

Safe Holiday Tips for Middle and High School Parents

From Brookline Parent Education Network (B-PEN)

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The holiday season is a time for connecting with family and friends, and celebrations can contribute to increased alcohol and marijuana consumption. For teens on school vacation with time on their hands, it can lead to all kinds of substance use experimentation. Be aware -- Belmont students say that their number one source for obtaining alcohol and pills are from their parents' cabinets. And with the legalization of marijuana, adolescents also may be drawn to marijuana under the impression that it offers a safe high.

Recommendations to Keep Your Teen Safe

- Talk to your child about the dangers of alcohol and marijuana on the developing brain. Set clear expectations and consequences regarding substance use at any time.
- Model responsible consumption.
- Do not drive after using alcohol or marijuana. Even if you think you are "sober enough," this sends the message that driving impaired is OK under certain circumstances.
- Keep your substances in a secure location. 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, don't leave unsupervised alcohol where it is accessible to underage guests.
- When your child goes to gatherings at other houses, check with parents to make sure there is supervision.
- Do not relax your family rules with your own teens during the holidays -- it will be hard to revert back to previous expectations. Make sure older siblings don't facilitate underage use.
- REMEMBER: Underage marijuana use and serving alcohol to non-family members under the age of 21 are ILLEGAL.

Considerations for New Year's Eve

- 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 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. 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.
- As an alternative, make New Year's Eve a family night and attend one of the many "First Night" activities around town. You will be helping your child to change the association of New Year's Eve from that of an alcohol-related event to a city-wide cultural celebration.