



## TALKING ABOUT PROM

# WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PROM (AND THE AFTER PARTY)

## A PARENT ACTION PACK RESOURCE



### **Prom is a special time in many teens' lives.**

It's a time for celebrating the end of high school and the beginning of a more independent stage of life. Teens see drinking as both a symbol of their increased independence and a way to heighten the celebration.

Although most teens are under age when they graduate high school, teens who have already begun to use alcohol may decide to drink more than usual on this occasion. Others who have not started to drink may decide this is the time for their first drinking experience.

### **Prom is a time when teens plan to drink more and drink more than they plan. Both situations present increased dangers for teens and their friends.**

### **Talk about safer partying with your teen.**

You know the risks for over-drinking at teen parties – alcohol poisoning (both for teens who are familiar with drinking and those who are new to it), sexual assault, social media posts that range from embarrassing to horrifying, drinking and driving. Go over these risks once again with your teen.

Remind them that:

- Vomiting is a sign of alcohol poisoning. It's a clear message to stop drinking. Check with your teen how they would respond if they saw the signs of alcohol poisoning in someone else at the party.
- Separating from their good friends or the group in any way is an added risk for personal safety.
- Sex and drinking can spell trouble – in terms of consent and consequences.
- **Any other drug** – including marijuana and high caffeine energy drinks – in combination with alcohol increases the danger greatly.
- **Any driving at all** – in any kind of vehicle – should not happen under any circumstance.

## Where is the risk?

Not so much at school-sanctioned events. Many schools have experienced problems at their school's prom event in the past, and in response most schools work with their own or the prom venue's personnel to ensure a safe and alcohol-free event. Because schools are keen to avoid problems, many have security who can recognize and turn away guests who arrive under the influence of alcohol.

## It's the after party where problems occur.

Many teens see the school prom as just the beginning of the celebration. With friends, they plan an informal party to be held after the actual prom where they can change out of their prom clothes and be free from adult supervision. The venue can be a hotel, someone's home or cottage, a campground or field. Alcohol is typically present and the party atmosphere, along with the presence of drinking friends, the buzz from the prom and the lack of restrictions blend together to make a scene that is ripe for unrestrained behaviour, poor decisions and harmful consequences.

Some communities work hard to create a "safer grad" after prom party. With the participation of the graduating class, they hold an alcohol-free party where teens have decided they can let loose, have fun and party all night long without the dangers of party drinking. This option represents the safest choice for celebrating, but isn't available in all communities.

## Less is better, none is best.

[Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#) suggest that teens delay their drinking, but if they do drink, limit their intake to two drinks on one occasion. For many teens at an after party this may seem like an unrealistic limit, but the evidence is that *their risk increases with every drink they take*. **Ask your teen what steps they could take to set a limit for themselves and how they would stick to it.**

### Together, make a safety plan that respects your teen's need for independence.

Ask your teen what they think is the best way of approaching their prom night to keep themselves safe. But remember, teens may not appreciate the extent of the risk or may want to minimize the potential dangers to keep you from worrying or interfering. So the next option is simply to present your bottom line for bringing your teen home safely. For example,

- Be available the night of the prom – including the after party. That can be all night long!
- Know where the party will take place.
- Agree on how long they can stay at the party. Remind them that they can leave the party if at any time they feel uncomfortable or things start to get out of hand.
- Ask your teen to identify their friendship safety net – and have *your* phone number on at least two friend's cell phones. This option may seem more comfortable for your teen than giving you their friends' mobile contact info.
- Emphasize that you will be available – for any reason – to pick them and their friends up at any point in the party.
- Make arrangements for how they will get home without depending on a drive from any friend at the party – whether you or another parent will pick them up or if they will take money for a taxi ride home. If they end up taking an unplanned taxi ride, let them know that you are willing to pay for the cab at the door.
- If your teen arrives home drunk, check on them as they sleep them off.

Helping your teen decrease their risks is the first step to keeping all teens safe!

**This year, let's have all teens enjoy a safe and happy prom night.**