

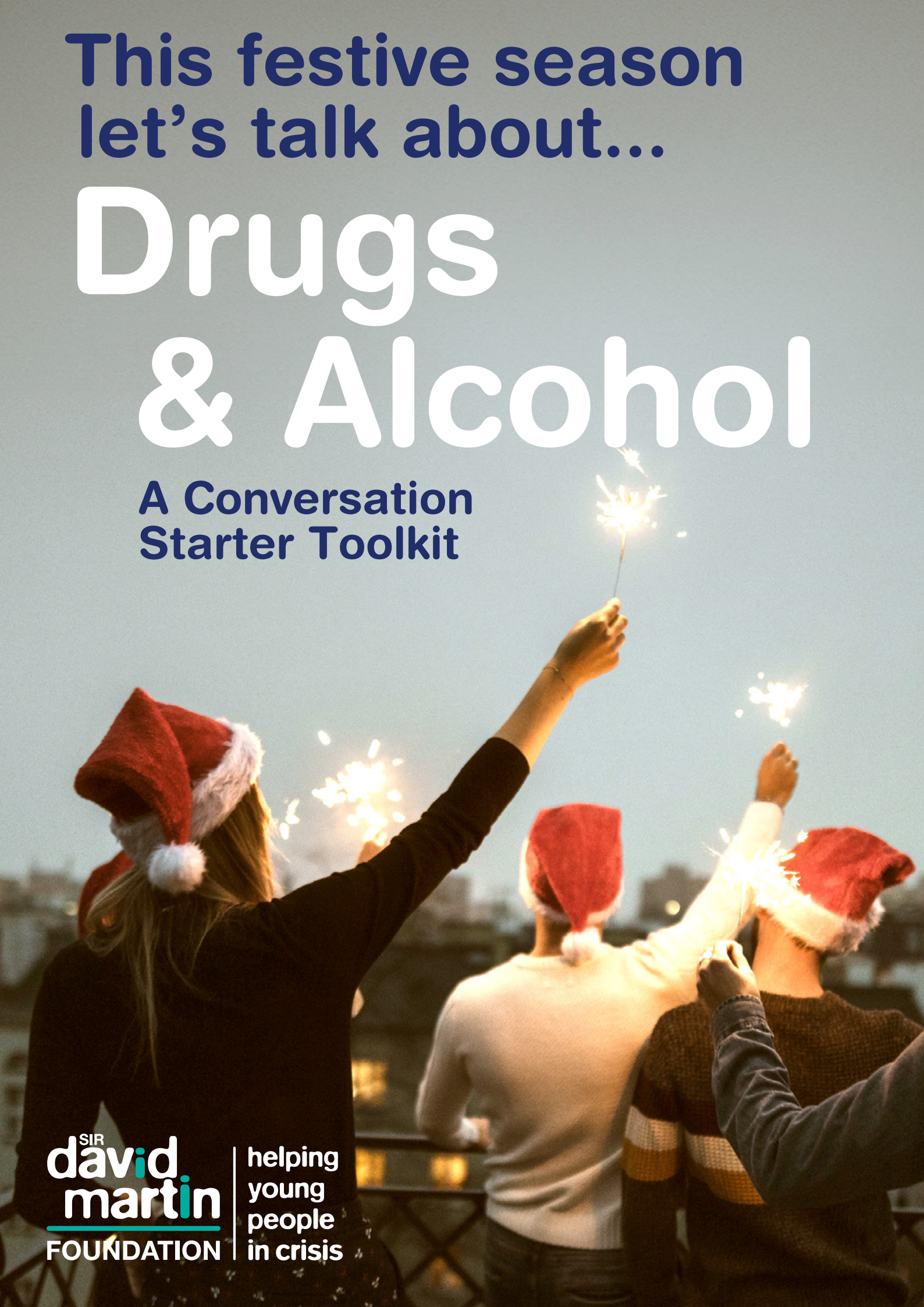
This festive season
let's talk about...

Drugs & Alcohol

A Conversation
Starter Toolkit

SIR
**david
martin**
FOUNDATION

helping
young
people
in crisis



'Tis the season

The festive season in Australia is all about fun, sun, long summer days and getting together to celebrate with friends and loved ones.

From schoolies and Christmas parties, to backyard BBQs and big New Year's events, it's a busy time of year.

Drugs and alcohol can feature at these social occasions, so we've created this Conversation Starter Toolkit to help you open up a discussion with the young people in your life about drug and alcohol use.

