

## YOUNG PEOPLE

ParentLink guides use 'he' and 'she' in turn. Change to suit your child's sex.

**Adolescence is a time for young people to learn the personal and social skills they need as they become adults. Having parties, being invited to parties and going to parties are very important events in a young person's life. Not only are they fun, parties and social gatherings play a part in helping them develop new skills with their peers. Most young people look forward to parties with great anticipation and excitement, but it is also very common for young people to feel nervous and not confident about socialising. When young people want to have a party or attend someone else's, most parents worry about what can go wrong!**

**Parties provide an opportunity for teenagers to learn social skills, make new friends and have fun. It is also an opportunity for parents to meet their children's friends and mark milestones in a special way.**

## Why are parties important?

Parties are occasions for people to socialise and share in the human need for interaction with others. Often parties are the celebration of an event in someone's life; an important part of all cultures is to celebrate such milestones. The milestone may be a birthday, moving house, a graduation, or anything that we want others to share in.

Just as we all have different ways of enjoying ourselves at parties, young people will have their own way of having fun. This will depend on their unique personality, their age, friends, interests, what sort of party it is, and the amount of supervision and freedom that parents or other adults provide.

As well as being fun for young people, parties can be:

- an opportunity to share and make new friends
- about strengthening friendships and being accepted by a peer group
- an opportunity to show off friends to their family
- an opportunity to learn the skills of planning and entertaining.

For parents, parties can be an opportunity to see their children growing up and interacting with others as they become independent adults.

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## Having a party

Supervision of parties by responsible adults is necessary, even though young people may not want this. You may decide to host a party for your child either at home or at a venue. Whether the party is in your home or in a venue, you have a responsibility to ensure the supervision and safety of those attending.

This guide is written for parties held at home where the full responsibility for safety of guests rests with you. If hiring a venue, make sure you have a written agreement which outlines your responsibilities and those of the venue. Ensure you understand the terms of the agreement before you sign and that things such as safety of guests and public liability in and around the property are stated clearly.

### Safety and supervision

- As a parent holding the party, you have a legal 'duty of care' to ensure the safety of those who attend. This responsibility can also include guests who may be hanging around near the party. There may be legal consequences if you breach your duty of care, for example, if someone is hurt you may be held legally and financially responsible for their injury.
- Uninvited guests (gatecrashers) are becoming more common. It's a good idea to ask other responsible adults for assistance on the evening. As a safety precaution some parents notify the police of the date and address of the party in advance just in case something goes wrong. Some parents hire a person from a security company with expertise in managing crowds as this can be a deterrent to uninvited guests.
- Discourage the use of Internet and SMS text messages on mobile phones to invite people.



## Party planning

- Work out the 'ground rules' with your son or daughter before the party is announced. This will need both of you to communicate calmly and clearly. It might be good to make a list of all the things you agree on. Remember that even though some points may be hotly debated, at the end of the day you are legally responsible to ensure the safety of all people at the party.
- Agree on these things together:
  - how many friends will come
  - how invitations will be sent (for example written, phone, email). Written invitations are a good way of letting people know what you expect, for example, whether the party will have a theme, dress code, special occasion, whether alcohol will be provided or allowed, time the party will start and end, how to RSVP. They can also be shown by guests to gain entry to the party
  - how loud the music can be and what time it's turned off
  - budget limits
  - what food to have—remember, salty nuts, chips and crackers make people thirsty
  - what activities you will have. activities such as a pool table, jukebox, dancing, karaoke, sports activities or competitions can take the focus off drinking
  - whether to have alcohol, how to control the amount, and the things you might need to do as the adult responsible for party safety
  - what about smoking, for example, inside and/or outside the home, or not at all
  - how to respond if drugs are used
  - what to do if someone gets sick or drunk
  - whether some rooms in the house, including bedrooms are off limits
  - what to do if gatecrashers come
  - how will guests get home
  - who will clean up after the party (expect your young person to help prepare and clean up)
  - how he (or you) will make the ground rules known to the guests.
- Be clear with him about what you expect, but don't be too heavy handed and take the fun out of it.
- Talk to other parents about tips they have learned from their young people's parties.
- Advise the neighbours about the party. Some families do a letterbox drop in the street or block the week before and provide a number for them to call if they have a complaint on the night.
- Find out from ACT Police about noise regulations and inform them on the type of party it is, start and finish times, whether alcohol is being served, number of guests, and contact details for the responsible adult.

