

## A BASIC GUIDE FOR HOSTING AN ALCOHOL-FREE TEEN PARTY

*For parents of socially active teens, sometimes the five scariest words are “Can I have a party?” We’ve all heard the horror stories of house parties gone amok, with hugely inflated numbers of partygoers generated by social media, severe damage to the home, injury, sexual assaults, even police arrests and hospitalization due to alcohol poisoning.*

### WHAT DO PARENTS NEED TO KNOW?

Having opportunities to cut loose and socialize as a group is an important part of teen development. However, in teen-speak, “party” is often code for “there will be alcohol.” Teens, like many adults, often see alcohol as an effective social lubricant to help relax inhibitions at parties and make socializing seem more fun. Unfortunately, Brookline teens tell us that when they drink, they generally **drink to get drunk**, which can severely impair judgment. And in the case of binge drinking (four drinks for girls, five for boys consumed in less than two hours), it can result in alcohol poisoning and damage to the part of the brain linked to learning and memory.

Teens need safe environments to hold social gatherings. Some parents believe that by hosting a party and allowing teens to drink in their home, they can keep them safe. But allowing other teens to drink alcohol in your home is illegal and can lead to devastating consequences for the whole family. (For more information refer to: [Social Host Laws and consequences.](#))

### SO HOW CAN PARENTS HOST TEEN PARTIES THAT ARE BOTH FUN AND SAFE?

Consider these basic guidelines, with some suggestions for alternative methods of fun that don’t involve alcohol, marijuana or other substances.

- **Plan together in advance** what kind of party this will be. Discuss together your teen’s ideas for activities, games, themes (costumes, video games, movie night, etc.) music/dancing, food, drinks, etc. (See resources below for some excellent party ideas and additional guidelines.)
- **Be there!** You don’t have to hover, but you **MUST BE HOME**, and it should be known to all guests that parents are present. You can offer to serve snacks or stay totally on the sidelines, but keep track of what’s going on.
- **Keep the party small**, 10 to 15 teens for each adult, if possible. Ask other parents to come over to help you if you think you’ll need help keeping track of what’s going on.
- **Set a guest list.** The party should be for invited guests only. No “crashers” allowed. This will help avoid the “open party” situation. Make it clear on any invitations that the party will not offer or tolerate any substances.
- **Set starting and ending times.** Decide on a time frame so the party doesn’t go too late.
- **Set clear ground “rules” and expectations.** Communication is key. Make sure your teen understands your feelings and expectations about alcohol and drug use – and why. (For factual information, go to [www.B-PEN.org](http://www.B-PEN.org)) Make sure you and your teen know the [Social Host Laws and consequences](#) for infractions. Rules should include the following:
  - No tobacco, alcohol, marijuana products, or other drugs.

- Consider putting all backpacks/bags in a separate room, off limits for the duration.
- Use specific entrances and exits, and no one can leave the party and then return.
- Lights are left on at all times.
- Certain rooms of the house are off-limits.
- If the party is outdoors, specifically restrict it to the backyard, so it doesn't spill into the street or the property of surrounding houses.
- Music has to be at a manageable level so as not to offend neighbors.
- **Have plenty of food and non-alcoholic beverages available.** Make the food tasty and fun, and have a wide range of beverages, including bottled water. A variety of non-alcoholic mixed drinks like virgin margaritas can be a fun alternative or consider an Italian Soda bar with seltzer and flavored syrups. You may also be able to get a keg of root beer, which gives a place for kids to gather round and could spark games like Pong and flip cup.
- **Secure your alcohol and any prescription or over-the-counter medicines.** This is a biggie!
- **Eyeball kids as they arrive.** Make sure kids are not impaired on their way into the party. (Tip: teens have been known to sneak clear liquids like vodka and gin via water bottles! You can head that off by having them drink only the bottled water provided.) Don't let kids bring edibles, like brownies or candies that might be infused with marijuana.
- **Discuss the "What ifs...?"** Talk ahead of time what you both can do if the unexpected happens – someone brings alcohol, uninvited guests show up, kids sneak off, etc. Establish a signal your teen can use if they need adult intervention for a situation. As parents, have the courage to step in authoritatively if needed. (For example, if a teen is disturbingly impaired, consider talking with him/her to assess if medical intervention or a parent call is necessary -- "Your child is not feeling well..." is a good face-saving script.) Empower your teen to cite Social Host Laws as well as house rules to **KEEP EVERYONE SAFE!**

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/TIPS/IDEAS

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-To-Teen-Parties.aspx>

<http://www.naturalmomsblog.com/how-to-throw-a-teen-party-without-alcohol.html>

*A cautionary tale of good intentions:* <http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/trying-and-failing-to-host-an-alcohol-free-teen-party/>

<http://www.party0.org/50-fun-things-to-do-without-alcohol/>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Throw-a-Fabulous-Party-Without-Alcohol>

<http://thealcoholtalk.com/blog/host-alcohol-free-teen-party/>

**www.B-PEN.org**

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[www.B-PEN.org](http://www.B-PEN.org)

[www.facebook.com/BrooklineParentEducationNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/BrooklineParentEducationNetwork)