

Teenagers and alcohol: parents talking

This is a transcript of the Raising Children Network video available at http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/alcohol_teenagers_video.html. Tom is 16 and has been brought home drunk by the police. His parents are glad he is home safely, but they want to talk to him about his behaviour and include him in deciding the consequences. This video demonstration with actors shows parents working together to address their son's behaviour. An adolescent physician talks about the positive strategies used by the parents.

Dad: He could have been killed. He could have fallen in front of a car.

Mum: You can't say that, you can't think... He's safe, that's all that matters. I'll watch him. If he throws up I'll make sure that he gets it in the bucket.

Dad: We'll tag team like wrestlers. Round 1, Round 2.

Mum: Very funny.

Dr Anthony Zehetner [*physician in adolescent medicine*]: We see here that the parents are worried about Tom. They talk about their fears and the dangers of him walking home drunk and alone. They're also scared about the amount of alcohol Tom's had. They're worried that if he's sick, he could choke on his own vomit. They don't talk with Tom about his behaviour that night, as their first priority is his safety. The father tries to break the tension with some humour.

[Next morning]

Dad: Tom, want a juice, water?

Tom: Yeah, juice. Thanks.

Mum: Tom, we've got to talk about last night.

Tom: Well, I didn't get hurt and the cops are pretty cool about it, so...

Dad: You broke the rules: no drinking 'til you're 18; wait to get picked up from a party, or phone.

Mum: We'll help you where we can, you know that. But there are consequences for last night and there's things we've got to work out.

Tom: But nobody got hurt.

Mum: True. But the police brought you home.

Dad: We had a deal. No alcohol or drugs, you wait to get picked up...

Tom: I didn't take any drugs.

Dad: If you can't stick to the deal...

Tom: Oh, this sucks! You drink.

Dad: Hold on! Your Mum and I want to help you out here but we can't if we end up in a shouting match. I'm getting more toast.

Tom: Yeah, as if I care.

Dad: While I get that, how about you have a think about what you want to do. You can work together with us on this or we come up with the consequences without you having a say. You tell us what's best for you.

Dr Anthony Zehetner [*physician in adolescent medicine*]: In this scene, the father offered Tom more juice or water to show that he still cares about his son. The father showed his anger but concentrated on what actually happened the previous night and didn't criticise. Both parents worked together to emphasise the consequences of Tom's behaviour, express their relief that he wasn't hurt and stayed connected to him by not falling into a trap of reacting when Tom argued back. The father used a momentary time-out to reduce tension then he gave Tom a choice of deciding where the rest of the conversation would go. Finally, the father took the opportunity to praise Tom for deciding to work things out together.

Dad: So, what do you say, Tom?

Tom: Okay.

Dad: What?

Tom: Talk about it.

Dad: That's great, mate, good thinking. We can easily work this out.

Dr Anthony Zehetner[*physician in adolescent medicine*]: Finally, the father took the opportunity to praise Tom for deciding to work things out together.