

# Parenting and Parties

## Hazelden calls on parents to be vigilant chaperones of teen gatherings

It's not news that parents can be unaware when it comes to their teenager's use of alcohol and other drugs. However, a survey from Columbia University documents the likelihood of drug use in teenagers' homes—even when parents are present. According to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse, about one-third of teens say they have attended house parties where parents were present and teens were drinking, smoking marijuana, or using cocaine, ecstasy, or prescription drugs.

"Too many parents fail to fulfill their responsibility to chaperone their kids' parties," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. "The message is loud and clear: Parents, wake up and smell the beer and pot. If your teen is having a party at your home, you should not only be there, but also be aware of what is going on. And if your teen attends a party at someone else's home, you should confirm that the parents will be present and that alcohol and drugs will not. The reality is that even when parents are present at a party, some kids will try to sneak in substances."

Ninety-eight percent of parents say they are normally present during parties they allow their teens to have at home. But a third of the teen partygoers report that parents are rarely or never present at parties they attend. On the positive side, parental presence at parties greatly reduces the likelihood that a teen party will have alcohol

or other drugs. Teens who say parents are not present at the parties they attend are 16 times likelier to say alcohol is available and 15 times likelier to say illegal drugs are available, compared to teens who say parents are always present at the parties.

"There's a special place in heaven for parents who are willing to make their home a safe haven for their kids and friends," says Marty Harding, a prevention strategies manager at Hazelden. "But as the CASA survey shows us, just opening the doors isn't enough. We need to show up fully for the event—making several appearances—and yet not embarrass our teenagers by being around too much." It's a tough balance, but it can be done.

Harding makes the following suggestions:

- Plan parties with your teenager far enough in advance to work through your expectations. Set some "non-negotiables": No tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. Once people leave the party, they can't come back in. And anyone under age 16 must leave with parents or another adult.
- Set a policy of "no closed doors" for parties. Make this part of the discussion early on. Let your child know that you won't just hide out while teenagers gather in private. And decide what areas of your house and property are off limits, such as bedrooms and outside buildings.

- Limit the number of people who can attend the party. The size of your house and your personal tolerance for noise ultimately determines the number.
- Be flexible about other things. Most party arrangements are negotiable. This includes food, beverages, starting and ending times, music, movies, and other entertainment. Whatever you choose, make it fun. Consider theme parties with games, prizes, and other planned activities.
- Invite other parents to be with you during the party. Make sure these parents know that it's an alcohol-free night for them and you. You'll need to be on your toes during the party, and alcohol won't help.
- Keep alcoholic beverages locked or out of sight from the teen partygoers.
- Provide lots of food and beverages—and serve them yourself. Stock up with treats that your teenager and his or her friends like to eat. But stay in charge of the food, and don't put it all out at once. Serving snacks gives you a reason to enter the party area and interact with kids.
- Prepare for emergencies. Make sure you have first-aid supplies and parents' phone numbers.

“Following the above guidelines is tough,” said Harding. “It’s much easier to talk about these guidelines than to implement them. But it is part of earning your parent merit badge. And it’s so much easier if you take the time to get to know your children’s friends and their parents. Once they know that you’re adamant about no alcohol and other drugs, they will be much likelier to enforce the same rules.”

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*Contributed by Hazelden, a nonprofit agency based in Center City, Minn. that offers information and services on addiction and recovery. Visit the website at [www.hazelden.org](http://www.hazelden.org).*



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