

## *Talk It Up! Column*

Alcohol Safety Tips for Prom and Graduation

*Paige Schildkamp, Program Assistant*

*Orange Partnership for Alcohol and Drug Free Youth*

The birds are chirping, the flowers are blooming and spring is here! While there is so much to enjoy, during this warm weather, this is also a time that we need to be particularly careful about keeping our youth safe. As we approach the end of the school year, there are many upcoming celebratory events that may provide students an opening or opportunity to drink – events like prom, graduation and the impending summer break. So, in order to make sure these events stay safe and positive, here are some tips:

- **Make sure that you know who is driving your child.** Car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens and one out of four of those involve alcohol.
- **Know the itinerary.** Make sure that you know where your teen will be at any given time. This is particularly important regarding after-prom or post-graduation parties/events. Where will those be? Who will be there? Is there adult supervision? What are the transportation plans? Look into community options for safer celebration, like school sponsored post prom parties.
- **Keep in touch.** Establish how to contact each other ahead of time, make rules for keeping updated if there are any itinerary changes, and plan check-in times.
- **Talk to your teen!** Have an open discussion about the chance that alcohol may be present at prom and/or graduation. Reinforce that drinking is illegal and dangerous. Make your expectations about underage drinking clear. Empower them so that they are confident handling tricky situations.
- **Practice scenarios.** Try some role-play, or simply discuss, ways to handle different situations where alcohol is involved. For example, how to refuse if they are offered a drink or are facing getting into the car with an intoxicated driver.
- **Have a plan for just in case!** What should your teen do if they find themselves in a risky situation and want to get out? Are they comfortable calling you to come get them? How will they be able to reach you? Perhaps create a text “code” they can use in case they are somewhere they cannot make a call. Save the number for a cab company or download an app like Uber or Lyft on their phone, so they have easy alternatives for transportation.
- **Know how it ends.** What is the curfew for the evening? At the end of the night, will your teen be coming home? If so, stay up and wait for them. If not, make sure you know their final destination and check in to make sure they get there.

Another important aspect is making sure everyone stays safe close to home as well! One of the most common places youth access alcohol is in their own home or the home of a friend. We often hear adults saying things like “Well, they’ll drink anyways, so better it be somewhere that I can supervise.” It is important to point out that this is a slippery slope of promoting and supporting an illegal activity. Don’t forget: providing alcohol to underage youth and/or allowing anyone underage to drink in your home is illegal. In fact, there are many liability risks for adults who provide alcohol, including criminal and civil charges. You could even be charged with child endangerment. There is significant scientific evidence that alcohol consumption underage results in a substantially increased risk of injury both short-term and

long-term: from falls, fights or car crashes to permanent damage to the brain and overall health. In addition, underage drinking significantly increases the chances that a person will develop an alcohol dependency later in life. As an adult aiding and abetting underage drinking, you could be held responsible for these consequences.

So, in order to avoid those substantial negative consequences, be aware of any alcohol that you have in your house – how much do you have and where is it? Keep track of that closely. Whether you plan on hosting any parties yourself or not, make sure that you have secured it all safely, like in a locked cabinet. If there are any older siblings or other people over 21 that will be home around this time, be sure to speak with them about not providing alcohol to teens. Finally, make sure to speak with any parents hosting an event your child will be at – know what their rules are and how they'll be supervising.

As we move into this exciting time of year, let's all make sure to pay attention to what our youth are seeing and drinking, so that we can all stay focused on celebrating!