

KEEPING TEENS SAFE ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

As we enter into the holiday season, one of the most highly anticipated events for kids and adults alike is New Year's Eve. While it can provide a lively opportunity to connect with family and friends, it is also one of the most dangerous nights of the year for teens, for whom the celebration often means an "all rules are off" mentality. Just as adults tend to party and "de-stress" with alcohol, teens gravitate toward alcohol and other substances at their own get-togethers, whether at someone's house, in a rented hotel room or simply out and about – enjoying "First Night" with the gang is sometimes a convenient alibi for other mischief.

Though most adults are able to enjoy some alcohol in moderation, unfortunately teen alcohol consumption often leads to unsafe behavior. More often than not, when teens drink, they drink to get drunk. (Several times a year Brookline teens are rushed to the emergency room due to an alcohol overdose.) And because the developing teen brain can't process alcohol and marijuana in the same way the adult brain is able to, judgment can become quickly impaired.

This is an especially important time of the year in general for parents to set guidelines for their teens, but New Year's Eve presents some extra challenges. Many kids have internalized the message that "Unless you are at a large gathering of friends drinking, you are a loser." They put pressure on their parents to let them go to unsupervised parties and sleepovers. Parents out with their own friends may be less vigilant about supervision. But be smart – have an in-depth conversation with your teens about New Year's Eve plans and check on the details. Be clear about communicating your expectations, and connect with the parents of your teen's friends about their expectations of responsible behavior.

Consider the following guidelines:

- If your teens are going to a party, find out where, exactly what the time frame is and who will be supervising. Double check with the responsible adult.
- Talk about how your teen will get safely home. This is an ideal time to talk about drunk driving, reinforcing the message never to ride in a car driven by someone who has been drinking. Make sure you model responsible behavior by not driving under the influence. Even if you think you are "fine," you send the message that drinking and driving is OK if someone is "sober enough." Have a designated driver or use a taxi service.
- If you are hosting a gathering, make sure to keep your alcohol in an easily monitored location, especially "hard alcohol." Even if you trust your child, your child's friends may be tempted by what's available in your home. Informing all the kids present that the alcohol is "adults only" is one option for setting up behavior expectations.
- Address the issue of marijuana as well – teens often think marijuana will not affect their driving. It so impacts judgment that some kids actually think they drive better after smoking, which can have disastrous consequences.

- Have a conversation about fake ID's and confiscate any you find. Talk about the risks of providing alcohol to other teens, especially if you have returning college students who might let teen siblings "join the party."
- Don't relax your family rules during the holidays -- it will be hard to revert back to previous expectations.
- AND REMEMBER: Serving non-family members under the age of 21 is ILLEGAL.

As an alternative, make New Year's Eve a family night and attend one of the many "First Night" activities around town together. You will be helping your child to change the association of New Year's Eve from that of an alcohol-related event to a city-wide cultural celebration.

Here's wishing you a healthy, happy holiday – Eat, drink and be merry, but be safe!

*informed * involved * connected*

www.B-PEN.org
www.facebook.com/BrooklineParentEducationNetwork