

MEREDITH LEVANDE: TROUBADOUR FOR KIDS

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(201) family

**PUTTING
THE THANKS
IN THANKSGIVING**

**TABLE
DRESSING**

**KIDS IN THE
KITCHEN**

**GIFTS
FOR
SPECIAL
KIDS**



party time

Protect yourself and your teens

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As parents, we all worry about our children. As the mother of two young girls, my worries at the moment are minimal – will they do their homework, do they get to sleep on time, are they eating their vegetables? However, as I have seen with my friends who are parents of teenagers and in my practice as a matrimonial and family law attorney, the kinds of things we worry about change and escalate as our children get older.

The teenage years are often the worst, as teens start to feel invincible and test the limits of the boundaries we have established. A common but risky scenario is when a teenager opts to throw a party when her parents are out of town. Drinking and drugs are often involved and can result in a parent's worst nightmare. What if someone is hurt and we as parents are held liable for anything that goes wrong?

I recently saw that happen firsthand in my law practice and felt compelled to write this essay as a wake-up call to parents. The case involved an unsupervised teen party where a 17-year-old tragically overdosed on drugs and has been declared incompetent. In addition to the horror that befell the unfortunate teen, many parents and teens were also held liable.

We as parents need to remember a case like that when we are thinking of leaving our teenagers home alone for an extended period of time. Even if you are home, if you do not supervise your teenage party and take the necessary precautions, you could be criminally charged and left open to civil suits as well.

So how do we protect our children and ourselves, the parents of these underage teens, while also allowing them to grow up and embrace their new freedoms as they slowly become adults? Here are some useful tips.

If you are not home:

Alert neighbors. If neighbors know the parents are away, they can check up on teens.

Inform the police. Police will make it a point to include your house in their nightly rounds.

Have your teen stay with friends.

If you are home:

Check bags when teens come in. A bottle of alcohol can be hidden easily.

Open bottles. Vodka can be disguised as water, whiskey can be disguised as apple juice and wine can be disguised as grape juice.

Monitor the party. Do not be intrusive, but check in on activities from time to time.

If your teen says the parents will be home at a party:

Call the home number and ask to speak to the parent of the teen holding the party.

Ask the parent if they will be home and supervising.

Ask if there will be alcohol served. If so, it is your responsibility to tell your teen he cannot go.

Your homeowner's policy:

If you are holding a party for your teen, check to see if you are covered if someone is injured in your home or if your home is vandalized or damaged. Policies differ, so check with your insurance company to be sure of coverage.

I wish my two girls could stay young forever. Unfortunately, they can't. Once they are teenagers, I will protect them using those tips, and I hope other parents do the same. If we do not protect our children, we are being irresponsible as parents and subjecting them and ourselves to a myriad of risks and potential liabilities. ❖



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