



LET'S TALK PARTIES



There are many ways to socialize in high school – parties are certainly one of them. There is much we can do and many tactics to share as parents helping our kids navigate being social. It's important for every parent to find the tone, voice and approach that works for them and for their family. Authenticity is important. Below are:

Tips and techniques shared by other parents

1. Help your child plan drug-free/alcohol-free social events

- Be intentional – have fun planning with your kid
- Create a guest list - make invitation-only
- Have a theme – identify one or two activities/games to get the party going, think about foods that will enhance the fun
- Define the space, “if you come, you’re coming to stay – no in and out.”
- Secure all alcohol, marijuana and RX drugs prior to the event
- Hire security for big events
- Let kids know the ground rules, i.e. – no back packs, they will be searched
- Parent vibe that works for some – “we really want you to come and just enjoy yourselves”

2. Monitor drug-free/alcohol-free social events

- Make regular visits throughout the party area/your home. Do not join the festivities – parents aren't attendees, but your presence should be felt.
- Take any substances found and discard them.
- If it's your style, offer to help other parents do the same that their homes

3. Set guidelines on when, whether and under what circumstances your child can go to parties. The spectrum we hear is “you can never go to a party” to “you can go and these are my expectations.” This can be clearly defined by the parents or developed in conversation with the child.

4. Call, Call, Call – Never fear or hesitate to call the parents where your child is planning to go. It is your parental right to know where your kids are at any time.

- Ask “do the home owners know there is a party planned at their house?”
- Ask the host's “policy on alcohol, marijuana and vaping.” Most will say they are not allowing it. Some parents will explain why they are allowing it. In the second scenario, parents leave that conversation with information. Information on which to make a decision about their child's attendance.
- It can be uncomfortable, especially if one doesn't know the parent they are calling, but it's always worth gathering the information and establishing a new parent connection.
- In general, stay in contact with the parents of your kid's friends.
- Suggestion: Start consciously reconnecting with parents in 8th grade – prior to high school when student independence dials further up.

5. Help your child navigate drug/alcohol– it can be useful for kids to think about what they will do if they encounter drugs and alcohol at events.

Exit strategies and excuses = Ways to say no

9th/10th graders can be particularly receptive to pre-identified excuses or ways to say “no”.

Excuses encompass things that “could” happen (actually or theoretically). Working on excuses together can be useful. Examples from parents:

- “My dad is giving me \$1000 if I don’t drink until I’m 21” (this dad uses a carrot – works for his daughters)
- “My parents drug test me” (some parents actually do, some threaten to)
- “My coach will kick me off the team/limit my playing time”
- “I have addiction in my family – I’m at greater risk than you.” (see section below)
- It is perfectly okay to be hard core as a parent especially if it’s the right approach for your family - “this is real, we are going to protect your brain until you are out of this house, you will lose your phone, your car, I will not pay for college.”

Extraction language – pre-identified signaling language that a teen can use if they need to leave a situation. It can be an agreed upon word or phrase texted, i.e. “giraffe,” “gotta go.” It can be dialogue, teen - “mom, how’s the dog doing?” Mom - “not great, I think it would be better if you came home.”

11th grader shift – excuses may still work, but as they get older more and more teens want to be with their peers no matter the environment. Certainly, parents can disallow attendance or require immediate departure if drugs or alcohol materialize at an event – again what is right for your family. There is also an opportunity to help kids find ways to – stay and stay sober or stay connected and not use. This is not easy and may ultimately be unfruitful or a bad idea, but it can be a good conversation. Examples from parents:

- No one knows what’s in that red solo cup – put in soda, ginger ale, water
- Be the designated driver
- Advise that you want your teen to be leader – stay sober and keep an eye on others, watch for assault, etc...
- “Being at a party and not drinking is a life skill you need to have – I want to talk with you when you get home tonight about what it was like.”
- Attempt to help kids understand themselves beyond the moment – goal/desires that are bigger than one particular event; what’s important to them? What are they trying to attain? Perhaps college attendance, athletics, performance, excellence in extra-curriculars – these types of things can be anchoring-reasons why they might “choose not to use.” “What do you want for yourself, your body, your reputation, your future, how does intoxication or intoxicated friends fit into this?” Brainstorm all the things that can go wrong, “what if you were suddenly incapacitated?” Are there examples of things going poorly in your family, among friends or in the media that you can refer to?
- Again, if addiction in the family – “you just can’t – you’re risking everything” (see addiction section)

Addiction in the family – it can be prophylactic for kids to know about family addiction. If it’s in their families, kids can be at as much as a 50% greater risk for addiction themselves. This can be a hard conversation for parents, as addiction is acknowledged and talked about to varying degrees in every family. However, if known, many kids take a “self-preservation” tactic with their friends and substance use. Also, when friends understand a friend is at “a greater risk” many times they become supportive.