

## PARENTING WITH A

## BUZZ

The memes don't lie: Young women are drinking more red, white, and rosé than ever before (obvi). We wondered what that means when it comes to raising kids.

by **KRISTEN MASCIA** / photographs by **PRISCILLA GRAGG**



**AFTER MY SON'S** birth last year, a few not-so-wonderful things happened to my routine. There was a lot less exercising going on, for one thing. A lot less brushing my teeth and showering at normal times of day, for another. Also, sadly, less sex.

What there seemed to be more of, though, was drinking. I remember going to a matinee movie with a mom friend and her baby when my son was about 4 months old. We chose a fancy theater that served nibbles and cocktails. The movie was meh, but the drinks were delicious. My friend downed an Aperol Spritz, and by the time the credits rolled, I had almost polished off a second pint of stout.

It was barely past two in the afternoon, I should add. On a Tuesday.

In those harried first months of motherhood, I drank a glass or two of wine most days of the week, often starting before the sun went down. As it turns out, I wasn't drinking alone. When *Parents* surveyed more than 1,600 moms about their alcohol habits, 78 percent said they drink at least one adult beverage a week. One in three consumes four or more drinks per week. The sip of choice? "Wine all the way," said more than half of moms. So far, no big deal.

But what happens when diving into a bottle at 6 P.M. starts to feel more like a

reflex than a choice? In our survey, about half of respondents said that they consume less alcohol since becoming moms; 39 percent imbibe rarely or never. However, 48 percent said they've tried to curb their drinking. One in three admitted they've thought they might be drinking too much, and 12 percent said they've worried they might have a dependency problem. Added to that, 52 percent of moms said they drink regularly with their children around, and 47 percent have been drunk or tipsy in front of them too.

I know what it's like to be the kid in those scenarios. My mom was a nightly



#MerlotMonday



#WINEOCLOCK



wine drinker. A cheerful one, tipsy more often than sloshed. But from an early age, I noticed the change when she drank. By day, she was organized, composed, maybe a little too tightly wound. Into her fourth glass of Burgundy, she came loose.

In our survey, 77 percent of moms said their drinking doesn't affect the way they are as parents. Could that be true? Is parenting with a buzz really no big deal? Or are we kidding ourselves?

### ● It's (Kind of) Funny

April Storey is a mother of two from Redding, California, with passions for fitness and wine. Two years ago, she became a viral sensation when she posted a "wine workout" on Facebook. In the video, she performs push-ups with a glass underneath her. With each rep, she lowers herself to sip through a straw—a flourish, she tells me, that's pure comedy: "I don't actually drink when I work out."

But Storey's post struck a chord, garnering more than 22 million views and a flood of comments. She knew other moms enjoyed wine as much as she did, but she hadn't realized just how many.

In 2015, women drank 57 percent of all wine consumed in the U.S., according to Nielsen. Among the health conscious, vino enjoys celebrity status as the unicorn drink that can supposedly slim your waist and strengthen your immune system. (Sobering fact: A report from the American Society of Clinical Oncology suggests that one drink a day—wine or otherwise—can raise a woman's risk for developing breast cancer by 4 percent.)

Wine is also a panacea for the trials of modern motherhood, if you buy into the messages in movies like *Bad Moms*, the memes and GIFs on Facebook, and the cutesy slogans printed on T-shirts sold on Etsy ("I wine because they whine," ha-ha). "It's become this wink-wink joke of

'Parenting is so hard, I need my wine,'" says Gabrielle Glaser, author of *Her Best-Kept Secret*, a book about American women's relationships with alcohol. But there's a problem with the punch line: It gives women who have bona fide drinking issues fodder to justify their behavior.

Stefanie Wilder-Taylor knows this firsthand because she used to be doing the wisecracking. The author of *Sippy Cups Are Not for Chardonnay*, she quit drinking in 2009 after accepting that her nightly swilling had gotten out of hand. Wilder-Taylor went on to found an online community, the Booze-Free Brigade. "Many moms who joke don't have a drinking problem. They just think it's funny," she says. "But the women who do have a problem get fooled into thinking, 'Every mom drinks like I do.'"

