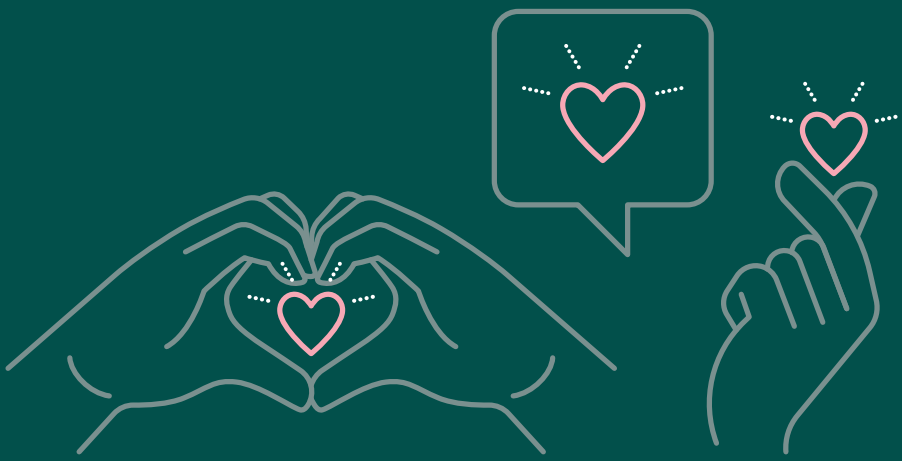
TAKE A MOMENT
Understanding Alcohol Harm

Asian Family Services

Stronger Families, Open Conversations

An alcohol conversation guide for Asian families



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About this booklet

This booklet helps Asian families talk about alcohol in a safe, open, and respectful way. Alcohol can affect the person drinking, their family, and the wider community. Family members may notice changes but may not know what to say or do.

The activities and tips in the booklet can help families understand alcohol, support each other, make informed choices, and find support. Adults can also use this booklet with teenagers to talk about family expectations, peer pressure, and delaying alcohol use.

Every Asian family is different. Use this booklet in a way that respects your family's culture, values, language, and experiences. Go at your own pace and remember to care for your own wellbeing too.

How to use this booklet

You can read this booklet from start to finish or choose the sections that are useful now or work through activities together as a family. Take your time and move at a pace that feels comfortable for you – there is no need to complete everything at once.

What happens when someone drinks alcohol?

Start with this quick quiz to test what you know

What do you think happens after someone drinks alcohol?

- ☐ It goes to the stomach.
- ☐ It is absorbed into the bloodstream.
- ☐ It reaches the brain within minutes.
- ☐ All of the above.

> **The answer is hidden somewhere in this booklet. Can you find it? Did you get it right?**

How alcohol can change thinking, feelings, and actions

 **Thinking and decisions**	• Harder to concentrate • Slower decision-making • Poor judgement
 **Feelings and behaviour**	• Feel more relaxed at first • Feel more confident • Become emotional or angry • Mood changes
 **Movement, speech and reactions**	• Slower reactions • Poor balance • Blurred vision • Slurred speech

Alcohol quickly enters the bloodstream and reaches the brain, where it starts affecting how a person thinks, feels and moves.

Different parts of the body are affected

Body part	What alcohol can do
 **Brain**	Slows thinking, memory and coordination.
 **Heart**	Can increase blood pressure and affect heart health over time.
 **Stomach**	Can irritate the stomach and cause nausea or vomiting.
 **Sleep**	Makes sleep less restful, even if they fall asleep quickly.
 **Whole body**	Slows reaction time and coordination, making driving or operating machinery unsafe.
 **Baby before birth**	Alcohol during pregnancy can affect a baby's growth and brain development. The safest choice is not to drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Why do people drink?

Drinking behaviour can be shaped by many connected influences, including family, culture, friends, work or study, stress, and social media. These influences are different for each person and can change over time.

Quiz: Tick all factors that may influence your loved one's drinking:

- ☐ Friends or social gatherings
- ☐ Family experiences or expectations
- ☐ Cultural traditions or social norms
- ☐ Stress, worry, or difficult emotions
- ☐ Work or study pressures
- ☐ Major life changes or challenges
- ☐ Feeling lonely or isolated
- ☐ Other: _____

Family

Ask yourself:

- ☐ Does your family celebrate with alcohol?
- ☐ Do children often see adults drinking?
- ☐ Does your family talk openly about alcohol?
- ☐ Does alcohol use in our family match the values that are important to us?

Children can be affected too

Children living with alcohol-related harm may feel worried, confused, embarrassed, responsible, or unsafe. Tell them clearly: "This is not your fault. You can talk to a trusted adult, and help is available." A calm, caring adult can help a child feel safer.

Workplace

Quiz: Have you noticed any of these workplace influences on your loved one's drinking?

