



A QUICK GUIDE TO FESTIVALS

A music festival is about so much more than the headline act. It's an immersive event that feels a million miles away from everyday life – and for parents, a daunting prospect if their teenager announces it as their next big plan! This quick guide, developed in conjunction with [Tooled Up Education](#), covers the most important things that parents and carers need to know about festivals, as well as signposting to further sources of information. Please note that legal information and some of the services referenced are applicable to the UK and rules for other countries may differ.



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The drug education charity

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WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

This quick guide would benefit from being read in conjunction with our [guide to alcohol in social situations](#) and associated topics, such as alcohol first aid and spiking. However, while alcohol is often a feature of

festivals, this quick guide looks at festivals more broadly, and so considers a number of different scenarios, providing tips that you can pass on to your teenage children (or use yourselves if you are the festival-goers!).

PREPARING FOR A FIRST FESTIVAL



Your teen announces their intention to go to a music festival with a group of friends. Whether or not they are generally sensible or used to life under canvas, attending a festival throws up a different set of circumstances. Preparation is key.



TIPS

✓ Check who is going and consider setting up a WhatsApp group or similar for the parents.

This will prove useful in the planning stages and during the festival. Encourage your child to do the same with their friends for similar purposes.

✓ Establish that your child is enthusiastic about the event.

Do they like the music that will be on and like and trust the group they will be with? They need to be able to rely on their friends (which includes no one being left on their own – something that can happen if they all want to do or see different things) and be in a positive mindset in order to have the best possible experience.

✓ Make sure finances are in order in terms of who is getting the tickets (ensure this is from an official source) and how they are being reimbursed.

Nobody wants to be out of pocket. Also agree a spending limit with your child, and establish whether it is a cash-only or cashless event, so they have funds in the acceptable format. The best place to find this out is on the event's website.

✓ Verify what facilities will be available.

All festivals have food and drink outlets, toilets, information points, drinking water points, security and first aid. Most have welfare teams and shops and some have showers and drug testing. Prepare for what is there.

✓ Encourage your child to research camping pitches carefully (before booking if this is done separately) as there may be several sites, each of which is likely to have a slightly different vibe. Some may be family-friendly (quieter at night, but busier in the morning). Others may be eco-friendly, etc.

✓ Practice pitching tents and breaking camp.

That way there won't be any surprises like missing poles, pegs or mallets upon arrival.

✓ Print a site map beforehand.

This will mean less looking at phones and chewing up precious battery life. Remember, festivals can be like small towns and the ground may be uneven, so comfortable footwear is a must.

✓ Invest in a really good power bank and/or consider using an older "brick" handset

as these generally have a longer battery life and won't be so devastating if lost. Make sure there is plenty of data available as well. Wifi and charging are sometimes available, but can be tricky (and costly) to access.

✓ Keep an eye on the weather forecast, but prepare for all eventualities.

Take waterproofs and wellies, as well as sunscreen and a hat. Don't forget water bottles, clothing (layers are good), first aid supplies, sleeping equipment, ear plugs, toiletries including toilet paper, head torch, wet wipes, bin bags... but also don't take more than is needed or anything of value (financial or personal).

✓ Ensure vaccinations are up to date, and any regular medication is packed,

as well as some over the counter remedies such as painkillers and anti-allergy tablets.

✓ Have a look at the banned items list for the festival.

Some allow camping chairs, food, alcohol, gazebos etc, while others are much more restrictive.

✓ Sort out ID but try to avoid taking valuable documents

such as passports or driving licenses. Consider instead whether a [Proof of Age Standards Scheme \(PASS\) card](#) will be sufficient.

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DRUG TESTING



It's a week until the festival and one of the other parents phones you in a panic. She's discovered there is drug testing at the festival and is feeling very wobbly about her child going as she thinks the presence of such a facility condones drug use and means drug taking will be more prevalent. She wants to know your thoughts.



TIPS

✓ **Research has shown that drug testing at festivals is a useful tool in reducing drug-related harms**, both for users who may alter their intended use and for others who will be alerted to the presence of unsafe substances. Research has also shown that festivals with drug testing facilities don't appear to have increased drug use, and drug deaths seem less likely.

