Parties and teenagers

Teenage parties get a lot of bad press, but they can be a positive aspect of your child's social life and development. There's no one right way to handle parties, but if you plan well and keep the lines of communication open, you can help your teenager stay safe – and have fun too.

**Teenage parties: the basics**

As your child gets older, he'll probably want to go to parties with his friends. He might even want to have a party at home. Don't panic!

Teenage parties are fun, and they can also be a chance for your child to:

- develop social skills, independence and confidence
- make new friends
- develop her planning skills, if she's hosting the party
- introduce her friends to your family.

*It's normal to feel worried* about letting your child go to parties. You might feel particularly concerned if you don't know the host or how likely it is that alcohol or other drugs might be on offer.

Your child might have mixed feelings too – excitement, nerves, anxiety. If the two of you talk about your feelings and work out a plan together, parties can be something you both feel happy and comfortable with.

As your child gets older, going to parties can be a great way to give him more independence and responsibility. Learning to make responsible and independent decisions is an important part of your child's path to adulthood.

**Going to parties**

When it comes to teenage parties, your child's desire to have fun and your concerns about safety don't have to be mutually exclusive.

You can join in the fun part, for example, by encouraging your child to have a friend over to get ready with beforehand.

The safety part is important too, and it's OK for you to ask about whether adults will be at the party, whether there'll be alcohol (and discuss how you would like your child to deal with this), and whether the party will stay in one place or move somewhere else during the night.

What if your child isn't keen on giving up the details of the party? You could explain why you're asking for details. For example, you might say, 'I'm worried that you might be at risk at this party. I can't agree to you going if I'm not sure you'll be safe'.

You could also get in touch with the party's host. If you already know your child's friends and their parents, it can be easier to take this step. Knowing the parents might also help you feel confident that your child will be well looked after.

When parents check on teenage parties – for example, by calling the host to find out whether
On the night
Some ground rules can help your child stay safe at parties. The rules might include how she’ll get to the party, when and how she’ll come home, and the rules about alcohol. You and your child might have different ideas about some of these rules, so the two of you might need to problem-solve to find a compromise you can both live with.

If your child breaks any of the rules you’ve agreed on about the party, you can follow up with a consequence. Consequences work best if they’re meaningful and you agree on them beforehand. For example, ‘The deal is that you’ll be home by midnight. If you’re not, you won’t be able to have friends over for a week’.

You can read more about using consequences in our article on discipline strategies for teenagers.

A back-up plan
Sometimes things go wrong. Your child might use alcohol or other drugs, or gatecrashers might cause problems. It’s a good idea to have a back-up plan, just in case.

You might consider:
- letting your child know that he can call you at any time, in any condition, if he needs your help
- making sure your child’s phone has his landline, mobile number, partner’s mobile number and other emergency contacts programmed into it
- giving your contact details to one of your child’s friends
- making sure your child has enough money for an emergency taxi ride home
- having a coded message that your teenager could use if he’s embarrassed about calling to ask to come home. For example, he could send a text message checking on a sick grandparent
- coming up with some strategies to help your child say ‘no’ to drugs or alcohol without losing face. For example, ‘I’d love to but I have to work in the morning’, or ‘I’ve got a big game tomorrow and need a clear head’
- giving your child a personal alarm to carry if you’re concerned about his physical safety.

Children with special needs
If your child has special needs, you and she need to be confident that she can be safe and enjoy herself at parties. For example, a child at risk of anaphylaxis will need to know how to check what she’s eating, know any warning signs of anaphylaxis, and have her EpiPen® with her at all times. You might also want to speak to the host to ensure the host is aware of the risk and knows what to do if a problem comes up.

Having a party at home
Your responsibilities
If your child is having a party at home (or somewhere organised by you), you’re considered to be the host. You have a legal duty of care to ensure that everyone at the party is safe. If anything goes wrong at the party, or even after the party, and you haven’t taken care to prevent this, you could be held responsible.

It’s a good idea to check the regulations about parties in your state, because laws about teenagers and alcohol vary across Australia. Also, if you register the party with the police, they’ll have all the details about the party so they can respond quickly if you need to call them.

Planning the party
Planning a party together with your child can be fun. You can find out what sort of party your child wants and help him make it happen. It’s also a chance for your child to take responsibility – for example, he could be in charge of telling the neighbours.