Developed in conjunction with experienced Youth Workers, it's packed with accurate information and practical tips that will help you take the 'awkward' out of the conversation and set the stage for more open, ongoing communication.

First things first

No judgement

Whether you're speaking with your children, grandchildren or other young people in your life, they're unlikely to want to chat about their drug and alcohol use. It'll be up to you to make the first move.

By being open, honest and curious (without judgement) you'll lay the groundwork for them to speak more freely with you – and open the way to sharing some of the facts and tips you'll find in the following pages.



Factors that can influence drug and alcohol use during the festive season



Peer Groups: Young people can be influenced by their peers. They might feel pressure (explicit or subtle) to use or experiment with substances.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): Curiosity and a desire to be 'part of the fun' can drive young people to join in drug and alcohol use.

Stress: While we may view the festive season as a time of joy and celebration, for many young people it comes with increased pressures. This may include social anxiety, new or unfamiliar situations or family stress. To escape or deal with uncomfortable feelings during this period, some young people may use substances to 'take the edge off' or numb themselves.

Did you know...

47% of high school students were given their last alcoholic drink from a parent.¹

1 [Australian secondary school students' use of alcohol and other substances – 2022–2023](#)

Don't panic

There's a lot of misinformation and fear when it comes to drug and alcohol use, but research shows:

- Most young people have never tried illegal drugs or use them on a regular basis.²
- Most young people who experiment with drugs will not go on to develop major problems in adulthood.²

2 <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting-talk/>

Don't forget

Talking with the young people in your life about drugs and alcohol is one of the best ways to help decrease the likelihood of them drinking, taking drugs or experiencing harm from substance use later in life.³

3 <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting-talk/>

How much is too much?

Alcohol: 18 years and under – to reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, it's recommended that children and people under 18 years old do not consume alcohol.¹

Over 18 years – to reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy adults should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.²

Drugs: There is no safe level of illicit drug use.¹ Prescription and over-the-counter drugs should be taken only as directed.



See the signs

Drugs and alcohol change the way our bodies and brains function. Take notice of the behaviour of the young people in your life and start a conversation if you notice changes. Of course, never hesitate to seek assistance if you are concerned or feel the young person is at risk.

Some effects of alcohol and drugs in young people include feeling:¹

- Anxious
- Agitated
- Moody
- Depressed
- Unmotivated
- Aggressive
- Paranoid

¹ <https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/practice-kits/alcohol-and-other-drugs/working-with-young-people-with-problematic-aod-use/seeing-and-understanding/young-people-s-aod-use>

² <https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/whats-new/Pages/mindful-merriment.aspx>

Start talking

Setting the stage for a meaningful discussion

- 1 Approach the conversation with genuine curiosity and a willingness to engage.
- 2 Know the facts and be honest.
- 3 Avoid accusatory language or a lecturing tone.
- 4 You don't need to have all the answers. If you don't, discover them together.
- 5 Listen and give the young person space to respond without interruption.
- 6 Pick the right time and place – give the conversation your full attention, without distractions.

Conversation starters

To kick-off a conversation try starting with short, open-ended questions about drugs and alcohol in general. Ask your child's opinion. Check in to see if they have questions. Listen without comment or judgement – even if their ideas are different from yours. Remember, how you listen can be more important than what you say. Using pop culture prompts, such as movies, songs or TV shows, can be a useful way to integrate substance-related discussions into your everyday interactions and create a natural dialogue.

Use pop culture

"I watched [TV show] last night and there's a scene where a group of young kids are drinking heavily. Does this happen with kids you know at school? What would you do in that situation?"

"I saw this documentary about [topic related to substance use], and it brought up some interesting viewpoints. It made me wonder, what are your views on drugs and alcohol?"

Test some hypothetical situations

"How would you handle it if someone offered you drugs/alcohol?"

"If a friend/family member under the influence of drugs or alcohol offered you a lift in their car, what would you say?"

"How would you look after a mate who was intoxicated?"

A REMINDER ABOUT STIGMA: Stigma is a negative attitude or idea about a person and is generally based on assumptions. It can lead to feelings of judgement and shame. When someone feels stigmatised, they're less likely to reach out for help. To reduce the impact of stigma, try to focus on the person, not on their use of drugs or alcohol. The words you use can have a big impact – choose them wisely and with compassion.