✓ **Analysis of substances may happen behind the scenes or there may be a service for people to submit a sample of their drugs for testing** and receive a confidential, non-judgmental consultation with a health professional that is tailored to their needs and the test result. No substances are ever deemed "safe", but instead the service communicates relative risk and all users are told that the safest choice is to not take drugs at all.

Some related tips about drug and alcohol use at festivals:

✓ **UK law prohibits people being in possession of illegal drugs**, and this includes at festivals, so all events have strict measures in place (such as sniffer dogs and searches) to try and prevent them getting on site. Being caught also brings with it additional risks, such as being kicked off site or sometimes even a lifetime ban.

✓ **It is worth bearing in mind that any time drugs change hands, this is supply in the eyes of the law for which the penalties are harsher. Some young people haven't realised this** – perhaps regarding it instead as an errand – and have faced **some serious consequences**.

✓ **Informed decision-making including harm reduction measures is vital for those who do decide to engage in drug taking.** There is **a lot of advice** available – some of which is substance specific. When talking to your child, it can be useful to come at this sideways by framing it as if they are with a friend who is using drugs. Good tips includes the following:

- **Don't do it alone.** Having a sober friend around is important.
- **Use testing services if available.** Otherwise, all drugs are unknown entities in terms of ingredients, strength, purity, etc.
- **Start low, go slow and remember that more is not better.**
- **Mixing is always a bad idea**, and that includes alcohol.
- **Mental state matters.** A negative headspace is likely to be compounded by drugs. For example, someone who is excited may tip into dangerous risk-taking behaviour.
- **Dehydration, heat and empty stomachs can affect the effects of alcohol and drugs and wellbeing more generally.** Extra care is needed in situations such as festivals.

✓ **Have a first aid app installed and know some basic first aid**, including the signs of a **drug emergency** and **how to put someone in the recovery position**. This can be life-saving.

✓ **In an emergency**, approaching a member of staff is the best thing to do as they will know who to call onsite. Calling 999 is generally not an effective way of getting help on a festival site.

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AT THE FESTIVAL



The festival is imminent. The camping gear is sorted out, rucksacks are packed bar the last few bits and pieces, and excitement is mounting...



TIPS

- ✓ **Check they've populated their In Case of Emergency details** on their phone, and know they can call you if they don't feel right about something. Be prepared to go and get them if needed.
- ✓ **Think about tent location and identification.** They might think their tents are distinctive, but that ease of identification may quickly fade in a sea of canvas. A flag, or similar, will make their pitch recognisable. Avoid high traffic areas, such as near toilets or the festival entrance. The noise and smell will soon outweigh the convenience.
- ✓ **Remember where the car is.** If one of them is driving, they need to note down exactly where they have parked. Using a [what3words](#) reference can be really useful.
- ✓ **Don't wear festival wristbands on the hand used to wipe after going to the toilet!** It might slip off and retrieving it won't be pleasant!
- ✓ **A bum bag or similar close body bag is essential** for carrying what they need as they move around the site.
- ✓ **The site may be huge so take some time to orientate.** Set up a buddy system, so people are at least in twos if everyone doesn't want to do the same thing, and agree on a meet up point and regular times to convene there.
- ✓ **Don't wait until desperate to go to the toilet.** They are likely to be a walk away and there will probably be queues. Also, don't skip the queue by going in a dark corner! If lots of people do it, the site gets pretty nasty, very quickly.
- ✓ **Observe toilet etiquette.** Flush to reduce the risk of blockages and accept they will be grimy. Have tissues and hand sanitiser ready, plus a head torch, in case it is dark.
- ✓ **Stay calm in crowds.** Try not to push against surges if they happen. Instead, find a lull to move into space and weave away from the pressure to the periphery. If someone falls, help them up while keeping an eye on personal safety, as it is easy for pile ups to happen.
- ✓ **Be considerate to others,** particularly those with mobility issues or young children, but remember that not all needs are visible, so general politeness is a good policy.
- ✓ **Remind teens that even though a festival can feel other-worldly, the rules of life still apply.** That includes criminal activity such as theft and assault, being polite to festival workers (they are people too), consent and safe sex. The list seems endless... Equally, if someone is on the wrong side of an incident, they should report it.

