

When's old enough to drink?

At the age of 16 you can join the army and kill another person or have sex and get married if you choose to. Yet you can't have an alcoholic drink. Is this right? Eshe Nelson, 17, puts this question to her peers.

The legal age for drinking is often a hot topic of debate. When the UK is compared to other European countries, with lower drinking ages and smaller binge drinking problems, the advantages of reducing the age are obvious. These countries have successfully made alcohol less of a novelty and more normal and so Melissa believes; "reduces binge drinking and encourages sensible drinking."

Annabel makes a valid point that; "America [legal drinking age] is 21, which is quite ridiculous because you're going to get 18 year olds who can make decisions but can't have alcohol and they act like the equivalent of British 15 year olds having their first drink of alcohol, which is quite ridiculous as they have adult legal rights but are acting like children."

However the big question and maybe the most important of all is: who should decide the age at which drinking is acceptable? The many contestants for this place include parents and the government. Annabel uses France as her evidence in arguing on the side of parents; "In France you can drink with your family in a controlled environment...they have a lot less social alcohol related problems than we do in England."

Hannah is adamant that the government should make this decision as that is what they're there for; "politicians end up making the decisions that lead to the legislation on drinking ages. We give them the right to decide then we vote them in. The point of pressure groups, interest groups, advisors and committees is to ensure there is specialist knowledge."

Another strong contender is young people themselves. Melissa and Selina agree that if young people were allowed to decide when to drink, the whole concept would be far less exciting and special, young people would probably drink less out of indifference. Young people are being asked to make important decisions about their lives, especially their futures from a very young age. UK laws legalise many things; including marriage, sex and leaving school from the age of 16. But still it's believed that the majority of young people aren't responsible enough to make their own decisions about alcohol. I think the problem lies in a universal lack of understanding. Adults as well as well as young people don't really know the effects of drinking on their body long and short term or the importance of watching the units. With better education on alcohol for everyone there could be some resolution to this problem.

Yet it is apparent that the increased knowledge approach isn't being considered. On 29th January, Sir Liam Donaldson, England's chief medical officer, published a guidance stating that young people under-15 should "never" be given alcohol. The recent survey suggesting that 20 per cent of 13 year olds drink once a week is clear sign that the situation for children so young is worsening. So let's hope these new rules don't have the same encouraging effect of previous legislation.

About this article

This article was written by Eshe Nelson, 17.

1 comment

More problems.

My friend has been told at 15 she'll be allowed to drink. Her parents are alot more laid back then other parents and i think this helps in some way, because my friend doesn't ever drink when all of us are and she's actually of the innocent ones in the group we hang around with. What i'm trying to get at here, is the fact that teens in France are allowed to drink with family in a controlled enviroment, yet we still have higher alochol problems then them, this could suggest that Teens just want to rebel against what they see as something they should be able to do, so by being able to drink by law or by anything teens dont see drinking as something exicting or new.

Malika (age 15) from Brighton, 08 July 2009 12:37

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