



Posted: Saturday, May 16, 2015 9:46 pm

Keeping celebrations safe for teens

Dear community member:

It's spring, and we're entering a season of celebration for our high school students. Although it may seem like the end of an era, it is really the beginning of many celebrations of life and a major milestone for our youth.

Unfortunately, youth often equate celebration with alcohol use. The Woods County Coalition is taking this opportunity to give parents and others a call to action to help eliminate underage drinking along with its all too common devastating consequences. Unlike a video game, there is no "restart" when someone is injured or killed due to underage drinking. Those consequences are permanent.

According to the 2012 Oklahoma Prevention Needs Assessment Survey in Woods County, 64.9 percent of 10th graders and 80.8 percent of 12th graders said they have had more than just a few sips of beer and/or alcohol in their lifetime.

Of those youth, 35 percent of 10th graders and 95 percent of 12th graders reported that they got it from someone 21 or older. Sixty percent of 10th graders and 88 percent of 12th graders got it at a friend's house.

Parents and other adults often allow a place for youth to drink as a means to prevent drinking and driving. However, there are other risks often associated with underage drinking too:

- Unplanned and unprotected sex
- Violence
- Sexual assaults
- Compromised reputations
- Other drug use
- Overdose

Additionally, it is against the law to knowingly host an underage drinking party. The Oklahoma Social Host Law holds the host accountable whether or not they provided the alcohol or are a minor themselves (www.oklahomasocialhost.com).

Parents are one of the most effective deterrents to prevent underage drinking. It is important for parents to talk to their kids about underage drinking. We have provided some information for parents to use when talking to their child about alcohol use:

- **Reinforce Your Expectations:** Set rules and consequences. Be clear – drinking or drug use is unacceptable. Being an upperclassman has privileges, but it also has responsibilities.
- **Encourage Your Teen to Make Each Moment Count:** Your teens may not understand that bad choices may cause them to miss out on future opportunities. The longer a teen waits to have that first drink of beer or alcohol, the less likely he or she will have alcohol-related issues in the future. Encourage your teen to wait until he or she is 21 to drink. A human's brain doesn't fully develop until the age of 25 and alcohol use before that can have a significant impact on that development. Scholarships, grants and other perks may be lost by getting a MIP (Minor in Possession) or other related charges.
- **Provide Safe Alternatives:** Plan chaperoned alcohol-free parties. Talk to other parents to assure they are not providing a place for youth to drink. Many people turn the other cheek to underage drinking thinking it's not their business until they have to attend a teenager's funeral – a tragedy that can be prevented.
- **Give Your Teen An Out:** Let them blame you if they need to leave a party. Make sure they know they can call or text you to ask for a ride home. Some families have a secret code they use during a call or text so the teen doesn't have to ask outright for a ride if in an uncomfortable situation or in front of their peers. For example, Jenny is uncomfortable at a party and sends the text "I'm at Jane's," or more likely, "I'm @ Janes" to her Mom. Her mom calls her immediately and tells her that she has to come home. Mom is the "bad guy" and Jenny is safe.

“At this time of year, underage drinking is a major problem. I urge students to rise above underage drinking and tobacco use while encouraging their peers to do the same,” said Kally Gordon, senior and SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) president.

As community members, we are asking you to help us create a climate of celebration that is safe and memorable for our high school students.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Members of the Woods County Coalition

If you'd like to become a member of the coalition, please join us on the last Monday of the month at 12pm at the First United Methodist Church (626 College Ave) in Alva. Please note: Due to the Memorial Day Holiday, the May meeting will be on May 18th.