Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
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Factsheet

Hosting a teenage party



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General)

Tags: party, parenting, teenagers, supervision

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Key messages

- There will always be risks involved in hosting a party, but the more planning that goes in, the more likely things will run smoothly.
- Involve your teenager in the party planning, so they can hear your concerns behind decisions and you can hear theirs.
- Regardless of whether or not there will be alcohol at the party, it's important to supervise guests at all times.

Click each point in our party checklist below to help you in your planning.

Preparing for a party

It's important to involve your teenager in the decision-making about their party. They are more likely to be reasonable if you give them a chance to express their views and hear your concerns about the party.

However, before including your teenager, think about whether there are any items you feel strongly about that can't be negotiated with your child. For example, these could include whether you will allow alcohol, or the number of guests. Communicate these with your child so you have a shared understanding on these issues.

Choosing a venue

Consider a location that would be suitable for your party. Some things to think about include:

- The number of guests to be invited. Will your venue be able to safely cater to them, or do you need to think of an alternative, like a community hall?
- Do you feel confident confiscating or denying alcohol if guests are underage or have had too much to drink? If not, look into other options such as holding the party on licensed premises. This means staff have the responsibility of serving only to those over 18 and monitoring the responsible service of alcohol.

Invitations

- If your teenager is in charge of invitations, make sure they limit invites to the number of guests you have agreed upon, and are only inviting people they know (not friends of friends).
- Plan how to invite guests to the party. Making an event or group on social media to invite guests could spread the word about the party to a larger number of teenagers than you want to attend. If you do wish to use social media, make sure the event or group is private. Make sure only the group's organisers, and not guests, have the function to invite people
- If invitations are sent out individually, it can be a good idea to number your invitations and ask all guests to show their invitation at the door. Have a guest list and mark off their number at the door. This can be helpful if you don't know all your child's friends by name
- Set clear start and end times, and make sure everyone invited is aware of these. This will help other parents to arrange transport for their child to and from the party.

Gate crashers

Have a plan for ensuring that only invited guests are attending the party. Some options include:

- A guest list at the door. This would require your child or a friend who can identify all guests at the door, or a number system on the invitations (discussed above in Invitations)
- Try to avoid having multiple entrances to the party. Use one entrance and exit and ensure all other ways to enter the party are secure.
- Keep guests to a backyard or inside the house, rather than in a front area that can be viewed from the street. Make a smoking area in a backyard rather than the front of the house.

If gate crashers arrive, ask them to leave. If they refuse, they are trespassing, and you should call your local police.

Managing RSVPs

- Keep track of who and how many people will be attending. This will help you arrange adequate supervision for the number of guests. NSW Police recommend 1 adult to every 10-15 children. As guest numbers increase, contact other adults if you will need help supervising. Don't leave this to the day of the party.
- If there are any under 18-year-old guests that have RSVP'd, and you are allowing alcohol, make sure to discuss the issue with their parents.

Notify police and your neighbours

If you're expecting to hold a large or noisy party, notify the police before the party, ideally at least 2 weeks in advance, or as early as you can. Most states have a Party Registration online form, however if your party is soon you will need to call the police in your state.

Online Party Registration SA, WA, NT, QLD, NSW, VIC, ACT, TAS

Notify neighbours so they can make arrangements for their house, including securing entrances to their property and keeping pets safe.

