

ADOLESCENTS AND SOCIAL EVENTS

Your teenager is going out: to a party, school social or other event. You are concerned about your child's safety but don't want to seem too strict or interfering.

First of all, be assured you are not the only parent who has concerns about how much freedom your child should have – even though your child may give you this impression! But in working out your position it can help to think about where your limits are and what you would feel comfortable with. What you decide will be strongly influenced by your values. For example:

Do you value being in control? If so, you may want to explore with your child what controls (people or environmental) are in place to ensure safety

Do you value your child being able to communicate with you no matter what they have done? If so, you may want to explain to them that you want them to contact you at all costs if they are in trouble.

Your teenager may not like the rules you make or the stand you take, but then they aren't the parent—the one with responsibility. And although they may not admit this, adolescents often feel confused and are usually looking for some limits.

But before you make your decision about what limits you want to put on your adolescent's participation in the event it's a good idea to get as much information about the event as you can from your teenager from the organizer of the event also.

But, before you make a decision See this as an opportunity to have a conversation with your teenager about the party—and to do some problem solving with them.

1. Find out (or get your teenager to find out) as much as possible about the event. For example, phone the organiser and ask:

- Will there be an adult or adults present the whole evening?
- Who is the adult? a parent? or someone employed as a bouncer? or an older brother or sister? How much older?
- Will alcohol be provided? And if so, will there be other drinks available? Are guests bringing alcohol?

2. Ask your teenager to do some problem solving with you. Explain to your teenager that:

- Your concern is their safety and their friends' safety
- You need to know that there is a plan, to keep them as safe as possible
- You will think some more after the discussion, and then let them know your decision.

3. Talk in terms of responsibility rather than trust.

- You as a parent are still responsible for your child's safety
- You are prepared to hand over that responsibility to another adult for the evening
- You don't think it is fair that your teenager may be put in a position of responsibility for the safety of others i.e. you know they are sensible and will do the right thing but others may not.

Work out some safety plans together. Use the drug triangle to help explore some of the things that may occur. Then, using each scenario explore some ways of avoiding the harms. (Don't worry if this becomes a bit of a game with your teenager suggesting more and more outrageous possible harms!).

For example a party to celebrate an 18th birthday at a suburban home:

The drug:

- Alcohol (and other drugs?)

The person (your daughter):

- Does not know many of the guests
- Is an inexperienced drinker
- Will need a lift home (you can't collect her)

The environment:

- Party in a private house, about 70 guests, many over 18
- One or two adults in another part of the house
- Alcohol will be provided
- Teenager's friends will probably take alcohol
- Hot weather is forecast and there is a pool

Put the three parts of the triangle together to work out what could go wrong and then explore how to stay safe:

Possible harms

- Teenager may feel they have to drink more than they

are used to.

- Teenager could be offered a lift by an older teenager, (licensed driver) who has been drinking.
- Teenager or their friends could be tempted to go swimming when they have been drinking.

Plans for safety

- Teenager could drink non-alcoholic drinks, or could bring two cans of alcoholic beverage and only drink that amount or ...
- Older brother could pick up teenager.
- Money could be left in an agreed place in the garden at your home. If no one can pick your daughter up from the party she could get a taxi and use this money to pay for it.
- Teenager could agree that she will not drink alcohol if she is going to go in the pool. Or she could swim before drinking alcohol.

Some things you might decide after your discussion

- Decide on your position regarding alcohol
- Decide on your position regarding adult supervision (i.e. if you do not believe there will be adequate adult supervision you may not allow your child to attend).
- Decide whether to take your teenager to the event or whether they can get a lift home or stay over

Then tell your teenager of your decision and the reasons for the decision. If he/she can go:

Think about back-up plans and options:

- Encourage your teenager to phone you or get a taxi home if they don't feel safe at any time.

If you pick up your teenager and they or a friend are intoxicated, what will you do? Whatever you choose to do and say, communicate your decisions clearly, and stick with them. Remember, you are not alone – many parents are feeling just like you!

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