Experts say there's a darker story to be told about how the drinking culture affects our health. Alcohol-use disorders, drunk-driving arrests, and alcohol-related deaths among American women are rising, says Deborah Hasin, Ph.D., professor of epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. If current trends continue, millennial women will become as likely to binge drink as millennial men.

### ● An Innocent Escape

After giving birth to her second child in December 2016, Storey couldn't wait to kick back with a glass of wine. "You're tired and overwhelmed," she says. "Going out at night is rare. A glass of wine is the thing we look forward to."

Stephanie Saxton, a mother of two from Louisville, Kentucky, feels the same way. She pours herself a Chardonnay almost every night, often around her kids' bedtime. "I'm more patient and more fun when I've had my wine. It's not my only outlet—it just happens to be the most convenient one," she says.

More than 80 percent of the moms *Parents* surveyed said the top reason they drink is to relax and unwind. And many of the women I interviewed for this story spoke of drinking and stress in the same breath. Some felt isolated and unfamiliar to themselves in new motherhood. Sitting back with a drink felt comforting, like a way to reclaim a part of their lives lost to parenthood.

WARDROBE STYLING BY AMY SODERLIND FOR WORKGROUP; PROP STYLING BY MICAH BISHOP; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JANET MARISCAL; MANICURE BY SONIA MOLINA FOR LULU ARTISTS; COLLECTIVE CHILD WRANGLING BY TRACIE MARQUEZ FOR LULU ARTISTS; COLLECTIVE STUDIO; TEACHING BY TIM WEEG; PREVIOUS SPREAD, ON MOM; SHIRT, REBECCA TAYLOR; PANTS, MADEWELL; ON CHILD; SHIRT, PETITIS VILAINS FROM ZIRAFFE; DRESS, BONJOUR DIARY FROM WEE MONDINE.

OUR  
EXCLUSIVE  
POLL

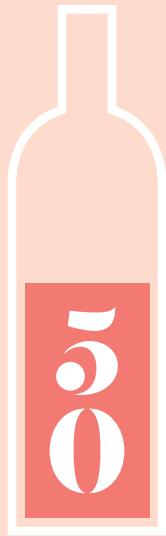
# How We Drink, by the Numbers

Is everyone obsessed with wine, or does it just look like that on Instagram?  
Parents polled more than 1,600 moms across the country to find out.

## UH-OH!

33% of moms have thought they might be drinking too much. 48% have tried to cut back on their drinking.

## WE DIDN'T LEARN THIS FROM MOM



50 percent of respondents say they drink more than their mothers did. 20% drink less, 24% drink the same amount.

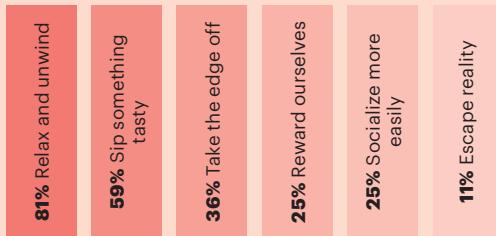
## LOCATION IS EVERYTHING!

We usually drink at...



\*But 19% worry or know for sure that their partner's drinking negatively affects his or her parenting.

## We drink because we want to...



## Here's how often moms say cheers:

- 18% Daily
- 44% One to three times a week
- 27% A few times a month
- 12% Never

63% never post about drinking on social media.

36% post about it sometimes.



1% post about it often.

No more #winedaywednesday? 30% of us say moms post too much about drinking.

## WE LOVE WINE, BUT NOT ALL THE TIME



## WHAT'LL IT BE?

- 55%: Wine all the way
- 22%: A cocktail, please
- 18%: Beer me!
- 3%: Got any cider?
- 3%: Just water, thanks



52 percent of moms drink in front of their kids fairly regularly or almost every day. Only 6% never do it.

## When it comes to #momsnightout, we're split:



## CHEERS, HONEY!



“We live in an alcogenic culture,” says Canadian journalist Ann Dowsett Johnston, author of *Drink*. “Drinking is how we celebrate, relax, and reward ourselves.” If she’s right, it shouldn’t surprise anyone that we’ve normalized going overboard.

Nearly one in three Americans is an excessive drinker, and one in six binge drinks about four times a month, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I was surprised to learn that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines low-risk drinking in women as imbibing no more than seven drinks over the course of a week, but no more than four drinks in a sitting. A breastfeeding woman should restrict her drinking further, per the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Those who are nursing should limit themselves to two or fewer servings a day, they say—and wait two hours after a drink to feed their baby.

