



Asking the difficult questions

It was the spring of my daughter's junior year in high school and she was invited to a party. We had a rule that I would need to call the parents and check things out. Of course, my daughter hated this. Time after time I had to explain that I did this because I did not trust the situation, not because I did not trust her. I stressed that I was only acting as a responsible parent interested in her safety and happiness.

Much to her dismay, I did what I always did—I called the parents. I introduced myself, asked if they were aware of the party and shared that I did not approve of alcohol or drug use for my daughter. I avoided one question: Will you be allowing the use of alcohol or drugs at this party? I felt uneasy and embarrassed asking the question, and thought surely if they knew my stance on the subject, that was enough. I was wrong.

When the teens arrived at the party, the parents passed around a basket to gather up all of the car keys. They then opened up the wet bar and tapped a keg of beer. At that point, the parents went upstairs and did not come back down until the next morning. I slept very well that night because my daughter had openly told me that she was sleeping over. She didn't tell me that *everyone* was sleeping over.

The teens had a great time, got totally wasted, and thought these were the coolest parents ever.

When I found out what had happened, I was furious at the parents, my daughter and myself.

What right did these parents have to make decisions about the health and safety of my or anyone else's child? What if someone had an extra set of keys and the teens had gone driving around? What if one of the party-goers had died from alcohol poisoning? And weren't the parents concerned about legal ramifications?

My trust in my daughter was seriously damaged and, trust me, my heated conversation with the parents was not nearly as pleasant as it might have been if I had initially asked that one simple question.

As for myself, why had I felt nervous or embarrassed about asking this question? Part of it was probably because I wanted my teen to fit in and not be ostracized for my actions. At some level, I also wanted to fit in and not be thought of as a prude or teetotaler.

I realize now that many parents are dealing with these same issues. The more we encourage each other to ask the hard questions, the safer our youth will be. We can affect change by making adults responsible for their actions.

I vowed to never be afraid to ask the hard questions again. To make it easier, I wrote myself a simple script that I now use when asking a parent about party plans. It goes like this:

- 1. Are you aware of a party at your house on (name the day)?**
- 2. Who will be chaperoning the party?** (You might offer to help chaperone if help is needed.)
- 3. Will you be allowing alcohol or drugs at the party?** (Be prepared for mixed reactions. Be alert as you wait for the answer, you may need to repeat the question.)

► If the response is "Of course not!", say, "Oh, I didn't think so but, as a parent, I needed to ask."

► If he or she answers affirmatively, thank the parent for his or her time, and let your teen know that you won't allow him or her to attend. Offer other ideas or alternative activities.

4. What will you do if you discover alcohol or drugs at the party?

(You are hoping the parent has thought about this and has a plan.)

5. If you discover alcohol or drugs, will you call me?

I know these questions are not the solution to all problems related to adults providing alcohol to teens. A parent willing to provide alcohol to teens may also be willing to lie about it, or teens may end up at parties that their parents did not even know about.

Even so, these are important questions that need to be asked whenever possible. These questions remind other adults that it is not okay to provide alcohol to teens, and they also serve to let other parents know that they are not alone in concerns they may have about this issue.

I was lucky, my daughter didn't suffer serious consequences as a result of being served alcohol. Make sure that your child does not either. Don't be afraid to ask questions and stand by your convictions. You and your teen deserve it!

Written by a parent who wishes to remain anonymous.