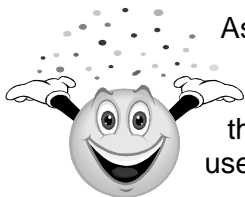


Sussex County Coalition for Healthy and Safe Families

A program of the Center for Prevention and Counseling
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Parents: Help Your Teens Party Right at Prom and Graduations



As the school year comes to an end across the United States, many teenagers will attend high school proms, celebrate high school graduations, and take trips to local beaches for senior week. While many of these seniors and other teenagers expect to have rules-free, fun-filled celebrations with their friends, they may very well engage in risky behaviors, such as underage drinking, other drug use, unprotected sex and impaired driving.

Besides the risky behaviors listed above, teenagers may encounter other problems that are sometimes beyond their control. For instance teenagers may be at an increased risk for becoming victims of injury, theft, and rape or other violent crimes. By educating yourself about the activities teens are often exposed to during these late springtime celebrations and offering guidance to your child, you can make a difference in preventing some of these behaviors.

Prom

The end of the school year is a very exciting and hectic time for juniors and seniors. Prom decisions are being made and graduation parties are being planned. But with all this fun comes the danger of underage alcohol consumption and all the negative effects that could result. While many students do not drive on prom night, underage drinking is still dangerous. Alcohol can damage brain cells, interact negatively with medications, and lead to loss of control and violence. Binge drinking can lead to loss of consciousness and alcohol poisoning, which often results in death.



Point out ways for your child to enjoy prom without alcohol. Many schools offer "after-prom" parties, which begin at the end of the dance and usually last until morning. Prom goers can win prizes, play games, hang out with friends, and eat favorite foods. Check to see if your child's school will be holding after-prom or after-graduation parties. If so, offer to volunteer some time and work to ensure that the party will appeal to students. If your community does not offer these alcohol-free parties connect with other parents to organize a party for your child and their friends at someone's home.

Graduation

High school and college graduations are such a special time for young people because their hard work has finally paid off with a diploma and the opportunity to move on to another part of their lives. For many graduating seniors, it is a bittersweet time, when they may need to say goodbye to some of their school friends. After their graduation ceremonies, seniors often head directly to parties to celebrate.



The focus of many of these parties is often binge drinking. One of the many concerns associated with graduation is impaired driving. In 2000, between 50 and 60 percent of all fatal car crashes that occurred on weekends during prom and graduation season were alcohol related, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Teens at the Shore

Every June, thousands of teenagers, particularly high school seniors, head to the beach to celebrate the summer and their newfound freedom. Many of these teenagers hope to spend the week lounging on the beach with their friends during the day and drinking at night. Unfortunately, many of these teenagers also end up engaging in unprotected sex, binge drinking, and risking their personal safety while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs.



Accompany your teen and their friends on their trip to the shore, if at all possible. This way, you may be able to keep your teen and his or her friends safe by discouraging them from giving in to any temptations to use alcohol or illicit drugs. Young people will be less likely to experiment with these substances if parents are nearby. If you are unable to go on the trip with your teen, talk with the parents of your teen's friends to see if any of them can go on the trip and monitor the young people's activities. You can also research the vacation spot your child has selected for a trip to the shore by searching for the city on the Internet or looking for information at a local library. Many beach communities take aggressive steps to discourage underage drinking and drug use.

**As your child enters into this season of fun and celebrations,
we ask you to remember the following:**

- Talk with your child and calmly explain your feelings about him/her drinking alcohol or using illicit drugs and driving under the influence. Make it clear to your youth that you do NOT approve of substance use because it is dangerous. Be firm, but nonjudgmental. Ask them how they plan to keep safe and avoid actions they will regret. Reinforce your belief in their character and in their ability to act responsibly.
- Allow your child to talk about any questions or concerns he or she may have. Remember that communication involves not only speaking, but also listening.
- Also emphasize that the legal drinking age is 21- no exceptions. A minor who consumes alcohol is violating the law and is risking his/her life and possibly the lives of others.
- Give your children the unconditional option of calling you at any time if he or she needs a safe ride home or for help or advice. Assure them that you always welcome being part of their making smart and safe decisions.
- Make sure your child has a plan for the evening and that you know it. Ask your child for specifics about whom she or he will be with, where they will be, and what they will be doing. Make sure you will be able to reach him or her at all times.
- Know where your child is attending a party; verify that there will be parental supervision and that there will be a zero tolerance policy for alcohol and illicit drugs.
- Impress the importance of using the "buddy system" (3 or more is best) to watch out for each other.
- Also stress the need for teenagers to keep an eye on their beverages while out and never accept a drink from someone they do not know. "Date-rape drugs," such as GHB and Rohypnol, can be slipped into a person's drink in mere seconds. The drugs are tasteless and odorless and the victim may not even be aware he or she is being drugged. These drugs cause the victim to lose consciousness or be unable to move so that a person can take advantage of him or her.
- Do not serve or allow alcohol at any party you are hosting. An adult who provides alcohol to minors is subject to arrest and is risking that child's life. Take stock of the alcohol in your home.
- Do not rent hotel rooms for partygoers. Work with your school's prom and graduation committees to help plan fun and safe after-prom/graduation celebrations.
- Know who is driving. If it's a limo, talk with your child's transportation provider and emphasize that you expect him or her to forbid drinking. Be especially careful about letting your child drive or ride in a car with other teenagers during school-end events. Regardless of how many times you have talked about them about the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you need their promise that they will not drive if they have been drinking or taking drugs or ride with someone who has. You must also set rules for your teenager about driving while talking on a cell phone, carrying other teenagers as passengers, and following curfews. Emphasize the importance of watching out for drunk and careless drivers.
- Come to a fair decision on a curfew, based upon your child's past level of responsibility in this area. Stay up for his or her return home.



Call the **Center for Prevention and Counseling at 973-383-4787** for a free copy of the following related publications: Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free: A How-To Guide for Parents and Caregivers; Navigating the Teen Years; Start Talking Before They Start Drinking; Make a Difference: Talk to Your Child About Alcohol; GHB and Rohypnol Quick Facts.

***Please help protect your son or daughter's bright future by ensuring a safe,
alcohol- and other drug-free season of celebrations.***