- ☐ After-work drinks
- ☐ Celebrations with alcohol
- ☐ Feeling pressure to join in
- ☐ Drinking to cope with work stress
- ☐ Played drinking games

Alcohol can affect people in every type of workplace. In 2025, more than 1 in 5 full-time workers in New Zealand drank at levels that increased their risk of harm.

Peer pressure of drinking

Activity: Myth or Fact?

"Everyone drinks alcohol."

- ☐ Myth
- ☐ Fact

About 1 in 4 New Zealand adults (25.1%) did not drink alcohol in the past year according to a study done by Ministry of Health in 2025. Families can remind each other that choosing not to drink does not stop someone from belonging, celebrating, or enjoying time with others. *(Answer: Myth)*

Social media

Quiz: Have you noticed social media posts that may influence how your loved one thinks about drinking?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Social media can influence our alcohol drinking behaviour by:

- Showing alcohol as part of celebrations, friendship or success.
- Making drinking seem normal or expected.
- Using influencers or celebrities to promote alcohol.
- Encouraging people to share photos or videos that include alcohol.

Answer

What happens when someone drinks alcohol?

- ☐ It goes to the stomach.
- ☐ It is absorbed into the bloodstream.
- ☐ It reaches the brain within minutes.
- ☑ All of the above.

What is harmful drinking?

Activity: Myth or Fact?

"Only people who drink heavily experience alcohol-related harm."

☐ Myth

☐ Fact

Drinking may become harmful when it affects your loved one's wellbeing, safety, relationships, or daily life. It can also affect you and other family members. (*Answer: Myth)*

Think about what you have noticed:

Start here	Think about...	What could this mean?
How does my loved one seem to be feeling?	Have they been drinking more than they planned? Do they seem to use alcohol to cope with stress?	Alcohol may be affecting their wellbeing.
How are our family relationships?	Has their drinking caused arguments or tension? Have you or others close to them expressed concern?	Alcohol may be affecting you and other people they care about.
How is their daily life?	Has their drinking affected their work, study, family responsibilities, or safety?	It may be time to share your concern, set boundaries, or seek support for yourself and your family.

Are you concerned about your loved one's drinking?

A loved one's harmful drinking can affect family relationships, wellbeing, finances, and cause ongoing stress. You cannot force them to change, but you can share your concerns with care and respect.

Activity: Take a moment to reflect.

You don't need to answer every question. These questions are simply to help you think about what you've noticed and concerned about someone else drinking.

What have you noticed?	✓
Has their drinking changed?	☐
Are they drinking more often or more than before?	☐
Has drinking changed their mood or behaviour?	☐
Have they missed work, study, or family duties because of drinking?	☐
Has drinking caused problems at home?	☐
Have they put themselves or others in danger?	☐
Are you worried about their wellbeing?	☐
Do you know how to talk with them about alcohol?	☐

> **Neither you nor anyone else can make someone cut down or stop drinking, but you can encourage and help them to make changes.**

How to talk to your loved one?

If you are concerned about your loved one's drinking, there are ways to approach them about it. Below are some tips:

Before the conversation

Understand family and cultural concerns

- They may worry about shame, family reputation, privacy, or disappointing elders.
- Avoid labels, blame, or comparing them with others.
- Remember that every Asian family is different.

Plan how to approach them

- Choose one or two real life examples.
- Decide whether a one-to-one talk or a trusted family member would feel safer.
- Use the language in which everyone feels most comfortable.
- Make sure that you are in a safe place to exit if you need to.

Choose a respectful time and place

- Talk privately when everyone is calm and the person is sober.
- Allow enough time so no one feels rushed.
- Avoid raising the issue during a celebration or family gathering.

Know your role

- You do not need to solve the problem.
- You can care, set boundaries, and encourage support.

Keep yourself and your family safe

- Do not begin the conversation if you feel unsafe.
- Ask a trusted person or service to support you.
- If anyone is in immediate danger, call 111.

During the conversation

Some prompts to start the conversation

- *"I have noticed _____. Could you share with me what has been happening?"*
- *"I am worried about your wellbeing because _____. Would you like to talk about it?"*
- *"We can look for support together by _____. Would you feel comfortable trying this together?"*

Begin with care and respect

- Explain what you have noticed and why you are concerned.
- Focus on wellbeing, safety, and family relationships.
- Try: *"I care about you and want our family to be well."*

Listen without losing face

- Give them time to speak without interruption.
- Acknowledge their feelings, stress, and pressures.
- Do not argue or demand an immediate answer.

Stay calm and specific

- Use *"I"* statements and facts, not rumours or assumptions.
- For example: *"I feel worried when you drive after drinking because I care about your safety."*
- Respect their choices while being clear about safety and boundaries.
- Avoid lecturing, threats, or bringing up old conflicts.

