

# The Record

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## **Opinion: Perilous cocktail: teens, grads, parties**

By Silvana D. Raso

IT'S JUNE and graduation time for many high school seniors in New Jersey. It's a time to be thankful that your son or daughter completed those four tough years and hopefully, is about to enter the college of his or her choice.

While you sigh with relief that they have made it through school, you cringe with trepidation as your teenager wants to throw a party to celebrate or, perhaps worse, attend another graduation party where you are sure there will be alcohol or drugs available.

While teens often test the limits of the boundaries parents establish, this is one instance where the boundaries should be very clear both for you and your teen.

As an attorney, I have seen the consequences of what can go wrong at these parties. What if your teenager throws a party when you are out of town? Drinking and drugs may be involved and could result in a parent's worst nightmare.

Make no mistake about it – unless you want to face legal liability for the conduct of your teen or the conduct of someone else's child, under no circumstances should you allow a party to take place at your home unless you can supervise it adequately to make sure alcohol and drugs are not used.

### **A wake-up call**

A recent case my firm was involved in should serve as a wake-up call to parents and teens alike. The case involved an unsupervised teen party with drugs where a 17-year-old tragically overdosed and as a result of the injuries, he has been declared incompetent and is wheelchair-bound for life.

In addition to this horror for the teen, some of the partygoers were held liable for supplying the drugs, and then preventing the young man from getting medical help once he overdosed. What might surprise you is that a parent who was not present at the party was also liable for the young man's injuries because that parent failed to take adequate precautions to prevent the party from happening.

As parents, we need to keep cases like this in mind when we are thinking of leaving our teenagers home alone. Even if you are home, if you fail to take the necessary precautions to supervise your teenager's party, you could face civil and possibly criminal liability.

There are steps you can take to protect yourself and your children during this graduation party season.

If you are not home, alert your neighbors and the police to this fact and the fact that your teenager may be having a clandestine party in your absence. Both can check up on your teens, which will make it less likely for them to try anything knowing that someone is watching over their shoulder.

If there is any suspicious activity, neighbors can alert the police who have the power to stop anything that should not be going on.

If you still do not feel secure with this line of protection, have your teen stay with a family member or friends and block their access to your home with an alarm system that your teen cannot disarm.

If you are home and are supervising the party, be sure to be on constant alert for anyone trying to break the rules. When your teen's friends come to your house with bags, check the contents to make sure there is no alcohol. If there is, confiscate it.

### **Disguising abused substances**

Likewise, check any liquids and smell them to make sure the teens are not trying to disguise alcoholic beverages as something else. Even with these precautions, check up on the party from time to time to see if there is anything suspicious.

If the party is going on in the basement, alcohol can easily be snuck in through a basement window. If you maintain your presence at the party, this will likely not happen.

To protect your teens when they are going to a friend's party, call the parents of your teen's friend to confirm that they will be there and will supervise the party. You should also ask if alcohol is being served. If the parents will not be home or alcohol is being served, you should not allow your teen to attend the party.

Taking this stance may well cause you to butt heads with your pleading teenager. Remember, this is not always a matter of trust concerning your child; it is a matter of liability concerning all involved.

It's always easier to say yes to keep your teen happy. But if we don't look at the risks and protect our children, we are not doing our jobs as parents, and we are subjecting them and ourselves to many risks and liabilities.

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