



Alcohol Reality Check

Youth Screening Guide

As Easy as 1-2-3

The Alcohol Reality Check for youth is easy to take, simple to score, and can facilitate clinician engagement with a youth in regard to risky drinking.

1. Have the participant complete the screening form. The participant needs only to answer seven short questions about their experiences with drinking.
2. Using the Quick Scoring Aid (next page), determine the participant's drinking pattern based on their responses. Record these results on both the screening form (retaining it for statistics) and on the *Alcohol and You* card.
3. Discuss the results with the participant (see suggestions on following pages), and give them the *Alcohol and You* card. Any post-interview notes can go on the back of the screening form.



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Quick Scoring Aid

Questions 1-6 inquire about contextual indicators of risk from alcohol-related experiences and solicit Yes/No responses. These questions are adapted (with an alcohol-only focus) from the CRAFFT test for problematic adolescent substance use made available by the Centre for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research, Children's Hospital, Boston, MA. See Knight, J.R. et al. (2002), *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 156(6), 607–614.

Question 7 inquires about episodes of excessive drinking and seeks a time indicator on how recently (if ever) the individual has been intoxicated. Episodes of inebriation are often the setting for significant immediate harm to youth.

Completed responses to the 7 questions are scored as follows:

Safer drinking pattern is indicated by:

- fewer than 2 Yes answers to Questions 1-6 **and**
- a response of **more than** 3 months ago or **never** to Question 7

Riskier drinking pattern is indicated by:

- 2 or more Yes answers to Questions 1-6 **and/or**
- a response of **less than** 3 months ago to Question 7

Be sure to indicate the pattern in the appropriate box within the "Staff Use" section of the screening form. On the *Alcohol and You* take-home card, check the boxes () for any "Yes" on Q1-6 and the appropriate response to Q7 and circle the pattern that applies.

Discussion Framework and Aids

Clinicians are encouraged to adopt a motivational approach which takes an empathic, non-judgmental, non-coercive stance. This approach appeals to the participant's own capacity to reflect on their conduct, recognize need for change and to act on this. It thus evokes exercise of personal responsibility and ability to make healthy behavioural changes, drawing on available resources. This is best supported by a clinician being attentive, using open-ended questions, respecting ambivalence, probing readiness, eliciting the participant's motivation, encouraging adoption of solutions they identify with, and reinforcing their self-efficacy to employ those strategies successfully.

The interview discussion framework can follow a strategic sequence of components.

"No" answers to the questionnaire items allow the clinician a chance to

- commend respondents,
- clarify their sense/perception of risk,
- gauge their attitude, and
- encourage further behaviour that avoids harm.

"Yes" answers afford the clinician an opportunity to

- assess extent of risk behaviour more precisely,
- assess motivation and readiness,
- discuss safety, and
- encourage a course of change the participant chooses.

Questions and comments offered below are suggested as examples you might wish to use or adapt within such a discussion framework. You might begin with an invitation to discuss (e.g., "I see that you've answered 'yes' on the first question" or "Can we discuss for a few moments your response to the second question?" or "I think it might be worthwhile for us to talk a bit about your reply to the third question").

Q.1: Have you ever ridden in a car driven by someone (including yourself) who had been using alcohol?

“No”

- No risk so far here; that’s good!
- What situations might tempt or pressure you to do this?
- What strategies have you taken or could you take to avoid riding/driving in such a situation?

“Yes”

- How much of an issue has this been for you? How often or not has it happened?
- What kinds of pressure do you feel to get in a car where the driver is impaired?
- What sorts of things can you do in the future to avoid riding or driving in such a situation?
- Where do you see yourself at in terms of handling this matter from here on?

Q.2: Do you ever use alcohol to relax, feel better about yourself, or fit in?

“No”

- Why do you think it could become a problem for someone to use alcohol for such reasons?
- What are other perhaps better ways of becoming more at ease, content or confident in a situation?

“Yes”

- How big have these motivations been for you? How often or not do they come into play for you?
- How do you think it could be a problem for someone to use alcohol for those reasons?
- What are some other ways to become more relaxed, positive about yourself or confident around other people? What advantages might they bring?
- What difficulties would you expect in going those routes instead of relying on alcohol?
- Where do you see yourself headed on these motives for drinking?

Q.3: Do you ever use alcohol while you are by yourself, alone?

“No”

- What do you think are some risks associated with drinking when alone?
- What are some ways to avoid relying on alcohol?
- How do you think you would deal with being excluded or feeling lonely?