This is general information only. For further support contact the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015. For crisis support contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Ways to say 'no'

During the festive season (and the rest of the year!) it can be difficult for young people to say 'no' to peers offering them drugs and alcohol – even when they want to. In one of your discussions, we suggest you and the young people in your life run through scenarios and workshop ways they could say 'no' that work for them.

TIP: It's best to keep things short and simple. No complicated reasons are necessary when you say 'no' to drugs or alcohol – it's your choice. Just be clear and direct with your response to discourage further invitation or pressure.

Here are some ideas to get you started, but we recommend crafting something that feels easy to say and authentic for you and the situation:

"No thanks, not tonight. You go ahead."

"No thanks, I'm good."

"Thanks, but I've got to get up early. I'm going to leave you to it."

"Thanks but it's not my thing. I don't want to bring anyone down so I'm going to head out."

"No, not right now. I want to catch up with Kara – I haven't seen her all night."

"No thanks. If I come home high/drunk my parents will never let me go out again."

"No thanks, I've got to work in the morning."

And remember, if you're feeling uncomfortable, you can always leave the situation.

The facts



24%

of young people aged 12-24 have engaged in harmful drug use.



30%

of 14-19 year olds drink at levels that risk harm, accident or injury.



83%

of risky drinkers aged 14-19 were injured as a result of their drinking.



33%

of all 16-17 year olds have tried at least one type of illegal substance including: cannabis, hallucinogens, amphetamines, ecstasy, opiates or cocaine.



38%

of all people in alcohol and drug treatment programs are aged under 30.



77%

of young Australians aged 14-17 who have used drugs made the decision to first use a drug due to curiosity.

Resources

Across Australia, there are many incredible organisations that offer help and information. Please, don't hesitate to reach out if you need support. You'll be glad you did.

Where you can get help

- [Lifeline](#)
- [Sir David Martin Foundation](#)
- [Family Drug Support Australia](#)
- [Headspace](#)
- [Reach Out](#)
- [Your Room | NSW Health and the Alcohol And Drug Information Service](#)

Further reading

- [Growing Happy, Healthy Young Minds](#)
- Doing Drugs with Paul Dillon: doingdrugs-darta.blogspot.com
- [Things to try: Alcohol - ReachOut Parents](#)
- [Drug and Alcohol Education: Parent Booklet - Positive Choices](#)
- [Getting Started - Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#)
- [How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk](#)
- [The Power of Words-Practical Guide.pdf \(adf.org.au\)](#)

Sir David Martin Foundation

About us

We're so glad you've downloaded this Conversation Starter Toolkit.

As an organisation, Sir David Martin Foundation is passionate about bringing awareness and support to young people experiencing addiction.

Established by the late Governor of NSW, Sir David Martin, and his wife, Lady Martin, the Foundation was created to help young people in crisis rebuild their lives.

Thanks to the incredible support of our donors, we have raised over \$75 million since 1990.

These funds have enabled us to work on best practice models of treatment for young people with drug and alcohol addiction, and become the major funder of Mission Australia's Triple Care Farm[^].

Located in the NSW Southern Highlands, the Farm's holistic treatment centre provides a safe, nurturing environment for young people to detox, get well and begin the next chapter of their lives. At the Farm, young people initially attend David Martin Place, the first (and only) youth Withdrawal Centre in NSW. They then spend 12 weeks in the comprehensive Residential Rehabilitation program.

With the support of our wonderful donors, the Foundation also helps fund the Aftercare program that provides vital help to young people in the critical 180 days after leaving rehab. This life-saving program helps young people stay well, build the foundations for their new future and turn their lives around.



Sir David Martin

After completing treatment at Triple Care Farm young people can begin afresh*



83%
reduction in
suicide attempts



96%
in stable housing



68%
engaged in education
and employment

1990

The Foundation was established to help young people in crisis.

2017

David Martin Place opened – the first youth Withdrawal Centre in NSW.



2022

Youth Network launched – a national expansion of the Aftercare program.

To date

We've raised over \$75 million for youth addiction thanks to compassionate people like you.

Please click here to support our vital work.

To find out more about Sir David Martin Foundation visit: martinfoundation.org.au

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[^] Sir David Martin Foundation acknowledges that Mission Australia, our service partner, owns and runs programs at Triple Care Farm and delivers Aftercare programs for Youth Network.

* Statistics are based on the 2023 Triple Care Farm program outcomes, 6 months after graduation. Stock imagery has been used throughout to protect privacy.