Protect dignity

- Do not call them an *"alcoholic"* or *"drunk"*.
- Keep the conversation private unless safety is at risk.
- Reassure them that seeking help is a sign of care and strength.

Agree on a next step

- Choose one small step, such as talking again or contacting a service.
- If helpful, offer a culturally matched worker, interpreter, or trusted support person.
- Remember that change can take time.

How do you feel after the conversation?

Activity: Reflect on the conversation

Were you able to express your concern calmly and respectfully?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Did you listen to the other person's perspective?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Did they feel heard and respected?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What went well?

_____

_____

_____

Is there anything you would do differently next time?

- ☐ Yes: _____

_____

_____

- ☐ No

You are not responsible for changing someone else's drinking.

By showing care, listening without judgement, and encouraging support, you may have taken an important first step. Don't forget to look after your own wellbeing too.

Understanding standard drinks

A standard drink measures the amount of pure alcohol, not the size of the glass. In New Zealand, one standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. A bottle, can, or glass may contain more than one standard drink, so always check the label.

Drink	Example of about 1 standard drink
Beer	330ml bottle at 4% alcohol
Wine	100ml glass at 12.5% alcohol
Spirits	30ml at 42% alcohol

Remember

Home pours and bar servings may be larger than one standard drink. Checking the standard-drinks symbol on the container is the easiest way to know how much alcohol it contains.

Asian drinks may also contain alcohol

Drink	Examples and reminder
Strong spirits	Baijiu (China), soju (Korea), shochu or awamori (Japan), arrack (South and Southeast Asia), and country or locally made liquor.
Fermented drinks	Sake (Japan), huangjiu or mijiu (China), makgeolli (Korea), rice wine, palm wine or toddy, tapuy (Philippines), and chhaang (Himalayan regions).
Check the label	Alcohol strength and serving sizes vary widely. A small cup, bowl, bottle, or home pour may contain more than one standard drink.
Note about kava: Kava is a traditional Pacific drink made from a plant root. It is not alcohol, so it is not counted as a standard drink. However, it can affect alertness and should not be mixed with alcohol or followed by driving.	

Helping your family plan safer celebrations

Celebration checklist

Before our next celebration...

- ☐ We have alcohol-free drink options.
- ☐ We have plenty of food.
- ☐ Everyone has a safe way home.
- ☐ We respect everyone's choice to drink or not drink.
- ☐ We're celebrating each other, not just the alcohol.

Try this – talk together before the celebration:

What signs tell the person that they have had enough?

What limit or alcohol-free choice feels right for them?

What will help them slow down or stop?

Who can help them get home safely?

What to do if someone else's drinking affects you

If someone else's drinking is affecting you, it's important to look after your own wellbeing too. Take a moment to think about what matters most to you and what helps you manage stress, relax, and enjoy life. Use the reflection prompts below, adapted from Health New Zealand (2025), to explore your own wellbeing. Examples are provided to help you get started.

What else might help?

If alcohol is being used to cope with stress or difficult feelings, family members can gently suggest other options:

- Talk with a trusted family member, friend, elder, faith leader, or counsellor.
- Go for a walk, exercise, rest, listen to music, practise breathing, pray, or meditate.
- Join a cultural, faith, community, or social activity that feels supportive.
- Ask for practical help with work, study, childcare, money worries, or other pressures.
- Seek professional support if stress or difficult feelings continue.

> **Ask what feels helpful to them rather than choosing for them. One small step can be a good place to begin.**

Looking after your own self

What matters most to me is that:

1. My family and I feel safe, healthy, and supported.
2. I stay connected to the people, culture, and values that are important to me.
3. _____
4. _____

The way I deal with pressure is to:

1. Get away on my own.
2. Visit a close friend and talk about it.
3. Go for a run or a walk or do some other exercise.
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

The things in life I enjoy doing are:

1. Going to a movie.
2. Spending an evening with friends.
3. Reading or watching TV or gardening or some activity that I can get into.
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

I can best relax by:

1. Taking the dog for a walk.
2. Leaving the children with a friend.
3. Doing a favourite activity like:
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Getting support

General family and whānau support:

The Family Services Directory can help you find local support for counselling, parenting, housing, food, budgeting, family wellbeing, and other needs. Visit **familyservices.govt.nz/directory** or call **0800 211 211**.

My supporters are:

1. Asian Family Services Helpline: **0800862342**.
2. 1737 Need help to Talk? Phone: **1737** (call or text).
3. Alcohol Drug Helpline call **0800787797** or text **8681**.
4. Shine Domestic Violence Helpline Phone: **0508744633**.
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Supporting teenagers to delay alcohol use

Delaying alcohol use is the safest choice for teenagers. For people under 18, it is best not to drink at all. Calm, regular conversations can help teenagers understand family expectations, respond to pressure, and feel able to ask for help.