“Yes”

- How much does this situation apply or not for you? What tends to bring it about?
- What might be some dangers of drinking alone?
- What ways can you think of to avoid relying on alcohol?
- What other things can you do instead when you feel left out or left alone?
- What steps would you now like to take in dealing with these challenges?

Q.4: Do you ever forget things you did while using alcohol?

“No”

- Have you ever seen alcohol have this blackout effect on someone else?
- What sorts of things do you think can happen to someone in that situation?
- How can you prevent this from happening to you?

“Yes”

- How familiar are you with this kind of experience? How frequently or not has it happened to you? Lately?
- What kinds of harms do you think can happen to someone in that situation?
- What circumstances do you think tend to facilitate such blackouts from a lot of alcohol?
- What can you do to prevent this from happening to you again?
- What if any barriers do you anticipate would stand in the way?
- How do you plan to address this concern and who do you think might help?

Q.5: Do your family or friends ever tell you that you should cut down on your drinking?

“No”

- Have they ever expressed any concern at all about it?
- Which family members or friends would be most likely to speak to you about it?
- How do you think they could help you if you needed some assistance?

“Yes”

- How often or not do you hear this and from whom?
- What do you think made them say that?
- Why/Why not might they still feel that way?
- How might they help you cut down?
- What for you are the largest obstacles and biggest benefits to drinking less?
- What steps do you think you need to take now to cut down?

Q.6: Have you ever gotten into trouble while you were using alcohol?

“No.”

- So, use of alcohol had nothing at all to do with any difficulties you may have run into?
- What kinds of trouble do you see others getting into most often because of their drinking?
- What other problems can you think of that alcohol can cause for a person?
- How do you plan to steer clear of any trouble arising from drinking?

“Yes.”

- How often or not and how recently has it contributed to troubles you’ve encountered?
- What sorts of problems has alcohol caused for you?
- How do you think you can best avoid trouble from your drinking?
- What stands in the way of you changing drinking habits that are conducive to difficulties?
- Who can you turn to for support in making such changes?
- How do you see yourself proceeding from this point?

Q.7: When was the last time you got drunk?

More than 3 months ago or never

- How many drinks did you have on that occasion (if there was one)?
- How many drinks do you think it typically takes a teen to get drunk?
- Intoxication is a frequent cause of serious immediate harm for young people, so you’re doing well to give it a complete pass lately.
- What sorts of things can you do to continue to avoid getting drunk?
- Keep going for health instead of harm!

3 months ago or less

- How often or not has this happened these last few months?
- How many drinks have you had on such occasions?
- How many drinks do you think it generally takes for young people to get drunk?
- Intoxication is a major cause of severe harm for youth (and adults); risk increases the more often it occurs, and rises rapidly the more drunk one becomes.
- So what steps can you take to help yourself reduce the risk of serious injury and damage, to you and others?
- How ready or prepared are you to begin taking such steps?
- Who do you think can help you make some worthwhile changes in your drinking pattern?
- It may be a bit hard, take some time and effort, and require some help, but as you see fit you can cut down on your drinking.

Overall Risk Profile

An overall profile is indicated by the above responses in regard to risky scenarios and recentness of intoxication (see Quick Scoring Aid). For those who manifest a riskier drinking pattern, two different lines of wrap-up remarks are suggested, in candid recognition of whether the person shows any or no readiness at present to pursue change.

Safer Drinking Pattern

- Congratulations! Drinking more safely now can also make for a healthier future.
- Keep a strong handle on it and follow the advice on the *Alcohol and You* take-home resource card. Take care!

Riskier Drinking Pattern

Your pattern puts you—and perhaps others—at real risk of harm.

(a) You've indicated some readiness to change your habits to reduce that risk. You can improve things.

- Check out the resources listed on the *Alcohol and You* card.
- Ask for support from family and friends, and don't hesitate to get any help you need from a health professional.
- All the best to you! Take care!

(b) At this point you don't plan to make significant changes. I encourage you to monitor your intake and keep in mind future steps you might wish to take.

- The *Alcohol and You* card lists resources you can check out. If you wish later to seek support from a health professional such as a doctor or substance use counsellor, they can help!
- Many people who have decided to change are very happy with their lives now.
- All the best to you! Take care!

For Further Information

Helping Schools (www.carbc.ca/HelpingSchools.aspx) provides further resources related to brief interventions with young people.

Here to Help (www.heretohelp.bc.ca) is a provincial public information resource related to mental health and substance use.

Alcohol Reality Check (www.alcoholreality.ca) offers online screening and information related to lower risk drinking.