Parents, Young People & Alcohol

LEAVERS’ SUPPORT KIT

alcoholthinkagain
ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit supports activity at the local level with the key message of reducing young people’s exposure to alcohol. The Parents, Young People and Alcohol campaign forms part of the overarching Alcohol.Think Again program.

TARGET GROUP FOR THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides information for professionals and community groups who want to increase awareness of parents and the community to help reduce alcohol-related harm associated with Leavers’ celebrations.

KEY COMMUNICATION MESSAGES

- Alcohol use by young people during Leavers increases the risk of a variety of harms at a time where there is often little supervision.
- Young people are more likely to delay drinking if parents set clear expectations that their children should not drink. During Leavers it is especially important that their supply and access to alcohol is restricted and not promoted.
- No-one should be providing young people with alcohol.
- For under 18s, no alcohol is the safest choice.

TARGET GROUP FOR STRATEGIES IN THE TOOLKIT

Primary target groups

- Parents and carers of Year 12 students attending Leavers’ celebrations.
- People in the Western Australian community who may be in a position to influence young people.

Secondary target group

- Year 12 students attending Leavers’ celebrations.
WHAT IS LEAVERS?
Leavers is the celebratory period of three to five days at the completion of Year 12 in Western Australia (WA) where students often travel to various locations (e.g. Dunsborough, Busselton, Margaret River, Rottnest) to celebrate with their peers. Referred to as ‘Schoolies’ in other states, Leavers has become increasingly popular in WA over the past decade. This year the official Leavers’ celebration period is from 24 to 27 November 2014.

YOUNG PEOPLE’S ALCOHOL USE OUTSIDE OF AND DURING THE WA LEAVERS’ CELEBRATION PERIOD

Both during Leavers’ celebrations and at other times of the year, the research shows that when young people choose to drink, they do so at levels significantly higher than the recommended low risk levels for adults.

Every three years, school students in Western Australia are surveyed to find out about their use of alcohol.

In 2011, the majority of 12 to 17 year-old students had not consumed any alcohol recently (last month or week). Of those students who did drink in the previous week, most reported drinking on only one day of the week.

**When students do drink, they are doing so at increasingly harmful levels**

Over the last two decades there has been an increase in the proportion of students drinking at harmful levels on a single occasion. Harmful levels are defined using adult guidelines (more than 4 standard drinks in a session), although the guidelines for young people state that not drinking is still the safest option. Only those students who had used alcohol in the last week were asked about the quantity consumed.

**Older students are more likely to try alcohol and drink at harmful levels**

As students get older they are more likely to have tried alcohol, despite the harmful effects of any alcohol consumption under the age of 18. The number of students drinking at risk of single occasion harm also increases with age.

**Many young people participating in Leavers drink large amounts of alcohol**

A survey done at a popular Western Australian Leavers’ destination found that leavers who drank alcohol consumed an average of 15.8 standard drinks on a typical celebration day compared to 11.9 standard drinks at their last social event with friends.
WHY IS LEAVERS A CONCERN?

For many young people, Leavers is the first time they are away from home for an extended period without parental supervision. This, along with the availability of alcohol, the high expectation to drink, and large numbers of other young people celebrating, can and does lead to young people being in dangerous and harmful situations.

Almost 9 out of 10 leavers reported at least one negative consequence due to alcohol or other drug use. Some examples of these consequences included:

- Hangover 67%
- Blackout 58%
- Accident or injury 41%
- Regretful sex 21%
- Unprotected sex 14%.

On a single occasion of drinking, the risk of alcohol-related injury increases with the amount consumed, potentially causing these additional health harms:

- Violence
- Conflict between friend groups
- Embarrassing behaviour put up on social media.

There are also local impacts on the community during Leavers, including:

- Littering
- Property damage
- Noise and disturbance to local community members
- Costs to the WA Police and health system.

It is important for all leavers to respect the town the celebration is held in.

For young people under 18 years of age, no alcohol is the safest choice.

Delaying drinking alcohol as long as possible is also recommended.
What influences young people to drink alcohol?

- If their parents are supportive of them drinking.
- A perception that the culture of alcohol consumption is normal in the Australian community and that the majority of adults drink.
- A belief that there is a culture among their peers of drinking to get drunk.
- Their friends.
- The availability of alcohol. The easier it is to get the more likely they are to drink.
- Beliefs such as ‘drinking is fun’, ‘won’t have a good time without it’, ‘easier to socialise’, ‘makes you more confident’, ‘to relieve problems’, ‘to relax’, and ‘it’s what everyone does, it’s normal’.