Food, drinks and activities

- Make sure to provide plenty of non-alcoholic drinks and water. A non-alcoholic punch or mocktails (non-alcoholic cocktails) can be a good option
- Provide enough food for your guests. Talk with your teenager about what kinds of food are served at other parties of their age group.
- Consider a schedule for the event. If you have set your start time as earlier than 7pm, it is likely that guests will not have eaten dinner. If this is the case, it is important to provide substantial food items as dinner (e.g. a barbeque, homemade pizzas, pasta salads)
- Try to get your teenager to come up with some age-appropriate activities, so guests have other things to do instead of drinking. These could include games or music/dancing, or speeches if relevant for the event
- Consider whether you will provide a sit-down meal or finger food. A sit-down meal may make it easier to ensure your guests eat enough
- Consider how it will be arranged, e.g. buffet style, or served by one of the hosts

Deciding whether you will allow alcohol

As your teen gets older, alcohol is more likely to be part of social events and parties. Ideally, parents should try to have a conversation about alcohol before their child has been exposed to it. It's important to talk to your teenager about the harms related to alcohol use. Positive Choices has many resources to help you with this. Read our alcohol factsheet, watch our webinar, or ask your child to watch this 5-minute video about the effects of alcohol on the teenage brain.

There are important issues to consider when deciding whether or not you will allow alcohol at a party, and how to manage either decision. Remember, providing alcohol for your adolescent conveys a positive attitude to alcohol, which increases the likelihood of teenagers starting to use alcohol at an earlier age, as well as having higher levels of alcohol use.

If you decide to allow alcohol at the party

Will you invite guests who are younger than the legal drinking age (18 years old in Australia)?

It is against the law to supply alcohol to teenagers who are underage without the consent of their parent or guardian. If underage guests will be attending, inform their parents and ask them whether or not they will allow their child to drink. Underage guests must have consent from their parents to drink. See our legal factsheet here.

If you **do gain consent** from parents for their underage teens to drink alcohol, you are required by law to **responsibly supervise** them at all times. This includes:

- Making sure they don't get drunk
- If you are supervising, you cannot get drunk either

If you **do not gain permission** from parents of underage teenagers, you will need to monitor these teens at the party to **make sure they are not drinking alcohol**. This can be difficult to do. You may want to think about some options to make this easier, such as:

- A wristband system at your party, with different colours for guests under 18, and whether for underage teenagers their parents have provided consent for them to drink alcohol.
- Using a bar service at your party which requires proof of age or consent to order a drink. This could be done either by hiring a professional service or getting help from relatives or other parents.

Consider the impact for non-drinkers at the party, such as feeling excluded or embarrassed. Try to get your teenager to come up with ways to ensure they still have an enjoyable party experience, such as providing mocktails (alcohol-free cocktails) or organising some games that don't include alcohol.

Will guests be allowed to bring their own alcohol?

- Guests bringing their own alcohol will be able to drink as much and as often as they like and can also bring high-strength alcoholic drinks. This can make it harder for parents to monitor safe consumption of alcohol.
- One alternative is to ask an adult to serve alcohol to guests, like in a bar or licensed venue. This will allow the adult(s) to monitor how much, how often, and what alcoholic drinks the guests are drinking.
- If you decide not to allow guests to bring their own alcohol, make this clear on the invitation.

If you decide you will not allow alcohol at the party

- Make this clear to your teenager and guests before the night of the party. Let them know that alcohol will not be allowed and will be taken away if guests try to bring it in.

Supervision

Regardless of whether or not there will be alcohol at the party, you will need to supervise your teenager and their friends. Keeping to one room or hiding out away from the teenage guests is not supervising. If injuries happen, you may be responsible. Actively move around the party and try talking to guests, or carry food around so you can monitor the party without embarrassing your teenager.

Remember to ensure there is adequate supervision for the number of guests at the party. Talk to other parents you know or relatives and ask if they are prepared to help you supervise. Alternatively, think about hiring security personnel to help you manage.

Also consider how you will supervise guests leaving the party. Think about how you can make sure those who have been drinking will not be driving. This might mean asking each guest how they are getting home as they leave, or minding drivers' car keys while they are at the party and returning to them if they are sober at the end of the night.

Hosting a teenage party always brings risk, but by putting in time to plan, ensuring responsible adult supervision, and considering how to minimise the risks involved, it is much more likely the party will run smoothly and can be a positive event in your relationship with your teenage child.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney and Dr Catherine Quinn at the University of Queensland.

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