

# Keeping Your Child Safe Around Prom and Graduation Time

First, here are some general guidelines in discussing drinking with your teenage children:

- Know where your child plans to go and with whom. Discuss the possibility that alcohol will be present, and emphasize to your teenager that underage drinking is illegal, that alcohol abuse is dangerous and that underage drinking is unacceptable to you.
- You may want to work with the school or other parents in your community to plan an alcohol-free pre- or after-party. You may choose to invite your child's friends over for an alcohol-free pre-prom or post-prom celebration and picture taking session.
- Find out where the kids are going before and after the prom, and if the setting will be supervised.
- Determine if another house your child plans to visit will have alcohol available.
- Know where the alcohol is in your house and how much you have so that you can monitor potential consumption.
- If your child will be part of a group of teens who chip in and rent a limousine, check with the limo company to make sure there is a policy that addresses underage riders and the consumption of alcohol in their cars.

## Starting Conversations

Newspapers often carry stories of adolescents who were caught drinking alcohol during prom and graduation festivities and the adults who were deemed responsible. These stories can often be used as conversation starters, whereby parents can broach the subject of underage drinking with teens of any age.

In 2005, Michigan high school students who had been drinking alcohol in a limousine prior to their prom were pulled over at the dance, given Breathalyzer tests and then ticketed by the police. They were subsequently suspended by their school, prohibited from partaking in Honor Society rituals or team sports, fined, and made to appear in court. Ultimately, these teens were sentenced to probation and community service.

## The Middle Adolescent (ages 15–17)

During the middle-adolescent years, teenagers struggle more with peer relationships and emancipation from their parents. The search for peer acceptance, the struggle for independence from parents, and the testing of limits can consume these years, making middle adolescence a challenge for any parent. Many of the serious problems of adolescence — associated with experimentation with drugs, tobacco, drinking, and sexual activity — occur during these years as teens seek to define their own identities.

Some middle teens may actually be invited to the prom as guests of older teens. Parents will want to have a conversation with their middle teen about how to handle himself/herself, especially if drinking is involved. Middle teens invited to the prom by an older date tend to be starry-eyed and easily influenced by the older teen's behaviors.

Teenagers at this stage may be more easily influenced by peer pressure to drink alcohol with their older friends. A particularly dangerous situation may arise if the teen's date has been drinking alcohol and then initiates unwanted sexual conduct.

*Some questions to get the conversation started in this area could be:*

- Tell me more about who is taking you to the prom. Where exactly will you be before, after, and during the prom? What will you do if your date decides to drink and you become uncomfortable?
- Make sure your child has a way to reach you if he/she is concerned, and wants to come home early. Role-play, in advance, some sample refusal conversations that your child can use if he/she wants to assert himself/herself and not participate in risky behaviors.