Young people’s reasons for not drinking alcohol

- Don’t want or need to drink.
- Want to be healthy and don’t want alcohol to interfere with the ability to do more important things such as playing sport or music.
- Loss of their parents’ trust.
- Wanting to stay in control.
- Personal or religious values.
LEAVERS’ TIPS FOR PARENTS

This section provides information for parents, who have chosen to allow their child to go to Leavers, regarding how they can best support their child in the lead up to, and during, Leavers’ celebrations. These tips could be used as a series of inserts in your local newspaper, or you could consult with your local radio station to use the tips to do free community announcements, negotiate with secondary schools to put on their website home page, place the tips in the school newsletter or on the P&C/P&F website home page, or put up on your organisation’s website.

LEAVERS’ TIPS FOR PARENTS #1

Plan for Leavers.

- While a young person’s brain is developing, decision making and the ability to take in information, understand it, then set goals and plan is affected. Help your child avoid some of the harms of Leavers by being involved in their planning.

- Support your Year 12 child in the planning process by providing clear, unambiguous expectations about alcohol use.

- Look up the Getting Ready To Go Checklist at leaverswa.com.au

For more information on planning for Leavers visit alcoholthinkagain.com.au or leaverwa.com.au

LEAVERS’ TIPS FOR PARENTS #2

Discuss your expectations about alcohol use.

- Discuss your expectations about alcohol and the reasons why you want the celebrations to be alcohol-free.
- Explain that you want them to have fun and enjoy themselves, but you would like to make sure that they are going to be safe.

Strategies to stay safe

- Encourage your child to participate in organised activities for Leavers that don’t include alcohol.
- Suggest good responses for your child to refuse alcohol when it is offered.
- Suggest alternatives to drinking alcohol such as a soft drink, juices and water.
- Discuss where to get help for themselves or their friends should the need arise.

For more information on Leavers visit alcoholthinkagain.com.au or leaverswa.com.au

LEAVERS’ TIPS FOR PARENTS #3

Support during Leavers’ celebrations.

Be available

- Maintain regular contact with your child while they are away.
- Encourage them to contact you at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable or need help.
- Be prepared to go and get them if they are not coping and want to come home.

Don’t provide your child with alcohol

- Do not give them money to buy alcohol or supply them with alcohol.
- Children who are supplied alcohol by their parents for Leavers’ celebrations more likely to drink at harmful levels.

For more information on support during Leavers visit alcoholthinkagain.com.au or leaverswa.com.au
This section provides some information to debunk myths regarding alcohol and young people, and gives parents tools for talking about these issues with their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MYTH: IF I PROVIDE THEM WITH ALCOHOL, I AM AT LEAST CONTROLLING HOW MUCH THEY DRINK</th>
<th>MYTH: WHEN TEENAGERS DRINK ALCOHOL AT LEAVERS, THEY DON’T DRINK AT HARMFUL LEVELS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACT</td>
<td>FACT</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research of Western Australian students celebrating at a popular Leavers’ destination has shown that children who were supplied alcohol by their parents for Leavers were likely to drink at harmful levels.</td>
<td>• 89% of drinkers at Leavers consume alcohol at levels which are considered by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to put adults at risk of short-term harm (more than 4 standard drinks in a single session).</td>
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<td>• Of the 25% of Leavers who said their parents provided them with alcohol at the celebrations:</td>
<td>• 87% of Leavers experienced at least one negative experience at the school Leavers’ celebrations from alcohol and other drug use. These included:</td>
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<td>- 89% drank at levels considered harmful for adults by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Guidelines.</td>
<td>- 67% had a hangover</td>
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<td>- 65% reported they had sources other than their parents providing them with alcohol. Provision of alcohol by parents is likely to be topping up this situation.</td>
<td>- 58% reported a blackout</td>
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<td>- 41% had an accident or injury</td>
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<td>- 21% had regretful sex</td>
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<td>- 14% had unprotected sex.</td>
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</table>
MYTH: PEOPLE WHO DRINK TOO MUCH ALCOHOL AT LEAVERS ONLY HURT THEMSELVES

FACT

- Leavers’ alcohol consumption and associated harms can also impact on communities where Leavers go to celebrate in terms of costs to:
  - The health system (Emergency Departments, health services)
  - WA Police
  - Local government (littering, property damage)
  - Noise and disturbance to local residents
  - Street drinking.

