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Wine and Spirits

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Letters | On World No Alcohol Day, let's remember to help our youth develop healthy drinking attitudes

- As more reach for the bottle amid the pandemic, we must reflect on our relationship with alcohol and remember to have open and honest conversations with our children about drinking

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A man picks out beer inside a shop in Central in June 2017. Photo: Felix Wong

As the Covid-19 pandemic drags on, studies show an uptick in alcohol use globally.

While there is limited data on alcohol use among the youth of Hong Kong during the pandemic, preliminary data shows that some adults are drinking more during this time, citing boredom and loneliness as key motivating factors.

What we do know is that family culture plays a critical role in shaping a young person's attitudes to and behaviour around alcohol, and even more so when young people are spending more time at home. Parents are our first role models, so what parents do matters.

How have your own behaviours around alcohol changed? Has your

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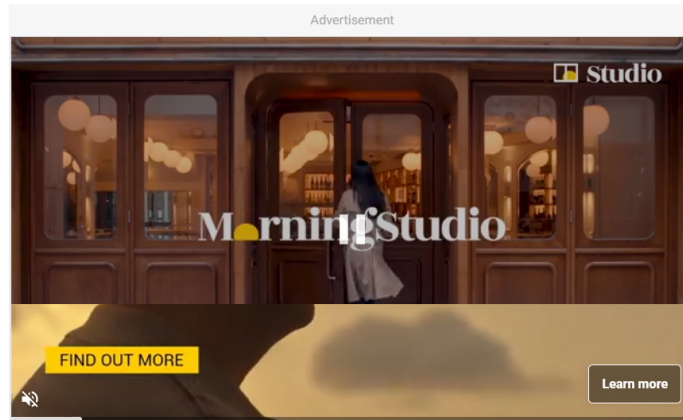


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alcohol intake increased in response to these stressful times? Perhaps the amount you're consuming hasn't increased, but you've shifted from drinking in bars to happy hour on Zoom at home.



The purpose of this self-reflection is not to judge – we are all finding ways to adapt to this new normal – but simply to notice what has changed and how that affects the young people around us.

Just as you reflect on your relationship to alcohol, it is important to have open and honest conversations about alcohol at home. Even if your children are not yet drinking, they are likely to already be facing pressure to drink, whether from peers or popular media. Talking about alcohol early and honestly will normalise the topic and open the door for your children to seek guidance when they need it.

Contrary to popular belief, it is often easiest to access alcohol not in bars or convenience stores, but at home. Many young people access alcohol from friends, family, at parties or by taking it without permission. This means that parents need to be attentive to how and where alcohol is stored in the home, ensuring that young people can't access it without parents' knowledge.

Young people these days are incredibly mature, more so than many of us were at their age. But what hasn't changed is their cognitive development. Young people's minds, especially their decision-making abilities, are still developing. What this means is that we can't assume young people are able to operate like adults – they still need our guidance to shape their perceptions around alcohol and set appropriate rules.

Today is World No Alcohol Day – how are you helping your family to make healthy decisions?

Sky Siu, executive director, KELY Support Group

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