I’ve never considered myself a heavy drinker. And yet before my son was born, it wasn’t unusual for my drink count on a Friday night to constitute a binge. The thing is, it’s easy to rationalize how much you drink when the people around you are guzzling at the same rate or faster. “The voice in your head says, ‘I drink four glasses of wine a night, but I’m not drinking more than my friend,’” says Stephanie Brown, Ph.D., director of The Addictions Institute, in Menlo Park, California.

One glass of wine, maybe two, can quiet the mind, but what about a third or a fourth? There’s self-care—the buzzword of my generation—and then there’s self-medication. For some drinkers, the line dividing the two is fuzzy. Add kids and the situation is even more loaded.

## 🌟 Children Are Watching

Research published last year by the Institute of Alcohol Studies, a nonprofit in the U.K., suggests that kids are more aware of their parents’ alcohol habits than we’d like to think. In a study of light to moderate drinkers and their children, kids who had seen their parents drunk, tipsy, or hungover—even once or twice—were more likely to report that they’d been worried or embarrassed by their parents’ drinking than their peers



### 5 WAYS TO CUT BACK

1

**Pick up a new beverage.**  
Make tea or seltzer a stand-in for your evening cocktail.

2

**Set rules.**  
Resolve to have no more than two drinks a night and not to start before 7:30 P.M.

3

**Commit to two “dry” nights a week.**  
Taking a break can stop a habit from forming, research shows.

4

**Fill times you typically drink with a specific activity.**  
Schedule a Barre class or a phone call during cocktail hour.

5

**Pause.**  
Give yourself ten minutes of quiet before reflexively pouring a drink.

were. In other words, not only do kids know we’re buzzed, they don’t like it.

“Children see, hear, and smell the signs of drinking from the earliest time,” says Dr. Brown. “They are attuned to your change in mood with even one glass.”

Amanda M., who lives outside Phoenix, used to regularly down a glass or two of wine in front of her kids in the evenings. She even belonged to a wine playgroup made up of moms like her. “I thought it was great,” she says. “We were there for fun. There was no judgment.”

But after the birth of her second child in 2013, when she endured a rough patch in her marriage, Amanda started draining a bottle of white each night. She thought her kids were none the wiser until the evening she overdid it with her friends and couldn’t drive herself home. “I had to pull over and call my husband, who had to wake up the kids, put them in

their car seats, and come get me,” she says. By the time he arrived with their pajama-clad children, Amanda, who had been waiting in her car, had vomited all over her backseat. “My husband told them I’d had bad pizza,” she remembers. For days afterwards, the kids asked about the smell.

## 🌟 Assessing Your Risk

Of course, not every mom who sips wine at day’s end develops a drinking problem. “It’s important to take a step back and not be an alarmist,” says Glaser.

Although children of alcoholics are four times as likely as others to become alcoholics themselves, half of them won’t have any issues whatsoever. Plus, research shows that most people who aren’t hardwired for addiction can moderate their drinking. The key is being brutally honest with yourself, says Reid Hester, Ph.D., senior scientist of CheckUp & Choices, an online moderation program.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism offers a free questionnaire ([rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov](http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov)) that gives users an objective picture of their habits. (Dr. Hester’s website, [checkupandchoices.com](http://checkupandchoices.com), has a similar self-assessment. Users get help setting limits and identifying what drives their urge to drink.)

But while moderation works for many, it isn’t the answer for everyone. After the car incident, Amanda ultimately decided it was best to quit drinking for good. Although seeing wine on Instagram can still trigger her, following accounts that advocate alcohol-free living has helped. She also checks in frequently with the Booze-Free Brigade and is vigilant about taking time for herself. “I like art and crafting, and I make sure to get workouts in,” she says. “I practice more self-care.”

Self-care. There’s that word again. These days I’m trying to engage in the kind that doesn’t involve a popping cork. Two or three nights a week, my husband handles bedtime and I lace up my running shoes. When I get back, still coasting on endorphins, sometimes I pour some wine, and sometimes I don’t. I like having the choice. I’m glad that it still feels like one.

And if it ever doesn’t? Well, I’ll know what to do. 🌟