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AFTER THE FESTIVAL



Your child phones to say they are coming home as planned, and you can tell on the video call that they are smelly and tired, but happy.



TIPS

- ✓ **All belongings should be removed at the end of the festival**, not just left, even if it is rubbish or a broken tent. **Leave no trace** is the mantra to pass on to your child.
- ✓ **A warm shower, a nutritious meal and a clean bed are the priorities when they reach home.**
- ✓ **Encourage them to unpack themselves** and sort out what is needed, whether that is drying out their tent, putting clothes in the wash, paying back friends or charging their phone. Taking responsibility for these tasks is part of the festival experience!
- ✓ **It can take a while to recalibrate to life at home.**
The key things are plenty of water, nutritious food and lots of sleep (at night; daytime napping is not advisable as it may further disrupt their body clocks) while they resume their normal routine.
- ✓ **Talk to your child.** What went well and what would they do differently? How did they find the festival environment and spending so much time with their friends?
- ✓ **Don't pile on the pressure.** Sleep deprivation and an influx of feel good hormones will mean that they may effectively be on a comedown. This may manifest as low mood and energy, but is basically the brain and body restoring themselves. Patience may be needed.
- ✓ **Be proud of them... and you.** It's a big step into the unknown for both teen and parent when they go to a festival for the first time, but hopefully it will have been a positive experience that has deepened the trust between you. Enjoy that!

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WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Resources to check out

Healthy, open, non-judgemental conversations with young people can be – literally – life-saving.

Fiona Spargo Mabbs OBE, founder and director of the **DSM Foundation** has written two books that are packed with advice and information.



Other excellent sources of information

[The DSM Foundation](#), our drugs education charity, has a number of resources to support parents and carers in their conversations with young people about the [risks posed by drugs and harm reduction](#), and a [video on festival safety](#). There is also a section for young people on [staying safe at festivals](#).

It is best to look at the event's own website, but additional information is available from [Festival Safe](#).

More information about drug testing services can be obtained from [The Loop](#). Harm reduction advice can be accessed from [Crew](#).

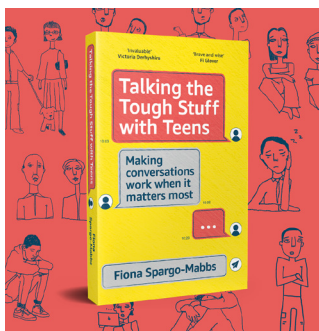
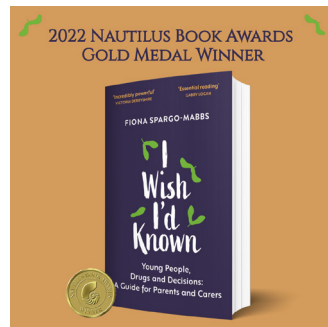
Information on drug first aid is available from [The Mix](#) and [St John Ambulance](#).

Remember that none of the resources listed here are a substitute for clinical advice and if you are worried about your child, your first port of call should always be your GP (or other relevant medical professional).

[Tooled Up Education](#) is thrilled to be collaborating with the DSM Foundation. Tooled Up brings evidence-based resources to school communities and enjoys strong relationships with some of the most respected researchers and organisations in the world. The Tooled Up Team dedicates its time to studying thousands of hours of research evidence and turning this into easy to use resources, in the form of videos, articles, podcasts, activities and tips to try.

Award-winner, [I Wish I'd Known](#)

interweaves the story of one family's terrible loss with calm, measured and practical suggestions for parents about young people, drugs and decisions.



[Talking the Tough Stuff with Teens](#)

draws extensively on hundreds of conversations with young people and parents in focus groups and

school and college workshops, to give a warm and compassionate framework for tackling tough conversations about difficult things, without judgement or anger. It covers everything from curfews and screen time, to sex, self-harm and suicide.