



A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers

There's a Party, Can I Go?

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The thought of teen parties may strike fear in the hearts of some parents, but with planning and forethought, teen parties can be a safe and fun alternative to unsupervised activities.

Parties at your home

When home is an inviting place to a teen's friends, parents can get to know their teen's friends and monitor their teen's activities. Home can be a place to hang out, have pizza and watch movies. It can also be a place for a full-blown party. Here are suggestions if your teen gives a party:

- Have your teen draw up a list of who is invited. Encourage a party with a limited number of guests as large parties can get out of hand.
- Help your teen think through the invitations. Make it clear who is invited to prevent an out-of-control open house.
- Timing is important. Inviting people too far ahead of time might mean too many guests. Too short a time doesn't give parents time to plan ahead.
- Settle on a time the party will end beforehand. Open-ended invitations can let a party go later than you want.
- Work out limits for "gate crashers." When teens can drive, uninvited guests can result in numbers getting out of hand. Some teens can be trusted to monitor numbers on their own or with the help of friends. Other teens might need a parent to help them monitor.
- Help your teen figure out the party activities. Is the entertainment a movie, dancing or just hanging out? Make suggestions for refreshments.
- Be clear that alcohol and other drugs are not allowed. Don't let teens bring in beverages since "smuggling" can occur. To help, check keys, backpacks or other bags at the door.
- Tell your teen ahead of time that anyone caught with illegal substances will be asked to leave. Parents will need to be called.



- Stress that once guests are there they must stay there. Teens coming and going are an invitation to trouble.
- Be home during the party. Maintain a discreet presence so that teens know you are around, but don't participate unless invited. You might circulate occasionally with refreshments.
- If the party is a fairly large one, walk around outside your home every once in awhile to discourage drinking.
- Consider inviting another parent. Not only can they help with refreshments, but they may know teens you don't.

Liability laws

Make sure that you check your state's laws. In Minnesota, the Social Host Liability law says that anyone over 21 who knowingly serves alcohol to someone under 21 may be held civilly liable for any damages caused by the person under 21.

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The key to teen home parties is to work with your teen ahead of time so there are no surprises. Talk with other parents about how they handle parties, but stick to the things that will keep a party safe for your teen and their friends.

Parties away from home

Your teen will also get invited to parties away from your home. If you have a good relationship with your teen, it will be easier to talk with him or her about parties. Plan how they will get there and back, ask who will be there, what they will do and the hours of the party. Sometimes teens leave out details, so do some checking.

Call the parents of the party-givers—even if your teen objects. Kate Kelly (1996) offers a clever way to do this. She says:

“Call, but call with an offer— ‘How nice of you to have the kids over Friday night. Could I drop off some soda ahead of time, or is there anything else I can do to help you out?’ If the party was a surprise for the parents, you’ve just blown the whistle in the nicest of ways. If the call goes well, you’ve also made a new contact.”

Create a network of parent contacts; getting to know the families of your teen’s friends will come in handy. Suggestions include:

- Stress to your teen that if plans change, they must let you know. Teens thrive on being spontaneous so encourage communication by cell phone or other means.
- Rehearse what your teen can do if they want to leave a party for any reason. Encourage them to call for a ride if they really need one, no matter where they are or what time it is.
- Remind your teen never to ride with anyone who has been drinking or using drugs.
- Stay up until your teen comes home or tell them to wake you when they come home. A wise parent once said they always give their teen a good night hug. Consider it a loving “check up.”
- Be suspicious if your teen frequently asks to sleep elsewhere after a party. This could be a sign that alcohol or drugs are available at the party.

Adapted with permission from Positive Parenting of Teens, "Teens and Parties" (University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1999), co-written by the author.

www.parenting.umn.edu

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- After a party, debrief with your teen. Talk about who was there, what they did, what was fun, and what wasn't.

When you are away

We've all seen television programs or movies about what happens when teens give a party while parents are away. Parents need to carefully consider whether or not to leave teens home alone.

- Ask a close relative or neighbor to keep an eye on things. Let your teen know that person will be checking.
- Ask if your teen can stay with family, or with the family of a friend while you are gone.
- Reconsider plans. It may not be worth the risk if there is potential for an impromptu party.

Staying close to teens by being interested in their activities and friends will help keep communication lines open. By working continuously on building trust, parents will find it easier to set limits around parties at home and elsewhere, and teens will be more willing to share the details of their activities.

Where you can go for more information:

University of Minnesota Extension
www.parenting.umn.edu

Minnesota Prevention Resource Center
<http://www.emprc.org>

A Parent's Guide to Sober Teen Celebrations
<http://www.madd.org/under21/0,1056,2710,00.html>

You may also want to look at:

Kelly, K. (1996). *The complete idiot's guide to parenting a teenager*. New York: Alpha Books.

Wilmes, D. (1998). *Parenting for prevention*. Minneapolis: Johnson Institute.