



*Police Department
Westborough, Massachusetts*

*Alan R. Gordon
Police Chief
508-366-3060*



Open letter to parents of Westborough Students

Dear Parents:

Between graduation parties, end-of-school celebrations, and summer gatherings, your teen's calendar is likely to be full of festive events this month. You and your teen might be planning a party of your own. You may have mulled over many of the party-planning details, but have you thought about what might happen if you allow alcohol and drugs at your event? Even if you don't buy alcohol for your teen's party, youth may still get it from your home or from a sibling or friend who is over the age of 21.

Some parents believe that it's safer for their teens to drink at home than to drink anywhere else. Other adults, including some parents, mistakenly think that underage drinking is part of growing up. They may view it as a rite of passage—one that often follows a teen's high school graduation instead of his 21st birthday.

But new social host liability laws in States across the country are changing parents' minds as the responsibility for underage drinking moves from teens who consume alcohol to parents who provide it to teens. Under these laws, adults who serve or supply alcohol to persons under the age of 21 can be held liable if any of those underage persons are killed or injured. Adults also can be held responsible if teens who drink at their homes kill or injure another person. The laws vary from State to State, but parents who break these laws could be charged for medical bills and property damage and could be sued for emotional pain and suffering.

In addition to lawsuits, parents in an increasing number of States, including Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas, may find themselves subject to criminal prosecution for underage drinking by their teens and their teen's friends. In one case, a Pennsylvania parent was sentenced to a 1- to 4.5-year prison term for involuntary manslaughter after three teens died in a drunk-driving accident following a party the parent hosted. Although the parent did not buy the alcohol for the party, the parent did allow the teens to drink the alcohol that was present.

Parents may be held responsible even if they're not home when underage drinking occurs. They also may be held responsible if underage drinking takes place anywhere on their property. Social host liability laws often extend to parents who fail to take sufficient measures to prevent underage drinking in their homes. You might think twice about leaving your teen home alone during a weekend.

The good news is that more teens are enjoying alcohol- and drug-free parties. School systems, parents, community groups, and faith-based organizations often host events without alcohol that provide parent supervision, food, games, and prizes. Teens are turning out in high numbers to these parties, keeping themselves and their parents safe.

Suggestions to parents for monitoring house parties:

- Limit attendance at the parties to your children's friends that you know
- Do periodic walk through's to ensure that nothing illegal is taking place
- Only allow non alcoholic beverages that you supply to be consumed
- Do not allow guests to make trips to their parked cars
- Monitor the outside of your house

- Check all backpacks to ensure no alcohol is being brought in
- If alcohol is found, do not allow the youth to leave, call their parent

Being a parent is by far the most challenging responsibility that a person will face. Children need guidelines which ensure their safety along with preparing them for the future. Giving in to their demands to be treated as an adult may endear you to them, but it will ultimately lead to bad decisions and a possible criminal record which will be with them for the rest of their lives. Being your child's friend rather than their parent is not being responsible.

As we all of have read about in the last couple of weeks, accidents do occur as a result of bad decisions made by youths after drinking, in particular in Saugus where an elderly woman was killed and her daughter injured at the hands of a high school senior who had been drinking. This high school senior will have to live with the knowledge that he made the choice to drink and drive. He made the wrong decision and will now pay the consequences.

I look forward to working with our parents to ensure that our children will be safe. Please support Project Graduation and the Safe Homes Network.

Sincerely,

Chief Alan R. Gordon

Sources: Philadelphia Inquirer March 31, 2003, Putting pressure on parents who let teens drink at home.