



SNAPSHOT: ALCOHOL

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ParentLine Scotland is the leading national source of support and advice to parents and carers in Scotland. These Snapshots from the helpline provide insight into parents' concerns and perspectives on a range of issues. For more information or to discuss these issues further, please contact: CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> Public Affairs Dept on T: 0131 446 2300.

### Summary of key points

- Parents and carers across Scotland are looking for help to deal with alcohol misuse by parents as well as by young people
- Many parents, carers and kinship carers are concerned about impacts of parental alcohol misuse upon their children
- Alcohol is seen to increase family violence
- Alcohol can be source of concern when parents separating
- Parents and carers are concerned about children regularly witnessing binge-drinking
- Parents are often unsure about how to deal with their teenager's alcohol misuse

*The quotes in italics in Snapshot briefings are taken from ParentLine Scotland call-takers' notes.*

### **Parents and carers are looking for help both with dealing with alcohol misuse by young people themselves, and with the impacts of alcohol misuse by parents**

Binge-drinking in Scotland is an accepted 'norm' within our culture, but ParentLine Scotland hear about many situations where this 'norm' is problematic for children and their families. In January - December 2009, 10% (322) of calls to ParentLine Scotland included drug or alcohol issues, and 50% (195) of these calls were around alcohol specifically.

The helpline found that approximately half of the calls around alcohol were related to concerns about a child or young person's drinking, whilst the rest were primarily concerned with the impacts of an adult's drinking upon a child. These proportions are perhaps contrary to the significant press and policy attention given to solely addressing young people's alcohol misuse.

## Many parents and carers are concerned about impacts of parental alcohol misuse upon their children

We know that alcohol misuse by parents or those with caring responsibilities for a child can have significant negative impacts upon a child's wellbeing. ParentLine Scotland's experience is that many parents and wider family members are very concerned about this impact. Callers spoke about some of the impacts being: children's safety being put at risk; children's behaviour deteriorating; children being taken into local authority care; physical abuse; miscarriage; isolation; neglect; lack of money for household needs; suicidal thoughts; child regularly missing school; volatile and unpredictable family relationships;

*'Mother spends all her money on alcohol; father very concerned for the welfare of his son.'*

*"Father is an alcoholic; daughter's behaviour has become unmanageable; caller thinks that daughter is reacting to her father's substance misuse."*

## Kinship carers are looking for support around impacts of alcohol misuse

Whilst the vast majority of calls to ParentLine Scotland are obviously from mothers and fathers, it is notable that 15% of calls around alcohol were from grandparents and other relatives. Some of these callers were full-time kinship carers, often because alcohol or other substance misuse had meant that the children could no longer live with their birth parent(s). Other calls were from relatives concerned about the impact of alcohol upon their grandchildren or nieces/nephews but not knowing what they could do about it. It is very encouraging that these individuals were taking positive action to protect children's wellbeing by contacting ParentLine Scotland.

Grandparents often struggle because it is their own children who have an alcohol problem, impacting upon their grandchildren. Balancing complex family relationships and emotional attachments, together with a fear that intervening may result in contact with the children being reduced or lost, can be very difficult and stressful. Grandparents and other relatives often speak about being aware of risks to children within a home before anyone else, but feeling that there is little that they can do about it without placing the children at greater risk or ruining family relationships.

*'My son is more interested in getting drunk than spending time with his kids.'*

*'A Grandfather phoned because he was concerned about his grandson's (8 years old) safety because his daughter binge-drinks, sometimes keeping grandson off school for days and being very unpredictable. There are no signs yet of abuse or neglect but caller worried that this might start.'*

*"Because of his dad's drinking, my son has gone to stay at granny's and is refusing to come back whilst his dad is still in the house"*

## Alcohol is seen to increase family violence

Callers to ParentLine Scotland talk about increased aggressiveness and violence after parents or teenagers have been drinking excessively. Sometimes parents are afraid of violence by their teenage child when they are drunk; in other calls, parents were worried about their child's safety when their partner got drunk. A few callers raised significant concerns about a child's protection from physical or sexual abuse when both parents and other adults in the house have been binge-drinking and no one is taking responsibility for the child(ren).

*"Every time he goes out drinking, I know that it will end up in violence"*

*"My partner gets really aggressive when he has been drinking, I really fear for the kids and me, I need to get out of this situation, but I have nowhere to turn"*

*"My husband is a drinker. Now my 15 year old son is getting drunk all the time with his Dad. Sometimes they fight. I'm really scared and don't know what to do."*

## Alcohol can be source of concern when parents separating

When parents are separating, separated or getting divorced, ParentLine Scotland hears from callers about alcohol being a source of added tension or worry for parents. In some cases, it is alcohol misuse which has led to the separation, with the parent then concerned about the ongoing safety of the child(ren) left in the home. Binge-drinking can also be a major source of tension when negotiating contact arrangements after separation, with parents asking for advice about how to ensure their ex-partner or anyone present does not binge-drink during contact with the child. Binge-drinking by parents can sometimes escalate as a means of trying to cope with the loss of separation or divorce.

*"My ex takes the kids in the car during contact visits, I know that he is drunk when he does this."*

*"Contact visits have gotten difficult as my son refuses to see his mother drunk."*

*"My daughter wants to live with me as when her Mum has had a drink she threatens to throw my daughter out of the house."*

## Parents and carers concerned about children regularly witnessing alcohol misuse

A particular concern that callers talk about is the effect of children being regularly present when their partner or another family member are binge-drinking. They are sometimes concerned that the children will think this is 'normal' and will grow up to also misuse alcohol. Others are worried about a child's behaviour as a result, and the risk to children when there is nobody present sober enough to care and protect them adequately.

*"I know that when my children stay with their Dad he drinks – I want to stop overnight stays because of this"*

*"My 4 year old wants to know why her Dad is always drunk –what do I tell her".*

## Parents often unsure about how to deal with their teenage child's alcohol misuse

Many parents worry about the drinking habits of their teenage children, and the impact that this is having upon them, such as: deteriorating behaviour at home; negative peer influences and relationships; increased risk to the teenager's sexual and emotional health; lack of attention to their education; increased violence and offending behaviour; poor mental health, amongst others. Many parents find it very difficult to talk to their teenager about alcohol misuse when relationships are often already strained and at a time when the young person is increasingly independent.

*Caller concerned that her teenage daughter is drinking heavily and having sex with her boyfriend.*

*"I'm really worried about this behaviour, she gets drunk and the police bring her home"*

ParentLine Scotland is the national, free helpline for anyone caring for a child in Scotland. Since its beginning in 1999, ParentLine Scotland has received over 103,000 calls from parents and carers who are looking for advice or support. ParentLine Scotland is a unique and valuable source of insight into the concerns and needs of parents and carers across Scotland. For more information about ParentLine Scotland, contact: T: 0131 446 2300

Helpline: 0808 800 2222 Mon, Wed, Fri 9am-5pm & Tues, Thurs 9am-9pm  
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ParentLine Scotland is a service provided by CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>.

