

Tips for...

Hosting a Teen Party

How to deal with the alcohol question

Your teen asks if he can have a party. You want to say “yes,” but you have some concerns. You know that many teenagers use alcohol, and some use other drugs. What if your teen begs you to buy beer for the party? What if your teen’s friends bring over their own bottles? Should you be disturbed or comforted by the fact your teen isn’t trying to hide their interest in drinking?

To some parents, teens who openly ask about alcohol are showing signs of maturity. For many, this is reason enough to oblige them in their request to have a party where alcohol is permitted. For others, the decision isn’t that simple. On the one hand, there are legalities and safety concerns to think about. On the other, there is the question of what you’re losing by saying “no” to a gathering you could both participate in and supervise.

Before you agree to host a party involving alcohol, be clear on the laws regarding minors drinking in your home. You should also consider the benefits and consequences involved in hosting a social event where alcohol is present. Lastly, make sure your teen understands and agrees with the rules and parameters you establish.

Considering the alcohol question

If you’re considering letting your teen have a party involving alcohol, you might want to discuss the details and restrictions before saying “yes.” That way, your teen will know there are boundaries. This also gives your teen a chance to rethink their original request.

Here are some things you might want to include in your discussion about party plans:

Limitations

Let your teen know that saying “yes” to alcohol is not the same as saying “yes” to intoxication. Explain that while teenagers may look and act like adults, they are in fact still developing physically, mentally and emotionally. Since alcohol affects teenagers differently than it does adults, party-goers between 16 and 19 years old should stick to the “one drink per hour” rule. Teens 15 and under shouldn’t drink at all.



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Invitations

Using written invitations can help keep the party a manageable size and give you a chance to lay down parameters around start and end times, pick-up and drop-off options, and other details. Your invitations could also be used to give parents a heads-up about the alcohol issue. By asking that the invitations be signed by parents before a teen is allowed to join the party, you are showing your child's friends and their parents that the party plans have been well thought out, and that the celebration will be monitored in a safe, responsible way.

Parental contact

If you're not into the invitation idea, you might want to contact parents by phone. This way you can let parents know you plan to allow supervised drinking. You can also discuss transportation options and expectations. Use this opportunity to ask about emergency contacts in the event that a problem arises.

The law and alcohol

In British Columbia, you're allowed to serve alcohol to your own children in your own home. However, there are restrictions on serving alcohol to your children's friends. Here are some rules and regulations you should keep in mind:

- It is illegal to serve alcohol to a person under 19.
- You could be held legally liable for any accidents or injuries that occur on your property. For this reason, it is important to understand what your home insurance covers.
- If alcohol is involved, you could be accountable for any harm your party guests experience after leaving your residence.

In other words, you're taking risks by hosting a party that involves alcohol, even when the guests are of legal age to drink.

Food

An important part of any party, particularly if alcohol is involved, is providing food for your guests. If possible, put a limit on the saltier snacks. Salt increases thirst, which can inadvertently increase alcohol consumption.

Activities

One way to prevent drinking levels from getting out of hand is to make sure there's stuff for teens to do besides simply sitting around and sipping beer. Help your teen come up with activity or game ideas that suit the party area and theme, if applicable. Offer to put up a dart board or a card table, or rent some movies, video games or even a karaoke machine.

During the party

Helping to plan the party is only one of your responsibilities as a parent. The others involve monitoring the party and keeping tabs on the punchbowl, the food trays and each of the teens in attendance. Below is a list of your responsibilities and duties while the party is in full swing.

Provide appropriate supervision

At least one adult should be present at all times during the party. If you've planned a large party, make sure other parents or people of legal age are there to help you cover all the bases. You could assign each adult a different duty or station. For example, you could have one adult manning the front door to respond to party crashers. Another adult could be responsible for serving or monitoring the alcohol that is consumed.

Fill the food bowls regularly

Snacks should be available throughout the night and the party-goers should be encouraged to keep on eating. When there is food in your stomach, alcohol has less effect on your blood alcohol content.

Abstain for the night

While you may be tempted to join in on the fun, you're better off remaining clear-headed and alert, just in case any problems pop up unexpectedly.

Be the server

To minimize the risks that come with hosting a party involving alcohol, serve the liquor yourself (or get help from other adults). As the "bartender" and "server," you'll be able to keep an eye on anyone who seems to be having trouble or getting out of hand. You could make it a stipulation that any alcohol brought to the party must be handed over at the door, along with the car keys of those who plan to drink. Stop serving alcoholic drinks an hour or two before the designated end of the party.

Offer alcohol-free alternatives

Be sure to have on hand a variety of non-alcoholic alternatives, such as soft drinks and juices. You could even get creative and serve a selection of blended "virgin" drinks, such as alcohol-free Margaritas and Pina Coladas.

Plan a safe ending

Ensure the safety of all guests by planning the end of the party before it starts. Teens who have been drinking should not be allowed to drive home. Take them home yourself, or arrange to have them picked up by their parents. If these options aren't possible, use a taxi service and be prepared to provide cab fare. Also be prepared for overnight guests in the event someone is unable to go home.

Alcohol-free alternatives

Margarita

- 2 oz. sour mix and a splash each of lime and orange juice
- Blend with ice until smooth
- Serve in a salt-rimmed glass
- Garnish with a lime wedge

Pina Colada

- 3 oz. pineapple juice and 2 oz. cream of coconut
- Blend with ice until smooth
- Serve in a Hurricane glass
- Garnish with a pineapple wedge, whipped cream and a cherry

Strawberry Daiquiri

- 3 oz. fresh or frozen strawberries, a splash of sour mix, and a dash of grenadine
- Blend with ice until smooth
- Garnish with a flag

For information about the effects of alcohol and other drugs, visit the “Learn about” section on the Here to Help website: www.heretohelp.bc.ca. You can also find information on a wide variety of substance use issues on the Centre for Addictions Research website: www.carbc.ca.

Benefits and consequences of hosting a party involving alcohol

Besides legal and health issues, there are other factors to consider when deciding whether or not to host a party. As for the benefits, hosting a teen party provides you with a unique opportunity to observe and monitor your child’s behaviour when socializing. Not only are you given a chance to get to know your child on a different level, you also gain the comfort of knowing where your teen is—and what they’re doing—on a particular evening. The alternative may be that your teen heads out for the night and drinks somewhere else in a much riskier manner.

Regarding consequences, your liberal values may not be appreciated by the parents of your teen’s friends. You also run the risk of developing a reputation as a “laid-back parent” or even “a push-over.” This could lead to your teen trying to take advantage of your lenience and pushing for more liberties. Finally, you don’t know for certain how your teen and their friends will react to alcohol. Some may not have much tolerance for the substance, while others may be prone to overdoing it and either create a scene, pass out or make an unwelcome mess.

