

As we approach the holidays, we get so caught up in buying the perfect gifts, decorating the house, and entertaining relatives, that we sometimes forget about making sure our teens are safe. However, the holidays can be a time of high risk for teens in terms of alcohol and drug use. It can start with “Blackout Wednesday,” which is the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving when college students come home and get together with high school friends. This night is often associated with binge drinking to the point of losing memory or “blacking out.” According to the *Sun Times*, in the Chicago suburbs, Blackout Wednesday can be a more popular drinking night than New Year’s Eve or St. Patrick’s Day. The holiday break can also be a high risk time with time off from school, college kids home again, and lots of free time and celebrations.

Remember, it is illegal to host a party for those under 21 years of age even if you didn’t buy the alcohol. This not only includes your home, but property that you rent, such as a hotel room, banquet hall, a limousine, etc. If someone is injured or killed as a result of the social hosting, you can be charged with a Class 4 felony and sentenced to between 1 and 3 years imprisonment, and up to \$25,000 in fines. You would also face the risk of being sued in civil court. Furthermore, the onus of the social host violation is on the adult. The law assumes that you know what is going on in your house—even if you are away. You need to make sure you have done everything in your power to prevent alcohol from being consumed to minors at your home or property.

The teen brain is developing until the age of 25. This is the last time your child’s brain will grow this extensively. Alcohol and drug use can harm this process. It is important that you keep your child safe from the risks and consequences of underage drinking and drug use. Here are some important tips to help you keep your teen alcohol and drug free:

- Set clear “no use” expectations with your child. Teach them about their growing brain and that you want it to be the best it can be!
- Teach your children that they can have a good time without alcohol--plan a non-alcoholic kid friendly party.
- If you have alcohol in your home, make sure to monitor it and/or lock it up. Also, lock up your prescription drugs and make sure to dispose of unused prescription drugs at the Lincolnshire Police Station.
- Establish a friendly relationship with parents of friends so that if your child is going to a party you can call ahead and make sure there will be no drugs or alcohol involved.
- Keep tabs on your child’s schedule, knowing their whereabouts helps you supervise any wrong behavior and it will avoid any confusion about your child’s intentions and activities.
- Make sure that if you have older children that they understand it is against the law to provide alcohol to a minor.

Most of the youth in our community do NOT drink alcohol. It is not a rite of passage. Teens report that PARENTS are the number #1 reason for not drinking! Talk to your child. They really do listen!

For more information about underage drinking and drug prevention or how to host an alcohol-free party, please see www.standstrongcoalition.org.

Happy Holidays!

Stand Strong Coalition