



This information sheet is the 6th in a series produced by the Public Health Wales central alcohol team. This bulletin is designed for Public Health Wales staff and their partners and provides background information on the advice available to people working with children and young adults.

Sir Liam Donaldson's (2009)¹ advice to parents is that children '*under 15 should never be given alcohol, even in small quantities*' however underage drinking is an issue in Wales with approximately 17% of 13 year olds reporting that they have been drunk at least twice (HSBC, 2009/10)². There was no significant gender gap between girls (18%) and boys (17%); which is in general agreement with a local survey (Roberts, 2011)³; where around one in ten secondary students report having been drunk four or more times in their life, with no significant difference in gender.

An alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option..... if children drink alcohol, it should not be until at least the age of 15¹

The same amount of alcohol will have a much greater effect on the body of a child or young person than on an adult, because their bodies are still growing and developing².

58% of 15yrs who recently drunk alcohol suffered²:-

- ☹ Being ill**
- ☹ Missing school**
- ☹ Being injured**
- ☹ Getting into an argument**
- ☹ In trouble with the police**



1) Donaldson, L. (2009) Guidance on the consumption of alcohol by children and young people Department of Health 2) AIM Alcohol in moderation 2010

The report by Donaldson (2009) recognises that the use of alcohol by children and young people occurs reporting that by ‘15 years, most children have drunk alcohol’. He discusses many aspects of the problem; and it is difficult to argue with the advice that an ‘alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest option’ -which is an ultimate ideal for society.

So why is it an issue?

The alcohol team have been delivering the ‘ABI’ Alcohol Brief Intervention programme ‘Have a Word’ campaign for **one year (?)** to secondary care workers including Youth and Social workers. The experience of these professionals is that their clients can be as young as twelve. The difficulty is that while there are validated and established screening tools for adults and over 16’s the NICE guidelines (2010)⁴ recommend the Common Assessment Framework⁵ as the only screening tool for under 15’s. This is too complex to be used as a screening aid during a brief intervention (5 minutes duration).

So what can be done?

The alcohol team are currently reviewing the literature to consider the methods used both in the UK and abroad. Some of the methods are for both drugs and alcohol and some are for alcohol alone. There are a number of models utilised in the USA which include the CRAFFT tool (2009)⁶ and a simple 2-stage question Johnson *et al* (2011)⁷ and there are examples of a combined alcohol and drugs screening tool available in Durham⁸ and South West England. Given that children under 16 are not legally entitled to drink a simple ‘do you drink’ question could be sufficient but in terms of an intervention the level of drinking is also important - as it can range from a sip of someone else’s drink to a binge session most nights.

A simplified version of the M-SASQ question maybe a quick way of determining level? A Screening scenario could be ‘have you ever had a drink containing alcohol?’ followed by the M-SASQ questions?

This is one unit of alcohol...

...and each of these is more than one unit

SASQ

Questions	Scoring system					Your score
	0	1	2	3	4	
How often have you had 6 or more units if female, or 8 or more if male, on a single occasion in the last year?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	

Scoring:
 A total of 0 – 1 indicates lower risk drinkers.
 A total of 2 – 4 indicates increasing or higher risk drinkers.
 An overall total score of 2 or above is SASQ positive.

A Unified approach:-

The alcohol team are encouraging the adoption of a consistent approach across Wales and are campaigning for the instigation of a validated process for screening tools for young people. The wording of the CMO's statement could be stifling an adoption of validated screening tools for under 15 year olds and hence a softening of the wording could be the gateway for further research and validation for screening tools and Brief Interventions for the young.

Next steps

The alcohol team have commissioned a literature search and now have a number of papers to review and digest. The team are also working with partners in secondary care to propose a model for screening tools for Wales. We will keep all parties updated and informed.

References

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<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/caf>
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9. Alcohol & Young People: A Toolkit Supporting Vulnerable Young People at Risk of Alcohol Related Harm
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