

## HELP TEENS ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS WITHOUT ALCOHOL

Sadly, our culture promotes drinking as a way to celebrate Christmas, New Year's Eve, and other holidays. For example, you cannot find an advertisement or movie about New Year's Eve that doesn't include champagne glasses. Unfortunately, as our teens get older, they want to imitate what they see as the "fun way" to celebrate. Drinking alcohol is always a concern for a parent of a teen, but New Year's Eve and other holiday parties bring that concern to a whole new level. Parents need to plan in advance to keep their teens safe.



Here are 5 ways you can help keep your teen safe during the holidays:

**Host a holiday party at your house with NO alcohol.** It is not that difficult or expensive to throw a fun teen party. Offer lots of snack foods. Buy silly decorations, noisemakers and hats. Let your teen make a music playlist to play all night and plan party games. Make sure your TV is tuned in to a holiday movie or the popular "ball drop" shows for the new year. Let your teen decorate the party room, for example, they could string your Christmas lights all over the walls and scatter balloons around the room.

**Research community events.** Check with your nearest visitor's bureau. Many museums, skating rinks, bowling alleys, and youth centers hold holiday parties for teens. Many towns offer a First Night celebration or fireworks, so offer to take your teen and their friends.

**If they go out, get the details.** Make sure your teen gives you their complete itinerary for the evening, including whom they will be with and where they will be going. Establish a mandatory check-in during the night, such as a text when they arrive at a certain location. Come to a fair decision on a curfew, based upon your teen's past level of responsibility. Know who is driving. Encourage them to go to a specific location and stay put to avoid drunk drivers on the roads. Give your teen the unconditional option of calling you at any time for help or advice. That includes picking them up at any time of day or night, with a promise not to shame or humiliate them in front of others.

**Communicate expectations.** The most important thing you can do to ensure your teen is safe is to talk about your expectations beforehand. You need to provide leadership, guidance and boundaries to your teens. Even if you think you have already talked about making healthy choices and the risks of drugs or sex, New Year's Eve is a very important time to repeat this message. Do not be vague! Directly discuss alcohol, drugs, driving impaired, and sex. Ask them how they plan to keep safe and avoid actions they will regret. Reinforce your belief in their character and in their ability to act responsibly.

**Role model.** Your teen mimics what they see. If your child sees you celebrating New Year's Eve by getting drunk, then they will assume that is the "right" way to celebrate regardless of what you say. If your child ever sees you drink alcohol somewhere and then get in the car to drive home, then they will assume that it's ok to drink and drive regardless of what you say. Actions truly do speak louder than words.

Source: <https://middleearthnj.org>