Talking with your child and establishing some ground rules can help things run smoothly and keep partygoers safe. You might discuss the following issues:

- Invitations: how will they be sent? Written invitations are a good way of stopping gatecrashers, especially if you ask everyone to bring their invite to get in. Avoid using text messages or social networking sites to advertise the party, because the invite could be forwarded on to people who haven’t been invited.
- **Activities**: your child might want games, such as competitions or karaoke, or she might prefer just to chat with friends and listen to music.
- **Music**: how loud can it be and what time does it need to be turned down or off? You could also help your child choose music or make a playlist.
- **Alcohol**: you can think about whether to have alcohol and how to control the amount. You might also think about what you’ll do if you find out alcohol has been smuggled into an alcohol-free party. For example, how would you take the alcohol away? You could be held liable if you give the alcohol back to a child who drinks it after leaving the party and then gets into trouble. You could ask the parents of children attending the party how they feel about alcohol use.
- **Smoking**: will you allow it?
- **Drugs**: what will you do if drugs are used at the party? For example, you might decide that the party will be stopped if anyone is using drugs.
- **Rooms**: for example, you might want to make the bedrooms or other rooms off limits.
- **Gatecrashers**: plan what to do about gatecrashers. If you’re having a big party, you might consider hiring a security guard.

**On the night**

It can be helpful to ask your child before the party whether he’s worried about anything in relation to the party. On the night, keep checking in with him regularly to make sure everything’s going well.

Other parents have also found the following tips helpful:

- Have one entrance to the party. Answer the door yourself to make sure only those with invites get in.
- Refuse gatecrashers. Look out for problems brewing before they happen, and be ready to phone the police.
- Keep the food coming. This gives you a chance to mingle and check out how the party’s going without looking like you’re spying.
- Consider inviting other adults – perhaps parents of the other teenagers – to help you.
- Don’t drink alcohol yourself, to ensure you can keep control of the party and deal with any problems.
- Turn lights on or turn the music down shortly before the party is due to end, to encourage everyone to leave.
- Check how the partygoers are getting home. Let them use your phone if they need to call for a lift, offer to book taxis, or have some spare bedding ready if someone can’t get home. Don’t let anyone who has been drinking alcohol or taking other drugs walk home.

⚠️ If someone drinks too much and becomes unconscious, consider calling an ambulance. Put the person into the recovery position, monitor her breathing and heart rate, and make sure she isn’t left alone to sleep off the effects of alcohol or other drugs. People can die from a drug overdose or alcohol poisoning or by choking on their own vomit.

**Alcohol at teenage parties**

It’s best for young people not to drink until they’re at least 18 years old. Drinking alcohol at a young age has significant health implications.

If your child is underage and wants to have alcohol at his party, you need to check whether this is legal in your state and decide whether it’s something you’re comfortable with. You could be legally liable if a problem comes up during or even after the party. You might talk with your child about the possible risks and harms of serving alcohol.

If your child is older, or you agree to serve alcohol, the following tips can help:

- Let the other parents know. In some states, it's illegal to serve alcohol to children under 18 without the consent of their parents.
Provide and serve the alcohol yourself, and consider serving it for only a short time — for example, between 8 pm and 9 pm. Offer drinks with a lower alcohol content, and serve small amounts.

Watch out for alcohol being smuggled in.

Provide plenty of soft drinks and water.

Make sure there’s plenty of food, but note that salty snacks make people thirsty.

Try to work out who’s planning to drive home, and make sure they’re not drinking. You might consider suggesting drivers give you their keys when they arrive.

If you have young people under 18 years at the party, make sure they can’t take alcohol away from the party.

There’s no safe level of alcohol consumption for children under 18. Their bodies and brains are still developing and can be easily damaged. You can find more information in our article on preventing or minimising teenage alcohol use.

State and territory information about teenage parties

The following links provide information about teenagers, parties and alcohol in your state or territory:

- ACT Police – Party smart
- NSW Department of Community Services – Surviving teenage parties: tips for parents
- NT Department of Children and Families – Teenage parties
- Queensland Police – Party safe
- Legal Services Commission of South Australia – Alcohol and teenage parties
- Tasmania Police – Youth and alcohol
- Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development – Alcohol, teenage parties and the law
- WA Drug and Alcohol Office – Hosting a party for teenagers

More to explore

- Risky behaviour in teenagers: how to handle it
- Peer pressure and influence: teenagers
- Social and recreational activities for teenagers with autism spectrum disorder
- Family rules
- Binge-drinking: teenagers
- Schoolies week: keeping teenagers safe

Web links

- ABCD: Parenting young adolescents – Social events
- MyNite

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