- Ensure the venue is suitable for the number of guests, for example, there is sufficient lighting in the area to ensure safety and that you have sufficient bathroom facilities.
- Ensure that you can restrict access to where the party is being held.
- Check with the insurer of your property (or hired venue) the extent of insurance coverage.
- Parents' phone numbers may be helpful, for example, if a young person is drunk or there is a mishap.
- Have spare bedding ready.

## At the party

- Have only one entrance to the party.
- Make sure vehicle access is blocked, but also ensure there is a safe exit if needed in an emergency.
- Have a responsible adult at the entrance to ensure people arriving have been invited.
- Ensure all adults supervising are aware of what to do in an emergency and have emergency numbers on them, as well as how to deal with an intoxicated guest.
- Don't drink or use drugs yourself.

## Alcohol-free party

- If you have an alcohol-free agreement and you discover young people drinking, be prepared to tackle this.
- You are responsible for their safety in your home and their parents expect it of you. It can be difficult and embarrassing for your young person, but it's important to remind them that this was not agreed to.
- Remove the alcohol and tell them you will take care of it while they are in your home.
- You can be held legally and financially responsible if you return alcohol to a young person who consumes it after leaving you and then gets into trouble.
- Keep an eye on what is happening without being obvious.
- Check on areas of the house which have been agreed are 'restricted'.
- Occasionally check the garden and boundaries, ensuring gates and side entries remain secure.
- Ensure guests stay on the property, encourage them to not gather at the front of the house.
- Consider having a 'chill' part of the house in case someone needs space.
- Every so often check with your young person that everything is okay.
- Refuse gatecrashers. Phone police if you can see a problem brewing before it gets out of hand.
- Encourage guests to leave at the agreed time by turning lights on and music down a half hour before the party is due to end.

## If you allow alcohol

- Make this clear to parents beforehand.
- Ensure young people under 18 years (minors) don't take alcohol from the party to drink somewhere else. If you know they are doing this you could be held responsible if anything happens. Whilst they can legally consume alcohol on private premises under adult supervision, it is against the law for them to drink alcohol in any public place (for example on the footpath, near their cars or in a nearby park).
- Make sure food is easily available. While food slows the passage of alcohol into the bloodstream, it doesn't stop people getting drunk.
- Encourage friends to look after each other.
- Only time will sober up guests if they are drunk.
- Suggest drivers give you their keys when they arrive. A person on P plates who has been drinking should not be driving.

## Control how much alcohol is consumed

If you provide the alcohol yourself you have more control, but be ready for people 'smuggling in' extra.

- Have a responsible adult serving the alcohol.
- Use small plastic glasses and discourage stubbies and cans.
- Don't let people 'top up' glasses—this makes it hard to keep track of how much alcohol is being drunk.
- Don't supply drinks with a high alcohol content.
- Provide light alcohol options.
- Supply alternatives to alcohol, including water.
- Serve non-carbonated drinks (juices or water) as 'spacers'.

## When your young person is going to a party

### Some things you might want to do

- Speak to the parents beforehand to check who will be supervising the party.
- Be aware of the start and finish times.
- Ask the parents if there will be alcohol at the party.
- Decide whether you think it is okay for your young person to attend. If you believe it is not suitable for her to attend, be calm and clear about your reasons. Her safety and wellbeing is your responsibility.

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- Decide on transport arrangements:
  - will you or another responsible adult take her and bring her home?
  - are you happy to let her go in a car with a friend on P plates?
  - is there a designated driver?
  - what if this person drinks?
  - does she have a 'fall-back' position in an emergency, for example, taxi money or a phone number if you won't be at home?
  - will she be staying overnight and how will she get home next day?
- Going to the door when you drop your young person off can sometimes embarrass her. However, you may need to if you are not sure whether the parents will be home. Don't be afraid to go to the door when you pick her up. You get to meet the parents who may become friends.
- Discuss a time when you expect her to be home. Don't be too different from what other parents decide and talk it over with them if you feel unsure.
- Find out what videos or DVDs will be shown at the party. Young people love thrills and suspense but R and X rated movies (and some M rated ones) are not appropriate for young people and may be very disturbing. You may have to make another unpopular decision!
- Remind them about being safe, such as not drinking and driving and not being alone in dangerous situations.
- Make sure you are both clear about the rules and the consequences if these are broken. Stand by these so that you are being consistent.