Conversation starters for parents and caregivers

- Ask what they see or hear about alcohol from friends, social media, school, or parties.
- Explain why you want them to delay drinking, and agree on clear family rules.
- Listen without judgement so they feel safe telling you if something goes wrong.
- Practise simple responses to pressure, such as *"No thanks"*, *"I'm not drinking"*, or *"I need to leave now"*.

Make a party safety plan together

- Go with a trusted friend and stay together. Avoid arriving or leaving alone.
- Know the address, who is hosting, how you will get home, and which trusted adult is available.
- Keep your phone charged and check in with a parent or caregiver at an agreed time.
- Agree on an escape plan, such as a code word or text that means *"Please pick me up now."* Parents should respond calmly and collect them without delaying.
- Call a parent, caregiver, or trusted adult if you feel unsafe. In an emergency, call 111.
- Never get into a car with a driver who has been drinking.

Alcohol and the law in New Zealand

Alcohol and Young People

- People under 18 cannot buy alcohol.
- A parent or legal guardian who supplies alcohol to a young person must do so responsibly and supervise them.
- Other adults must have permission from the young person's parent or legal guardian before supplying alcohol.

Drink-Driving

Alcohol can slow reactions and affect judgement. Drivers under 20 have a zero alcohol limit. Drivers aged 20 or older must stay within the legal limit, but the safest choice is simple: if you drink, do not drive.

> **The safest option is always not to drink and drive.**

You can find more info through Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora website https://resources.alcohol.org.nz/alcohol-management-laws/nz-alcohol-laws

Getting Support: Safe, Private, and Respectful

Seeking support is a sign of strength and care – not failure. Many Asian people delay asking for help because of concerns about reputation, family honour, privacy, or stigma. These feelings are understood and respected in New Zealand's health and support services.

Hope and recovery

Change is possible. Recovery can take time and may include small steps, setbacks, and support from family, community, peers, or professionals. Asking for help is a sign of strength and care.

What support services can offer

You can ask for help for yourself or your family, even if your loved one is not ready. Services can listen without judgement, help you plan next steps, support safety and wellbeing, and connect you with counselling, groups, or other local help. Information is kept private, and interpreters may be available.

Frequently asked questions

Will my information be private?

Support services keep your information private. They will explain any limits to confidentiality, such as when someone may be at serious risk of harm.

What happens when I ask for help?

A worker will listen, ask what is happening, and discuss the support you or your family may need. You can ask questions and decide what feels right for you.

Can I get support if my family member does not want help?

Yes. You can seek support for yourself and your family, even if your loved one is not ready to change or contact a service.

Community Alcohol and Drug Services (CADS) Auckland

CADS Auckland provides free support for family members affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use. It also supports people who are concerned about their own use. Call **0800 845 1818**.

If you live outside Auckland, the name of your local community alcohol and drug service and the way you access it may be different. Use the Alcohol Drug Helpline or Healthpoint to find the right local service.

Asian focused support:
Some staff speak major Asian languages, and free interpreters are available in over 20 languages.

Find support in your area

- **Alcohol Drug Helpline:**
  Call **0800 787 797** or text **8681**, free and confidential, 24 hours a day. A trained counsellor can provide advice and help you find a local service.
- **Healthpoint:**
  Visit **healthpoint.co.nz** and search under Mental Health & Addictions to find alcohol and drug services by region, service type, language, and access pathway.
- **SMART Recovery:**
  Visit **smartrecovery.org.nz** for free peer-support meetings. You can view New Zealand meetings or include online meetings available across Australia and New Zealand.
- **Alcohol.org.nz:**
  Information and resources
- **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA):**
  0800 229 6757
- **Al Anon / Alateen:**
  0508 425 266 for people affected by someone else's drinking.
- **FASD CAN:**
  Support for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- **Living Sober:**
  livingsober.org.nz – a free, anonymous online community for people who want to change their relationship with alcohol.

Call 111 now

If the person cannot be woken, is breathing slowly or irregularly, has a seizure, repeatedly vomits, looks pale or blue, or you are seriously worried. Stay with them, place them on their side if safe, and do not leave them to “sleep it off”.

Alcohol and mental health

Harmful alcohol use can occur alongside stress, anxiety, depression, trauma, gambling harm, or other wellbeing concerns. Alcohol may seem to help someone cope for a short time, but it can make these concerns harder to manage. Families can encourage support for both alcohol use and mental health rather than treating them as separate problems.

Asian Family Services (AFS) offers free, private, culturally responsive support for Asian communities in New Zealand.

Asian Family Services

Phone: **0800 862 342**

Website: **www.asianfamilyservices.nz**

Languages: Services available in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, Japanese, and Hindi.

Support includes: counselling, health advice, addiction support, and wellbeing support.

Scan the QR-code to share your thoughts and win $50 wellbeing pack!



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