

How to handle the real world of alcohol

1. Alcohol can give you both pleasure and pain

Alcohol slows your thinking, slows your reflexes and reduces your coordination. It reduces your ability to think clearly. The more you drink, the more likely you are to:

Spend more money than you wanted; Say and do stupid things; Make bad decisions; Stumble and knock into other people; Get into arguments and fights; Have sex when you don't really want to; Accept a lift with a drunk driver; Drive when you shouldn't and have an accident; and Walk across roads without looking.

You can feel sick, vomit, get a hangover, and in the long term damage your brain, your liver and other organs. You can pass out, go into a coma and even die. This is why binge drinking is a serious concern.

2. Pain can happen because you don't prepare properly

Despite your best intentions, problems can easily occur. They can occur without warning and you can get 'caught out'.

For example, you could be at a party and everything seems fine but then:

1. You are ready to go home and you find that your driver has been drinking. You know you shouldn't get in the car with them but how else will you get home? You might want to stop the driver from driving and your friends from being passengers, but how will you do that without getting into an argument?
2. You've just said 'no' to an offer of a drink, but then the person has got one for you anyway. You don't want it, and say 'no thanks', but they insist. So you take it and put it down. Then people notice that you're not drinking and criticise you; at first it is with little comments but then it is with outright rudeness.

A lot of the pain occurs because we: Fail to plan and fail to organise; Fail to identify problem situations; and Fail to take action. You must always be prepared for possible problems.

3. Obeying the law can keep you from getting hurt

You need to know the laws. Some questions you should be able to answer include: What types of Licensed Venues are there, and what are the laws for each? If you're under 18, can you enter any part of a Licensed Venue with your parents or with an older friend? If so, under what conditions? If you're under 18, is it legal for someone to buy alcohol for you? What should the staff of a Licensed Venue do if a patron is intoxicated? What are the penalties for breaking the law?

4. Set a limit

Medical and other health authorities have studied the problems related to alcohol use. In response, they have recommended that people should not drink more than two Standard Drinks on any day, and no more than four Standard Drinks on a single occasion.

They found that people under 15 are at the greatest risk from drinking and should not drink at all. It is best to delay the start of drinking as long as possible.

Drinking more than these recommended maximum amount places you at risk. What is a Standard drink? Can you correctly identify a Standard Drink in different types of glasses?

5. Develop your own tactics for sticking to your limit and keeping safe

Make a limit for how much you are going to drink and over what time. (In many cases, this limit will need to be zero.) Organise yourself so you can stick to your limit. Handle the pressure to drink more than your planned limit – handle the indirect /subtle pressure and also the direct / upfront pressure. Refuse to go with a drunk driver and get home safely some other way. Stop a drunk driver from driving. Let your parents, or others, that you have refused a lift. Tactics need to fit with the recommendations of medical authorities and fit your personal needs and your skills. This is where the activity Real Life Rehearsals is important.

6. Develop your own skills for using the tactics in the real world

The real world is full of obstacles to the successful delivery of your tactics and you must be able to overcome them. Of course, you will develop these skills with experience but experience is a process of 'trial and error' and some of the errors have terrible results. Your skills need to be developed before you need to use them in the real world. This is where the activity Agent Provocateur Role-Plays is important.