

Parent's Guide To Teen Parties

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As a parent, you know the importance of your teen's social life and that parties are a way to socialize and relax. But an unsupervised or poorly planned party can result in unwanted or even tragic consequences. However, parental responsibility is the key to a fun and safe party.

The following is important information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about teen parties.

Facts about teen parties

- **Guest List.** When a teen plans a party, news spreads very quickly via social networking site like Facebook or Twitter. Because of these new media, teen parties can grow too large for parents to control.
- **Time and Place.** Teen parties often start late at night and move from house to house.

Facts about alcohol and drugs

Teens often expect alcohol and marijuana at parties. Some parents believe that it is better to allow teens to drink in their home so they can keep them safe. While this idea may be well intentioned, it is simply misguided. Parents cannot keep impaired teens safe.

Alcohol and other drugs impair judgment. Teens are more likely to have sex, be involved in a violent incident, or suffer an injury after using drugs or alcohol. All too frequently teens die from violence, unintentional injuries, or overdoses related to alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol effects teens differently than adults. For example, compared with adults, teens are more likely to remain awake, to wander about, or to drive a car while having a much greater degree of mental impairment.

What parents need to know

Communication and honesty are important to keep your teen safe. Teens whose parents talk with them regularly about drugs and alcohol are 42% less likely to use substances than those whose parents don't. Tell your teens that you expect them not to use alcohol or other drugs at parties.

Parent networking is the best prevention tool to combat underage drinking. Get to know your teen's friends and their parents. If your teen is planning on going to a party, call the parents to ensure that they will be home and that they will not allow drugs or alcohol. If this is not possible, don't let your teen go.

Parents are legally responsible for anything that happens to a minor who has been served alcohol or other drugs in their home. If anyone brings alcohol or other drugs to your home, be prepared to contact their parents. And if someone comes to your home already intoxicated, make sure that they get home safely. Help your teen feel responsible for this as well.

Parents may be criminally or civilly liable if...

- Alcohol is provided to a minor at a party they have organized.
- Someone's property is damaged.
- Someone is injured.
- Someone leaves and gets into a car accident and/or injures someone else.
- Someone dies.
- Understand the local laws about alcohol and other drugs. Laws about alcohol and drug use vary from state to state, so make sure you know what the laws are in your state.

If you are hosting a teen party...

- **Plan in Advance.** Go over party plans with your teen. Encourage your teen to plan non-alcohol-related group activities or games.
- **Keep parties small.** Ten to 15 teens for each adult. Make sure at least one adult is present at all times. Ask other parents to come over to help you if you need it.
- **Set a guest list.** The party should be for invited guests only. No "crashers" allowed. This will help avoid the "open party" situation.
- **Set starting and ending times for the party.** Check local curfew laws to determine an ending time.
- **Set party "rules" and your expectations.** Discuss them with your teen before the party. Rules should include the following: No tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. No one can leave the party and then return. Lights are left on at all times. Certain rooms of the house are off-limits.
- **Have plenty of food and non-alcoholic beverages available.** Also, put your alcohol and any prescription or over-the-counter medicines in a locked cabinet.
- **Be there, but not square.** Pick out a spot where you can see what is going on without being in the way. You can also help serve snacks and beverages.

If your teen is going to a party...

- **Know where your teen is going and how long he will be there.** Have the phone number and address of the party. Ask your teen to call you if the location of the party changes. Be sure to let your teen know where you will be during the party.
- **Call the parent of the party host** to make sure a parent will be home the entire time and supervising the party. Make sure that tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs will not be allowed.
- **Talk with your teen beforehand** about how to handle a situation where alcohol is available at a party.
- **Make sure your teen has a way to get to and from the party.** Make it easy for your teen to leave a party by making it clear that he can call at any time for a ride home. Discuss why he might need to make such a call. Remind your teen NEVER to ride home with a driver who has been drinking or using other drugs.
- **Be up to greet your teen when he comes home.** This can be a good way to check the time and talk about the evening.
- If your teen is **staying overnight** at a friend's house after the party, verify this arrangement with the friend's parents and that they will be home.