

Safe Holiday Tips for Middle School Parents

The holiday season is a period of connecting with family and friends, of rituals and religious occasions, celebrations and parties. It is also a season that is associated with increased alcohol consumption during many of these festivities. And as pre-teens and teens on school vacation find themselves with time on their hands, it can become a season of increased alcohol and marijuana experimentation. Brookline students say that their number one source for alcohol is the liquor cabinet at home. Kids sneak alcohol from their parents and share it with their friends, and during the holidays, alcohol may be readily accessible. With the legalization of marijuana for medicinal use, adolescents also may be drawn to pot under the impression that it offers a safe way to get high.

B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) offers the following recommendations to keep your middle school kids safe over the holidays:

- Talk to your child about the dangers of alcohol and marijuana on the developing brain, and set clear expectations and consequences regarding substance use at any time.
- Model responsible alcohol consumption.
- Do not drive after drinking. Even if you think you are “sober enough,” you send the message that drinking and driving is OK under certain circumstances.
- Keep your alcohol in a secure location, especially “hard alcohol.” Even if you trust your child, your child’s friends may be tempted by what’s available in your home.
- If you are hosting a party, do not leave unsupervised alcohol around where it is accessible to underage guests.
- When your child goes to gatherings at other houses, check with parents to make sure an adult will be there to supervise.
- Do not relax your family rules with your own teens during the holidays -- it will be hard to revert back to previous expectations.
- REMEMBER: Serving non-family members under the age of 21 is ILLEGAL.

New Year’s Eve can be a difficult night for parents to set guidelines for their adolescents. More than any other event, this night is associated with drinking. Many kids have internalized the message that unless they are partying and drinking with a large gathering of friends on New Year’s Eve, they are losers. They put pressure on their parents to let them go to unsupervised parties and sleepovers. Parents may be out with their own friends and less vigilant about supervision. But be smart – check on the details. Know where your child will be and who will be the responsible adult. Make sure to communicate with other parents and be clear about communicating your expectations to your teen.

Wishing you a safe and healthy holiday season!

For more information, including other helpful *Tip Sheets*, visit www.B-PEN.org or contact B-PEN coordinators June Harris (june_harris@brookline.k12.ma.us) or Karen Campbell (kcampbell@brooklinema.gov)