will not have the reach or impact desired to combat the problem.

Recommendations include:

For parents

- Discipline and supervision at age of initiation (15–16). Strict discipline and supervision are extremely important at this age for teaching children personal responsibility over the long term, as well as protecting them from alcohol use and misuse in the short term. This holds true for both general parenting and alcohol specific techniques. The evidence suggests that parents should not take a relaxed attitude to under-age consumption; should discuss alcohol with their children within the context of setting firm boundaries; should avoid being drunk around their children; and should actively ensure that their children develop sensible and responsible expectations of alcohol consumption.

- Warmth during the early years (0–5) and up to the age of 10. Most parents will develop a warm and loving relationship in the early years of their children's lives. The report stresses the importance of

Poor parenting increases likelihood of binge drinking.

such a relationship for developing a number of extremely important life skills, including responsible drinking in later life.

- Careful monitoring of alcohol access. Easy access to alcohol in the home is one of the key predictors of alcohol consumption and drunkenness among teenagers. Ensuring that alcohol in the home is monitored and teenagers do not have access to it is an important element of a 'tough love' approach.

For Government

- Enforcement of under-age drinking laws. Discipline at 16 is an important mitigating factor against excessive alcohol consumption, even if it is not parent led. By taking a strong line on enforcing the law of sales and proxy sales of alcohol to under-age drinkers, the government can help parents enforce alcohol boundaries by making it much harder for children to obtain alcohol. Such enforcement also helps strengthen the social norm that under-age drinking is not acceptable. Research shows that young people who buy their own alcohol are especially at risk of becoming problem drinkers.

- Local partnerships to target trouble areas. Enforcement schemes can be effective if they are part of a broad local partnership of police, the local authority and retailers. Community alcohol partnerships, business improvement districts and Pub Watch are all examples of multi-component responses, where police, local retailers, local authorities and others work together to solve specific local alcohol-related problems such as under-age drinking or anti-social behaviour. The forthcoming alcohol strategy must contain a commitment to help these schemes.

- Investment in alcohol-related school programmes that involve parents. Contrary to popular belief, evidence shows that teaching children specifically about alcohol and its dangers in school is not particularly effective at moderating their drinking behaviour. However, if the parents are involved, and the intervention deals with general life skills such as sociability, autonomy, application and so on, school-based programmes can be effective. The forthcoming alcohol strategy should ensure resources for school-based activities are targeted on these types of programmes. Where spending on alcohol reduction strategies does not clearly display effectiveness, it might be better to scrap symptom-focused interventions and spend the money instead on evidence-based parenting programmes that are proven to work.

- Spreading the six-week summer holiday throughout the year and providing activities for at-risk children. For children without engaged parents or in deprived communities the long summer holiday can provide opportunities to engage in risky behaviour like binge drinking. Structured activities can not only avoid boredom that leads to risky behaviour but can also provide inter-generational mixing that is crucial for young people's positive development.

Jamie Bartlett, lead author of the report, said:

Poor parenting increases likelihood of binge drinking.

“The enduring impact of parenting on a child’s future relationship with alcohol cannot be ignored. This is good for parents: those difficult moments of enforcing tough rules really do make a difference, even if it doesn’t always feel like that at the time.

“While levels of binge drinking have fallen for five years running, there is a minority of extreme, publically visible, drinkers. No matter how high minimum pricing on alcohol is, there will be a hardcore of binge drinkers who will find a way to pay for it.

“For children whose parents may be disengaged, very practical measures like spreading the school summer holiday throughout the year and providing activities for children in the school breaks, will go some way to preventing boredom and avoiding risky behaviour like under-age drinking.

Notes to Editors

Demos analysed data comprising over 15,000 children born in Great Britain over the last 40 years. Researchers then ran logistical regressions, to determine whether parenting style affected the future drinking patterns of that child. Data used in this study came from the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS), a large, well-respected longitudinal study of children and their parents in Great Britain.

Demos used the following matrix of parenting styles in this research:

Authoritarian parents: Parents who employ this style tend to control and evaluate their children’s behaviour by setting standards that are severe and absolute. Authoritarian parents value hard work and a respect for authority and can be overly critical and given to excessively punitive discipline. Obedience and very structured environments are valued over freedom and exploration.

Tough love or authoritative parents: Parents falling into this category tend to expect that their children will conform to household rules and boundaries but that these will be set and negotiated within a context that encourages autonomy in the children’s decision-making. Such parents have high standards but support their children warmly in adhering to them; in their enforcement of rules such parents are assertive without being aggressive.

Laissez-faire or permissive parents: Laissez-faire parents are responsive and emotionally engaged with their children but tend to abrogate responsibility for setting rules and boundaries, and in turn do not expect children to take on much responsibility either. Parents conforming to this style allow children to structure their own activities and impose few standards for behaviour.

Disengaged parents: Like laissez-faire parents, disengaged parents are uninvolved with their children, and do not structure their activities or set standards for their behaviour. But such parents are also uninvolved with their children emotionally. At the extreme, disengaged parents may be unpredictable, abusive and neglectful.

Binge drinking in the UK is measured as more than twice the recommended allowance of alcohol consumed in a single episode. The recommended allowance for men is 3-4 units of alcohol, and for women 2-3.

Poor parenting increases likelihood of binge drinking.

The Department of Health recommends a weekly allowance of 21 units for men and 14 for women. In 2009, men drank on average 15.6 units a week and women drank 9.5 units a week, both falling below the recommended allowance.

Under the Influence by Jamie Bartlett, Matt Grist and Bryanna Hahn is published on 15 September, 2011. It will be available for download for free from www.demos.co.uk

This research was funded by SABMiller to support a better understanding of the impact that parenting styles have on excessive drinking behaviour in 18 to 25 year olds.

Jamie Bartlett is available for comment and interview.

Media Contact: Ralph Scott ralph.scott@demos.co.uk

020 7367 6338

07933 770498

http://www.demos.co.uk/press_releases/parentingbingedinking