

Spring Celebrations Invite Risky Teen Behavior

by Sue Blaney

The arrival of spring brings many opportunities for teens to celebrate at parties, proms and graduations. Parents want their teens to enjoy these special times, but history shows that these celebrations can turn deadly in an instant. Can you guess what the single biggest influence is on whether teens use alcohol? It is their parents. Parents have far more influence than you may believe. Use your influence to keep your teens safe this spring. Here are some tips:

1. Don't try to be a "cool" parent. Parents who allow parties with alcohol are breaking the law and creating a dangerous situation for everyone. If you try to be cool and look the other way, you are giving permission for your teen to misbehave.

Action: Suggest and encourage activities that are fun for teenagers and keep them engaged appropriately and safely. Volunteer to drive or to organize such events for groups of your teen's friends.

2. Help your teen make an escape plan. With your teen, create a code word that can be used to tell you he or she needs to be picked up immediately. If you help your teens save face they will trust and rely on you to help them avoid risky behavior. Try to brainstorm with them various ways to say "no" and get themselves out of bad situations.

Action: Talk with your teen to create a plan; role-play how they can handle this. Assure them that you will pick them up at any time under any circumstances.

3. Define the rules and be consistent. Parents who provide clearly stated and consistent rules and expectations help kids make better choices. Your consistency will help your teenager stick to the rules.

Action: If your teen breaks the rules, apply consequences. Your teens expect this, and they value fairness. Failure to apply consequences makes you lose your credibility.

4. Be in touch with other parents. Know what is going on; don't allow yourself or your teen to be duped. Parents who are connected with one another are more informed and better prepared.

Action: Call ahead to teens' parties and make sure they will be supervised and safe.

5. Strengthen your relationship. Teenagers who have a mutually respectful relationship with their parents are much more likely to engage in behavior that will maintain that relationship. Teens who have a positive relationship with their parents don't want to disappoint them.

Action: Spend time together; invest in this relationship continually. Be someone your teen enjoys being around.