

TEEN PARTYING DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING IS A BAD IDEA

(September 2020) Socializing in person is so important for adolescent development, and most teens are sorely missing hangout time with their peers. But young people often have a distorted sense of their own mortality – in fact, teens’ brains are hard-wired for risk-taking. That, plus peer pressure and mixed messages in the media, have resulted in lots of partying that defies the guidelines for safe gatherings during the pandemic. It seems like every day the media reports news of large parties of unmasked kids, which can go on to become super-spreader events and force the cancellation of in-person learning. Stress and anxiety are no excuse for putting the safety of others at risk.

So what are parents to do? How do we get buy-in from our teens on abiding by safe behavioral guidelines?

The very first step is to **be the parents**. As adults, it is our responsibility to **keep our children safe**, to know the facts and share them with our teens along with our clear expectations for behavior. As always, know where your teen is going, with whom, and what the plan is when they get there. Keep in mind, many people can be “silent spreaders” with no symptoms, and exposure during a party with friends could be harmful to others, especially older parents, grandparents, etc.

Massachusetts’ [basic guidelines](#) still recommend that we:

- Avoid gatherings if we can – transmission is a factor of distance, duration, and density
- Wear a mask – mandatory when you cannot maintain six feet of separation with others.
- Don’t shake hands/hug or share food/drink, etc.

"The health department wants to stress the importance of continuing to follow protocols so plans for in-person schooling don't get derailed, as they have in other communities," stresses Brookline's health commissioner, Dr. Swannie Jett.

But also, experts remind us to **be sympathetic** and acknowledge how hard it is to have one's social life so restricted. A [CNN editorial](#) by an insightful 20-something writer stressed harm reduction rather than abstinence. She writes, "Instead of telling them to 'STAY HOME FOREVER, we can help young people understand what activities are safer -- biking with a few friends, hiking, getting take-out food -- versus what are more dangerous: house parties with lots of people and swimming in crowded public pools." She also mentions the power of positive peer pressure. "Instead of shaming young people for following the crowd, we can encourage them to create an environment in which putting themselves at risk of Covid-19 is against the norm."

In a [recent "Parents" article](#), Dr. Barbara Nosal suggests that parents **facilitate safe ways to socialize** in person, like small, socially distant meetups outside at a park or beach. She adds, "Parents can lead by example by embracing technology to host 'House Party' and 'Game Nights' with extended family members or friends for teens to see that virtual gatherings can be a fun alternative to in-person get-togethers. We all realize that this time is full of frustration, but there are alternatives to reinforce safety and prevention for everyone's sake." Mom.com offers some specific [ideas for teen parties](#) during the pandemic.

This is new for all of us, we have to continue to keep perspective and remind ourselves that this will not last forever. Sometimes we just have to take it one day at a time.