



Know! To Keep It Safe This Party Season

Prom and graduation seasons are quickly approaching. Though COVID-19 lingers on, many school districts around the country are working on plans to allow for both events to safely take place this year. While these celebrations will most likely look and feel different from prepandemic times, there are certain aspects that are likely to continue on—we're talking about underage drinking.

As a parent, it may be tempting to think to ourselves that if our older teens are going to experiment with a substance, we'd prefer it to be alcohol over other drugs. However, when we consider the range of risks and negative consequences alcohol presents, we know we cannot afford to allow for underage drinking.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) shares the following dangers associated with teens consuming alcohol:

Causes many injuries and deaths: Alcohol is a significant factor in the injuries and deaths of young people from motor vehicle crashes, alcohol overdoses, falls, burns, drowning, homicides, suicides and more.

Impairs judgment: Drinking can lead to poor decisions about taking risks, including unsafe sexual behavior, drinking and driving, getting into the car with someone who has been drinking and aggressive or violent behavior.

Increases the risk of physical and sexual assault: Underage binge drinking is associated with an increased likelihood of being the victim or perpetrator of interpersonal violence.

Can lead to other problems: Drinking may cause youth to have trouble in school or with the law. Drinking alcohol is also associated with the use of other substances.

Increases the risk of alcohol problems later in life: Research shows that people who start drinking before the age of 15 are at a significantly higher risk for developing an alcohol use disorder later in life.

Interferes with brain development: Research shows that young people's brains continue developing well into their 20s. Alcohol can alter this development, potentially affecting both brain structure and function. This may cause cognitive or learning problems and/or increase vulnerability for an alcohol use disorder, especially when people start drinking at a young age and drink heavily.

Alcohol is no joke, and underage drinking should not be taken lightly; nor should it be a rite of passage for older or graduating teens. It's clearly unhealthy and unsafe. It also is illegal.

If you have plans to host an upcoming after-prom party, graduation celebration or any other gathering that includes teens in your home or on your property, it's essential to keep these tips in mind.

As a parent:

- You can't give alcohol to your teen's friends under the age of 21 under any circumstance, even in your home.
- Let your neighbors know in advance there will be a party and that you will be there to supervise.
- Secure all alcohol, firearms and other hazardous items.

Helpful things you can do as a parent:

- Get to know your children's friends and their parents.
- Ask other parents about their views on alcohol, drugs and tobacco.
- Encourage alcohol-free and drug-free parties and activities for underage youth.

Party hosting suggestions:

- Refuse to supply alcohol to anyone under 21.
- Be at home when your teen has a party.
- Make sure alcohol is not brought into your home or property by your teen's friends.
- Talk to other parents about not providing alcohol at events your child will be attending.
- Create alcohol-free opportunities and activities in your home so teens feel welcome.
- Report underage drinking to local law enforcement.

While alcohol remains the number one drug of choice among youth, underage drinking is not inevitable, as many parents might think. In fact, more than 58% of teens do not drink alcohol, and nine out of 10 say that underage drinking is not worth the potential negative consequences.

Adults would likely agree that hosting or turning a blind eye to an underage drinking party also not is worth the potential negative legal consequences. Thirty states assign criminal penalties, including and up to felony charges for permitting teens to drink alcohol. If you give alcohol to minors, you could lose your driver's license, have your property seized, get fined and face criminal charges. You can also be held legally responsible for the actions of any underage teens who drink in your home. Obviously, it's not worth the health and safety risks to your child or their underage friends and not worth the legal risks for you.

As these celebrations come into full swing, be sure to talk to your children about the wide range of risks and negative consequences associated with underage drinking, and take action to protect yourself legally, while keeping your child and their friends safe and healthy.

Sources

[National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism \(NIAAA\): Underage Drinking Statistics. March 2021.](#)

[Prevention Action Alliance: Parents Who Host, Lose The Most; Don't Be a Party to Teenage Drinking.](#)