

## Teenage Parties

### What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

Adolescence can be a trying time for both teenagers and their parents. Even though it's a stage all adults have been through themselves, dealing with it as a parent is not easy.

The rites of adolescence, which include sexual development, dating, experimentation of all kinds, first love and lots of other "firsts," scare adults because we see the potential for huge mistakes. Unfortunately, in response, many adults believe that what they don't know can't hurt them when it comes to activities such as teenage parties.

This couldn't be further from the truth. What you don't know can hurt you and your children.

### Your Responsibilities as the Parents of a Guest

- **Call the host.** Before giving your teenager permission to attend a party, make sure you, your teen and the host's parents understand the rules. For example, do you all agree that no alcohol will be allowed and that there will be parental supervision?
- **Check the party plans beforehand.** Know where your child is going and with whom. When taking your teenager to a party, wait to see that he or she is inside the house. If you don't know the host parents, introduce yourself.
- **Make it easy for your teenager to leave a party.** Make sure you and your teenager have an arrangement that allows him or her to depend on you for transportation if there's drinking or drugs at the party. Urge your teenager never to accept a ride with a driver who has been drinking. You might want to have an agreement on having no punishments or restrictions for a call that lets you know if things are getting out of hand.
- **Stay up to greet your teenager when he or she comes home.** You'll feel better if you know your child is home safely and you'll be showing you care if you wait up for your teenager. Tell your child you are waiting up out of concern, not because you don't trust him or her to get home on time or because you are suspicious.

### Your Responsibilities as Parents of the Host

- **Plan in advance.** Check party plans with your teenager and know who's on the guest list to curb the "open party" situation. It is not unusual for strangers to show up if you haven't made your rules clear.
- **Set a time limit.** Set a definite start and end time—not too long. Consider daytime parties as an alternative to evening ones, or plan a seasonal activity such as swimming or skating to give some positive focus to the party.
- **Agree to rules ahead of time.** Rules might include no drugs, alcohol and smoking; no leaving and then returning to the party; no gate-crashers; lights be left on; some rooms in your house off-limits.



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- **Understand your role as a parent.** The responsible adult at a teenager's party is visible and aware. Remember that it is illegal to serve alcohol to minors. You are legally responsible for anything that may happen to a minor who has taken drugs or alcohol in your home.
- **Invite another parent or couple.** Other adults are company for you during a long evening and can be of help if there are problems. Also, if parents have driven teenagers to your house, you might consider inviting them in to meet you, however briefly.

## **Increasing Your Chances of a Successful Party**

For your teenager, being liked and accepted by peers is very important. Your child may feel pressured to have the kind of party that he or she thinks will be attractive. Your challenge as a parent is to give your child options for a successful party. Planning is your best bet.

- Consider entertainment such as music or videos.
- Keep the guests busy with games or competitions that are appropriate for their ages, such as demonstrating a new dance and then having the guests perform for humorous prizes.
- Have plenty of food and soft drinks. Maybe you can serve something that allows the kids to get involved in preparation, such as a summer barbecue, or in decoration, such as for a post-game victory party.
- Limit the number of guests and invite only friends who have common interests and compatible personalities.
- Do not allow alcoholic beverages but have fun alternatives on hand. For example, make exotic fruit drinks in a blender for summer parties or serve hot cider or cocoa in the winter. Flavored sparkling waters are interesting and exotic.

## **An Opportunity to Reinforce Values and Enhance Your Relationship**

Your willingness to help your child plan a party is a sign that you care. Likewise, talking with your child about attending a party is an opportunity to show love and establish trust.

Our best advice is to be aware and not to hide your head in the sand. You never know—you may even have some fun yourself.

## **Parties that Cause Problems**

The causes of problem parties are lack of adult supervision, "open" invitations, and alcohol or drug use.

If your teen has attended parties of this kind and you are unable to deal with it, seek professional help. If something illegal is occurring, you can call the police. If the problem is a disciplinary issue, you might benefit from expert counseling. Professionals can teach you techniques and show you options you might not have considered.

**Sometimes just a little help can prevent short-term problems from becoming more serious.**

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