



May is Prom and Graduation Season

“Motor vehicle crashes remain the No. 1 cause of death among 15-20 year-olds, with 7,884 fatalities recorded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 2003 alone. Of that amount, 25 percent of drivers 15-20 who were killed in crashes had blood alcohol concentrations of .08 or higher, the legal definition for driving while intoxicated (DWI) in all 50 states.”

“Although alcohol-related crashes are a year-round problem, NHTSA notes how numbers spike from April to June, the months of proms and graduations. For example, in 2001, more than one third of youth under age 21 killed in alcohol-related crashes died during the months of April through June.”

The resources below will help you and your teen plan for a safe and sober prom and graduation season.

A Guide to Safe and Sober Event Planning

[\[http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/PartiesRock/toc.html\]](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/PartiesRock/toc.html)

This guide for teens (and their parents) includes ideas for party settings, themes and activities, promotional ideas to help spread the word about the event, party task lists to make sure the event goes off without a hitch, and a complete set of resources for the event.

This guide is full of ideas to help you throw the best parties in town. By using the information in this guide alongside a little creativity and teamwork, you can put together an event that people will remember for a long time—and for all the right reasons!

Tools for Talking with Teens

[\[http://www.madd.org/Professionals/Social-Host/Social-Host-Parent-Tips.aspx\]](http://www.madd.org/Professionals/Social-Host/Social-Host-Parent-Tips.aspx)

Talking to teenagers about underage drinking is a critical conversation that could save their life and the lives of others. Follow these practical tips for talking to your teen about underage drinking:

1. **Teens drink for a number of reasons, so be aware of your teen’s vulnerabilities.** As you begin a discussion with your teen, it is important to understand why your teen may be drinking or even considering drinking.
2. **The conversation, rules and consequences have to involve things important to your teen.** Before you can have important discussions, set boundaries or dole out consequences, you have to create a conversation tailored to your teen. Think about what your teen would hate to lose or give up. The reasons that will persuade your teen not to drink must be reasons that are real and important to them.
3. **Set a good example.** This may begin with whether, and how, you choose to use alcohol, but it shouldn’t end there. To have meaningful discussions with your teens, you must be an involved parent. You have to participate in their lives for them to really hear why you need them to wait to drink alcohol until they are 21, when they are more emotionally and physically ready. Additionally, you need to set a good example by honoring all laws.
4. **Remember that mistakes are often an important part of the process.** Deciding whether or not to drink alcohol is not a one-time choice for most teenagers; it is something they may be faced with every week, on multiple occasions. The decision is ongoing, so your conversation should be ongoing, as well. Remember that one bad decision does not make a bad kid. Certainly, rules and consequences need to be non-negotiable, and teens need boundaries. But keep things in perspective, and do not overreact if

your teen does make a bad decision. Sometimes being caught provides parents with a “teachable moment” that can affect future decisions and behaviors.

5. **Use specific examples of the impact of alcohol misuse.** Talking about alcohol-related problems in the life of a family member, friend or acquaintance may help make the topic more real.
6. **Work to have a two-way conversation.** Try to have a conversation rather than give a lecture. Pay attention to your tone of voice, facial expression and body language. Create an environment where your teen feels comfortable and validated in expressing his or her thoughts and opinions.

Use Science to Convince Teens a Sober Prom is Better

[\[http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/ScienceInside/alcohol/alcohol.shtml\]](http://www.aaas.org/programs/education/ScienceInside/alcohol/alcohol.shtml)

This is the time of year when even teens who have never tried a drop of alcohol may be tempted. Middle and high school proms and graduation are big events and there will be multiple parties to attend and a wide array of opportunities for alcohol to be served. Assume that your child will be tempted to drink alcohol at the end of the school year, advises the [Science Inside Alcohol Project](#) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). So start talking to your child about alcohol right now.

Instead of just asking your teen not to drink, the Science Inside Alcohol Project suggests explaining how alcohol can affect his or her body. Here are five ways alcohol can ruin prom night or graduation:

1. **They May Not Remember** - Teens spend months preparing for prom and graduation and cherish those memories throughout their lives. But if they drink, there's a good chance they may not remember any of it. The hippocampus, or the area in the brain that stores memory, is still maturing in teens. Drinking even small amounts of alcohol can make kids forget what they did while drinking and even black-out completely.
2. **They May Do Things They Don't Want to Do** – Alcohol helps release inhibitions, and teens who drink may indulge in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex or drunk driving. The brain's prefrontal cortex, which is involved in planning and decision-making, does not completely mature until a person's mid-to-late twenties. Using alcohol can harm a teen's ability to reason and weigh options instead of just doing something because it is fun or feels good.
3. **They May Get Into Fights** – Research shows that teens who drink are often more violent than those who do not. For example, 7th graders who drank averaged almost twice as many violent behaviors as those who didn't, according to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A report from Ormond Street Hospital in London says that almost a fifth of 12-13 year olds and more than a quarter of 14-15 year olds reported damaging or destroying things after drinking.
4. **They May Get Really Sick** – Who wants to spend prom night throwing up or so dizzy that he or she can't dance? Alcohol can irritate the stomach causing dehydration which often leads to vomiting and dizziness. Throwing up also may be a sign of alcohol poisoning, which causes body systems to break down and requires immediate medical care. That's a good way to ruin everyone's night.
5. **They May Feel Horrible for the Next Couple of Days** – Even small amounts of alcohol can cause a hangover which can lead to thirst, dizziness and lightheadedness. Headaches caused by blood vessel expansion and sleepiness due to narcotic effects on the central nervous system are other symptoms of a hangover. Your teen may have to forgo events scheduled for the next day or two while trying to get better.