- Problems associated with drinking alcohol at Leavers that impact on the individual drinker and others can include:
  - Accidents and injuries
  - Violence (verbal abuse, aggression)
  - Crime (including assault, vandalism, and petty crimes)
  - Road safety issues
  - Impact on friendships and relationships
  - Humiliation through social media
  - Unwanted sexual encounters
  - Unprotected sex.

- Every additional drink significantly increases the risk of injury and death for the drinker and may place others at risk of harm as well, such as family, friends and members of the community.
Radio can be an effective way of reaching a large audience to communicate important information about various topics. Below is a sample of radio questions and answers that can be used if you are interviewed about Leavers’ celebrations and young people’s alcohol consumption during the celebration.

### What is Leavers?

Leavers is the celebratory period of three to five days at the completion of Year 12 in Western Australia (WA) where students often travel to various locations (e.g. Dunsborough, Busselton, Margaret River, Rottnest) to celebrate with their peers.

Referred to as Schoolies in other states, Leavers has become a growing trend in WA over the past decade.

- This year Leavers’ celebration is from 24 – 27 November, 2014.
- Whilst Leavers can be an exciting time for teenagers it can also put them into situations they may not have been in before.
- It is important for parents and school leavers to be informed about the risks and alcohol-related harms that can occur. Parents can help their child avoid some of the harms associated with Leavers by supporting their child in the planning process.
- There is also a good chance at Leavers’ celebrations young people may find themselves in an environment where alcohol is being consumed.

### How much are young people drinking during Leavers’ celebrations?

Research conducted at a popular Leavers’ destination found:

- More than half the young people surveyed in a 2009 study reported drinking an average of 15.8 standard drinks a day, which places them above the adult Guideline for single-occasion harm.
- It is recommended for young people under 18 years of age, no alcohol is the safest choice and to delay drinking alcohol as long as possible.
What harms can arise during Leavers?

Alcohol consumption among young people at Leavers can result in a series of negative alcohol-related effects:

**Effects on the individual**
- Accidents and injuries.
- Violence, verbal abuse, aggression).
- Crime (including assault, vandalism, and petty crimes)
- Road safety issues
- Impact on friendships and relationships
- Humiliation through social media
- Unwanted sexual encounters
- Unprotected sex.

**Effects on the wider community, including the host communities for Leavers:**
- Costs to the health system (Emergency Departments, health services)
- Costs to the WA Police
- Local government costs (littering, property damage)
- Noise and disturbance to local residents
- Street drinking.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aren’t you being wowsers?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Leavers deserve to have a good time – they’ve earned it! We’re saying “have fun - but do it without alcohol”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• If you’re under 18, alcohol can affect your body and brain in a way that can have long-term effects.</td>
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<tr>
<th>It’s seen as part of the Aussie culture to have a few drinks to celebrate.</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Young people learn a lot from adults about the place of alcohol in everyday life and a lot of alcohol-related harm happens during Leavers’ celebrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We hope parents and young people will get informed about what alcohol can do to the growing body and brain.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Realistically, how do you expect kids to say no to alcohol when there’s so much peer pressure?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Teach them. Give your kids strategies to deal with situations when they are offered alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Suggest ways to say “no, thanks”, in a language they will use. Recommend non-alcoholic options.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What can parents do to help their child avoid alcohol-related harm during Leavers?

There are many things parents can do to ensure their children are safe during Leavers’ celebrations. It is important to know that what parents do, how they communicate their expectations and whether they supply alcohol does affect their child’s choices about alcohol.

Don’t supply under 18s with alcohol.
- Research at a popular Leavers’ destination in Western Australia has shown that children who were supplied alcohol by their parents for Leavers’ celebrations were more likely to drink at harmful levels.
- For example, of the 25% of Leavers who said their parents provided them with alcohol at the celebrations:
  - 89% drank at levels considered harmful for adults by the National Health and Medical Research (NHMRC) Guidelines.
  - 65% reported they had sources other than their parents providing them with alcohol. Provision of alcohol by parents is likely to be topping up this situation.

