

What you don't know about hosting under-age parties can really hurt you.

Unity Chemical Dependency Parent Resources

The following information was presented by Deputy Dan Lyon, Crime Prevention Deputy, Monroe County Office of the Sheriff

PLANNING A SAFE PARTY FOR TEENS

Parties are a great part of life. And many parents are happy to host a graduation or after-party for their teens. But here's the problem:

According to the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, many parents don't understand the tough laws and liabilities that apply when anyone under age 21 drinks alcohol or uses drugs in their homes.

Arrests...jail time...expensive legal costs and fines...catastrophic lawsuits that can cost you your home and virtually everything else you own...even the loss of your homeowners insurance...

These are all risks of under-age drinking and illegal drug use in your home. And guess what? You will be exposed to all of these terrible risks even if you're not home and you don't know what's going on. If underage drinking or illegal drug use takes place in your home, you're responsible for everything that happens as a result — whether you know about it or not.

A QUICK GUIDE TO SOCIAL HOSTING LAWS.

Here's a quick run-down of the things you need to know about "social hosting laws" in New York State. They are important to consider when planning or hosting a party.

- It is illegal to allow anyone under the age of 21 to drink alcohol in your home.
- If teenagers under the legal age drink or use drugs in your home—*with or without your permission*—you are legally responsible for their actions even after they leave your home.
- You can be arrested and charged with two misdemeanors for "hosting" a party where underage drinking or illegal drug use takes place:
 - Unlawful dealing with a child
 - Endangering the welfare of a child

- Your children can also be arrested—and potentially sent to jail—for the misdemeanor crime of “unlawful dealing with a child” if a person under the age of 21 gets into trouble after drinking or using drugs in your home.
- Applications for colleges and jobs typically include the following question: “Have you ever been arrested?” If your child has been convicted of a misdemeanor, he or she will be obligated to answer “yes.”
- You are legally responsible for your child’s actions until they are 21. However, if a child over 21 is in your home providing alcohol or illegal drugs to people under the legal drinking age, you as the homeowner are still responsible for any problems that result.
- If someone is injured on your property as a result of underage drinking or illegal drug use, you could be sued and your homeowners insurance will not protect you. In fact, you may lose your homeowner’s coverage.
- If an underage teen drinks or uses illegal drugs in your home and afterwards is injured, causes an injury to someone else, or damages someone’s property, you will be legally responsible. As a result, you will run a high risk of being sued, in which case you could lose almost everything you own, including your home.

And remember. You will be responsible for what happens even if the party takes place without your permission or awareness – even if you aren’t home at the time.

WHAT CAN A CONCERNED PARENT DO?

Here are some tips from law enforcement officials, chemical dependency experts, and other parents.

1. Make it clear to your children – and your children’s friends – that you don’t approve of illegal drug use or under-age drinking and you don’t allow it in your home.
2. Be home whenever there’s a party on your property. And make sure you’re on duty as a supervising parent.
3. If you drink alcohol, make sure your wine, beer, and liquor supplies can’t be accessed or stolen by under-age people.
4. Talk to other parents to make sure that alcohol and illegal drugs are not available at parties in their homes.
5. Talk to your children about the laws and liabilities that put you at serious risk if one of their friends drinks or uses drugs in your home.
6. If anyone under the age of 21 brings alcohol or illegal drugs to your home when you’re away, convince your child to tell him or her to leave immediately.

7. If a party at your house gets out of control and you or your child can't stop it, call 911 right away. In most cases, the party will be broken up without any arrests.

But here's something to keep in mind. If a neighbor calls 911 to complain about a party at your house, you, your child, and any under-age guests who are drinking could all be arrested. In fact, every year the Monroe County Sheriff's Office arrests a number of parents for hosting parties where illegal drinking and drug use take place.

8. Keep the lines of communication open with your children about drug and alcohol abuse. In an age when almost every teen knows someone who's abusing alcohol or drugs, good communication between parents and children may be the most important preventive measure of all.

This information is based on a presentation by Deputy Dan Lyon, Crime Prevention Deputy with the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. The presentation was given at a Prom and Graduation Safety Workshop on May 9th, 2007. The workshop was hosted by Unity Chemical Dependency and The Eastside Family YMCA.

For more information on the social hosting laws in New York State, visit www.nydas.org/parentswhohost. For more resources for parents and information on treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, go to www.unityhealth.org