

Prom Time Rite of Passage: Celebrate Safely

As the spring moves towards summer we are reminded once again about the danger connected to the school related celebrations and rites of passage including Prom.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the months of April through June are some of the most dangerous times of the year for teens with more than one third of fatal car crashes involving teens occurring during these months.

Automobile accidents are the number one cause of death for young people ages 12 to 19. Prom night can be a particularly dangerous time with so many teens on the road late at night. A survey conducted by Liberty Mutual found that only 20% of juniors and seniors believed being on the roads on prom night was dangerous.

According to the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) 75% of high school seniors said they have used alcohol even though the legal drinking age is 21. Twenty four (24%) of high school juniors and seniors engaged in binge drinking within the two week period prior to a survey by OASAS. 52% of those surveyed reported they got the alcohol from their parents or a friends parents. 28.5% of students say they have driven in a car with a drunk driver one or more times. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) reports that alcohol is responsible for 6000 teen deaths annually, more than all illicit drugs combined.

According to Automobile Association of America (AAA), 87% of teens reported their friends would be more likely to drive after drinking than to call home for a ride (especially if they thought they would get in trouble). Also concerning is approximately 19% of teens said they have ridden with someone who had been drinking rather than calling their parents to come and get them. Nearly 30% of teens know other peers who have received DUIs for impaired driving and 90% believe their classmates will likely drink and drive on prom night.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that approximately 1000 young persons, less than 21 years old, die every year in preventable tragedies while celebrating spring summer school rites of passage.

Data from MADD and Chrysler Group's Road Ready Teens program found that 74% of teens felt pressure from peers to use alcohol on prom night and 49% said their friends pressured them to try drugs as well. These statistics show the power of peer influence and how heavily it weighs on the life of a teen.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teens whose parents view underage drinking as unacceptable are 80% less likely to drink compared to peers whose parents are less strict. Clearly parents play an influential part in helping their teens make good decisions.

Another survey of 12,843 high school students, revealed 14% of girls reported having sex on prom night, and 5% of those girls and 3% of boys lost their virginity on prom night. Nearly 53% of those surveyed also reported consuming alcohol on prom night. When alcohol is present there is an increased likelihood of sexual assault as well as risk taking behavior including unsafe sex practices as inhibitions are lowered and sound judgment can be altered.

The following reminders can help keep teens safe on prom night.

- (1) Outline rules and expectations; no alcohol/drug use! Emphasize consequences.
- (2) Explain how a poor choice can impact future plans and shatter dreams.
- (3) Talk to your teens about the consequences of alcohol/drug use.
- (4) Highlight that bad decisions can have permanent, life altering effects.
- (5) Set a good example by being a role model.
- (6) Encourage your district administration to host an event and reward participation.
- (7) Support the alcohol free prom events being hosted by school districts in your area.
- (8) Reinforce individual, clear minded, informed choices and personal body boundaries

Make a pact with your children asking them to agree to never get in a vehicle if they or any other driver is under the influence of alcohol or any other drug. Tell them they can call you anytime from anywhere for a ride home and you will pick them up without any questions to help avoid a dangerous situation.

Suggest and agree to a code word (i.e. what did you make for dinner? did you do laundry? that means to come and pick them up so they will not be embarrassed talking in front of their friends. Praise this behavior when it occurs. We must all contribute in order to keep our young people safe and to help prevent alcohol related driving deaths.

Resources for parents and the community are available at: www.ncadd.org and www.theantidrug.com

For help with an alcohol/other drug problem call:

LECSA EAP at 631-851-1295

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