### Some things your young person could expect to do

If you think the party is okay, let him:

- Decide whether he wants to go or not.
- Decide what he will wear.
- Have a say in what time he will come home.
- Decide whether he goes with a friend because it is sometimes difficult for teenagers to go into parties alone.
- Having a friend over to get ready together or even having a friend sleep over after the party can be half the fun.
- Choose and buy a birthday present himself. These responsibilities can gradually be taken over by him because eventually he will be making all his own decisions in life.
- Tell you of changes in plans such as homecoming time. Parents have the right to know their young person's whereabouts and not to be worried.

## Some things worth knowing

- Supervision of teenage parties by responsible adults is necessary.
- Parents holding the party are responsible for the safety of those who attend their teenager's party. This responsibility can also stretch to include guests who may be hanging around near the party and even after the party. There may be legal consequences if you have breached your legal duty of care, for example, if someone is hurt you may be liable for their injury.
- It is unwise for parents to supply alcohol to teenagers in their home in view of the potential for harm to young people.
- If alcohol is provided consumption should be closely supervised.
- If you as a parent choose to supply the alcohol at a party, you **may** have greater control over the amount and the type of drink that's available. You **may also** have a greater chance to prevent the risk of individuals excessively drinking.
- Remember that alcohol can have unpredictable effects on teenagers and their health and safety could be severely compromised.
- Teenagers under 18 years (minors) should not be allowed to take alcohol from the party to drink somewhere else. If you know that this is happening you could be held liable.
- It is against the law for young people under the age of 18 to drink alcohol in any public place even with a parent or guardian. Charges could be laid against the parents and the teenagers.
- **If you intend to allow alcohol at a party make sure that the other parents know.** Do not make this decision lightly.
- Liquor licensing laws will apply where there is buying and selling of the liquor or there is payment of money to be able to attend the party and drink.
- Contact the Legal Advice and Information Line 1300 654 314 for more information.

### Remember

- First and foremost you have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for your teenager's party.
- It is recommended that parents are aware of the Australian Alcohol Guidelines in relation to children and young people under 18 years of age as released in February 2009: [www.alcohol.gov.au](http://www.alcohol.gov.au)
  - A. To prevent risk of harm from alcohol for young people under the age of 18 years not drinking is the safest option.
  - B. Parents and carers should be advised that children under 15 years old are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and it is very important that they do not drink alcohol.
  - C. Young people aged 15 to 17 should delay their first drink for as long as possible.

## Reminders

- Helping your young person plan for a party can be fun.
- The more thought and preparation that goes into the planning the more smoothly it is likely to go.
- Some young people are nervous about going to parties and others are nervous about having them—this is all very normal.
- Half of the fun of a party is getting ready for it and talking about it afterwards.
- You have a legal responsibility to provide a safe environment for your young person's party.
- Think very carefully about providing or allowing alcohol.
- Ensure you understand your legal responsibilities.
- Let your young person go to parties, but do your homework first.
- Stand firm if you believe there are good reasons why they should not go to a party.
- Be clear about what's okay and what's not okay.
- Talk to other parents. They are often feeling the same as you and may have tips that help.

## Contacts

<b>ACT Health Alcohol and Drug Program</b>	24-hour	6207 9977
<b>Directions ACT</b>	9am–5pm, Monday–Friday, except public hols	6122 8000
	After hours	6253 3055
<b>healthdirect Australia</b> (staffed by registered nurses)	24-hour	1800 022 222
<b>Kids Help Line</b>	24-hour	1800 55 1800
<b>Legal Advice Information Line</b>	9am–4pm weekdays	1300 654 314
<b>Police</b>	24-hour, for attendance	13 14 44

## Websites

<b><a href="http://www.adf.org.au">www.adf.org.au</a></b>	Australian Drug Foundation provides alcohol and other drug information, publications, research and fact sheets for parents, young people, health professionals
<b><a href="http://www.alcohol.gov.au">www.alcohol.gov.au</a></b>	Australian Alcohol Guidelines
<b><a href="http://www.australia.gov.au/drinkingnightmare">www.australia.gov.au/drinkingnightmare</a></b>	Information on safe partying
<b><a href="http://www.cyh.com">www.cyh.com</a></b>	Parenting and child health information
<b><a href="http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au">www.parentlink.act.gov.au</a></b>	Other parenting guides

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