Talk about expectations with alcohol use.
- Discuss your expectations about alcohol and the reasons why you want the celebrations to be alcohol-free.
- Explain that you want them to have fun and enjoy themselves, but you would like to make sure that they are going to be safe.
- Provide strategies to stay safe.
- Encourage your child to participate in organised activities for Leavers that don’t include alcohol.
- Suggest good responses for your child to use to refuse alcohol when it is offered.
- Suggest alternatives to drinking alcohol such as a soft drink, juices and water.
- Discuss the risks associated with alcohol consumption (blackouts, intoxication, being unable to control their actions, violence, the risk of unwanted sexual encounters etc.).
- Discuss where to get help for themselves or their friends should the need arise. Ensure they have an In Case of Emergency (ICE) contact on their phone.

Be available for your child to contact at any time.
- Maintain regular contact with your child while they are away.
- Encourage them to contact you at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable or need help.
- Be prepared to go and get them if they are not coping and want to come home.

For more tips on how to support your child if they are attending Leavers go to alcoholthinkagain.com or leaverswa.com.au

If you would like any support in delivering these messages and/or require information more specific to your community and location please contact the Community Programs team at the Drug and Alcohol Office - Ph: (08) 9370 0333
# INFORMATION GRABS

The section below provides short information grabs which can be used as radio messages, in newspaper articles, online and any other form of media where a short message is required to promote the campaign messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Leavers?</th>
<th>Leavers is the celebratory period of three to five days at the completion of Year 12 in Western Australia (WA) where students often travel to various locations (e.g. Dunsborough, Busselton, Margaret River, Rottnest) to celebrate with their peers.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• There is also a good chance at Leavers’ celebrations young people may find themselves in an environment where alcohol is being consumed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• In WA, this year’s Leavers’ celebration commences on November 24 and finishes on November 27, 2014.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption during Leavers</td>
<td>Research conducted at a popular Leavers destination in 2009 found:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 93% of WA Leavers consumed alcohol during the celebration.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• An average of 88% of Leavers were drinking across the three days of the celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol-related harms among leavers</td>
<td>• Alcohol consumption among young people at Leavers can result in a series of negative alcohol-related effects including injury, violence, crime, unwanted sexual encounters, and embarrassing behaviour put up on social media.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Costs to the wider community can include Local government costs, police costs and costs to the health system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leavers and their parents</td>
<td>• Parents are key influencers on whether their child does or doesn’t drink alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Children who were supplied alcohol by their parents for Leavers’ celebrations were more likely to drink at harmful levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is important for parents to support their child’s plan for their Leavers’ celebrations to avoid possible harms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What parents can do</td>
<td>• Don’t supply under 18’s with alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss your expectations about alcohol use.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be available for your child to contact you at any time.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk about the risks associated with alcohol consumption (blackouts, intoxication, being unable to control their actions, violence, the risk of unwanted sexual encounters etc.). For more tips on what parents can do go to <a href="http://alcoholthinkagain.com">alcoholthinkagain.com</a> or <a href="http://leaverswa.com.au">leaverswa.com.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leavers – what parents should know

Help young people avoid harms at Leavers by providing clear expectations about alcohol.

A survey conducted at a popular Leavers’ destination found:

- **93%** of leavers used alcohol during the celebration.
- Leavers who reported drinking consumed an average nearly 16 standard drinks a day.
- **Almost 9 out of 10 leavers** reported at least one negative consequence due to alcohol or other drug use, including:
  - hangover: 67%
  - blackout: 58%
  - accident/injury: 41%
  - regrets: sexual encounter: 21%
  - unprotected sex: 14%

However, during the rest of the year, young people also report drinking in a similar way:

- **Most 17 year-olds (94.3%)** have tried alcohol.
- **48.6%** of 17 year-olds who drank in the last week, did so at levels considered harmful for adults.
- In Western Australia
  - **29.8%** 17 year-olds get alcohol from licenced outlets
  - **29.2%** someone else bought it for them
  - **20.8%** friends
  - **18.4%** parents

If you choose to send your child to Leavers:

- **Help your child** avoid some of the harms of Leavers by being involved in their planning.
- **Talk to your child** about staying safe and respecting the town they are visiting.
- **Do not provide your child with alcohol or money to buy alcohol.**
- **Maintain regular contact with your child.**

NO alcohol is the safest choice for under 18s.
TIPS FOR USING THE MEDIA RELEASE IN THIS TOOLKIT

- The following media release has been designed to be used or adapted to your local community.

