

## **Parents, Parties, and Preventing Underage Alcohol Use – YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

Would you let your teenage son drink beer at his best friend's birthday party? Would you let your daughter attend a graduation party where wine would be available to underage kids? What if a parent were chaperoning these events?

Kids, parties, and alcohol are never a good mix. However, in a poll by the American Medical Association, 1 in 10 parents said that it was okay for teens to attend prom or graduation parties with alcohol if a parent were present. It may come as no surprise, then, that 20 percent of 16- to 18-year-olds reported that they have attended a graduation party with underage drinking and parents present. And 15 percent of these teens had been to a graduation party where the alcohol was actually supplied by parents.

Laws in many States call for parents to be prosecuted if minors drink alcohol in their homes. In New Hampshire, RSA 644:18, better known as the "Party Host Law," holds the "hosts" of parties responsible for the actions of underage participants. This law can be applied to any adult. Under this law, a person who hosts a party where minors drink alcohol or use drugs may be charged with a misdemeanor, fined up to \$2,000 and spend a year in jail. More detailed information about NH's Party Host Law can be found on CADY's web site at [www.cadyinc.org](http://www.cadyinc.org).

But some parents still allow alcohol at their teens' parties and, in many cases, buy alcohol for the event. This group of parents is the minority. According to the study NH Attitudes & Opinions on Youth Access to Alcohol, conducted by New Futures, 9 out of 10 adults in New Hampshire are concerned about teen drinking, and 3 out of 4 NH adults believe it is not okay for teenagers to drink alcohol. Contrary to what you might think, unless you are part of the above minority, you are not alone! Most parents DO NOT allow their underage children to drink and would not buy alcohol for their kids or allow it at a graduation event.

During the busy graduation season, your teen may be invited to a party where alcohol will be available to minors. Try taking these steps to keep your child alcohol free:

1. Before the party, talk to the parents hosting the party and get all the details. Where is it? What time does it start and end? Who's invited? What activities are planned? Will there be adult supervision for teenage guests? What is the ratio of adult supervisors to teenage guests? What can I do to help? You're not being nosy! Think of it as gathering information so that you can make an informed decision.

2. Ask the parents hosting the party if alcohol will be served at the event. If it's a party with guests over and under age 21 and alcohol will be present, ask about their plans to prevent minors from drinking alcohol. If all of the guests will be under 21, ask about their plans to make sure that no one brings alcohol to the party.
3. Talk to your child about what to do if he finds himself at a party where alcohol is available to minors. Let him know that even if other teens are drinking, you expect him not to. Tell him that he should call you right away and you'll come pick him up-no matter how late it is. You may want to create a "code word" that your child can use if he wants you to come get him. He may be calling you when he's surrounded by friends, and he may be unable to tell you what's going on without a code word.

Throughout the busy graduation and post graduation summer season, you might have to make difficult choices about what parties your kids attend. It can be hard to tell your child "no" when she wants to go to the party that "everyone" is going to. You may wonder if your rules are too tough.

It's okay to be tough when it comes to protecting your kids from underage drinking. Underage drinking is a key factor in the two leading causes of teenage deaths: car accidents and fatal injuries. It also is linked to two-thirds of all sexual assaults and date rapes of teens, and it increases the chance of contracting HIV or sexually transmitted diseases. So, go ahead, be tough on underage drinking, and be on the lookout for risky situations during end-of-the-school-year parties.

Community members can be a part of the solution to prevent underage alcohol or drug parties by calling the PROJECT MONITOR UNDER 21 anonymous tip line. By making the free call to 2-1-1 and sharing information about area gatherings where youth have access to alcohol, Project Monitor Under 21 will prevent a potentially harmful situation from happening *before* it occurs. Remember – a call to 2-1-1 may prevent a call to 9-1-1.

For more information about Project Monitor Under 21, or for tips on how to talk with your teens about drugs and alcohol, contact CADY (Communities for Alcohol- and Drug-free Youth) at 536-9793.

*This article was adapted from "A Family Guide To Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy & Drug Free," a public education web site developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).*

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