- Once you have adapted the media release below to suit your community and have obtained permission from your organisation to use the media release you can send it to various community newspapers for possible publication. You can also include the associated supporting facts (p13) for additional publishable material.

- Talk to the Community Programs team at the Drug and Alcohol Office to find out if there are local statistics available that can be used to make your media release more specific to your community or region. Phone: (08) 9370 0333.

NOTE: The official Leavers’ celebrations commence on Monday 24 of November and finish on Thursday 27 of November 2014
MEDIA RELEASE – Leavers: What parents should know

• 93% of Leavers at a WA destination reported drinking alcohol
• 15.8 standard drinks = Leavers’ average number of drinks on a typical celebration day
• 9 out of 10 reported at least one negative consequence of drinking such as blackout, unprotected sex and injury.

(Date)

(INSERT ORGANISATION NAME) is urging parents in (INSERT COMMUNITY) to take an active role in preparing their children for Leavers’ celebrations. (24-27 November 2014)

Alcohol-related harms can – and do- occur during Leavers.

‘There are many things you can do to help your child avoid some of these harms by being involved in the planning process,’ said (INSERT NAME) from (INSERT ORGANISATION NAME).

‘Explain your expectations about alcohol, and set ground rules for your child to follow. Discuss what can happen when people drink alcohol, and ensure that your children know that they can contact you at any time.’

Interestingly, leavers report that parental approval of drinking and supply of alcohol influences the amount they drink.

‘Leavers who thought their parents would approve of them drinking were more likely to report heavier alcohol use, and those who were supplied with alcohol by their parents were more likely to drink at harmful levels.’

To reduce the likelihood of harm, it is recommended that parents do not provide their child with alcohol.

According to the National Health and Medical Research Council Alcohol Guidelines, the safest option for under 18s is not to drink at all.

For more information on alcohol and Leavers visit alcoholthinkagain.com.au or leaverswa.com.au

ENDS

(INSERT ORGANISATION SPOKESPERSON NAME and CONTACT NUMBER)
MEDIA RELEASE SUPPORTING FACTS

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australian Alcohol Guidelines recommend for young people under 18 years of age, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

This is based on an assessment of the potential harms of alcohol for young people, as well as a range of epidemiological research, which show that:

- Risky behaviour is more likely among drinkers aged 15–17 years than older drinkers; if drinking does occur in this age group, it should be at a low risk level and in a safe environment, supervised by adults.
- Alcohol may adversely affect brain development and lead to alcohol-related problems in later life.
- 93 per cent of attendees at a popular Leavers’ destination reported using alcohol during the celebrations.
- Alcohol-related harms during a Leavers’ celebration:
  - 58% reported a blackout.
  - 67% a hangover.
  - 41% an accident or injury.
  - 21% had regretful sex.
  - 14% had unprotected sex.

Research conducted in 2009 of Western Australian students celebrating at a popular Leavers’ destination has shown that Leavers who were supplied alcohol by their parents were more likely to drink at harmful levels.

‘Of the 25% of leavers who said their parents provided them with alcohol at the celebrations:

- 89% drank at levels considered harmful for adults by the NHMRC.
- 65% reported they had sources other than their parents providing them with alcohol. Provision of alcohol by parents is likely to be topping up this situation’.


USEFUL LINKS

Drug and Alcohol Office
7 Field Street
Mount Lawley  WA  6050
Telephone: (08) 9370 0333
Fax: (08) 9272 6605
Website: dao.health.wa.gov.au

Alcohol.Think Again
Information about how alcohol affects young people, tips for staying safe, advice for parents and guardians.
Website: alcoholthinkagain.com.au

Leavers WA
Information to help plan your Leavers experience, advise for parents and guardians, and tips to stay safe during Leavers.
Website: leaverswa.com.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Information, counselling and advice for people concerned about their own or another’s alcohol use. This is a 24-hour, state-wide, confidential telephone service.
Telephone: (08) 9442 5000
Toll free (country callers only): 1800 198 024
Email: adis@health.wa.gov.au

Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)
Confidential telephone support, counselling, information and referral service for parents.
Telephone: (08) 9442 5050
Toll free: 1800 653 203
Email: pdis@health.wa.gov.au
We would really appreciate your feedback!

To enable us to continue to provide support kits with information that is of use to you, Community Programs will send you a short online survey to complete one week after the official Leavers’ week finishes. If you have any feedback or suggestions for future support kits please let us know!