

Play It Safe

Staff Reports
Westport News

Article Launched: 11/22/2006 05:12:35 PM EST

Teenagers attending three or more parties a month are at 2.5 times the risk for substance abuse compared to those who do not attend parties, according to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XI: Teens and Parents, which is conducted annually prior to the start of the new school year by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

The survey also revealed that teens who say parents are not present at the parties they attend are 16 times more likely to say alcohol is available, 15 times more likely to say illegal and prescription drugs are available and 29 times more likely to say marijuana is available, compared to teens who say parents are always present at the parties they attend.

"Teen drinking and drugging is a parent problem. Too many parents fail to fulfill their responsibility to chaperone their kids' parties. They have no idea how drug- and alcohol-infested their teens' world is," Joseph A. Califano Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, said in a release on CASA's Web site, www.casa.columbia.org. "The denial, self-delusion and lack of awareness of these parental palookas put their children at enormous risk of drinking and using illegal and prescription drugs."

Parents, according to the survey, are wearing blinders as to what their kids are doing. The survey found that:

80 percent of parents believe that neither alcohol nor marijuana is usually available at parties their teens attend. But 50 percent of teens attend parties where alcohol, drugs or both are available.

98 percent of parents say they are normally present during parties they allow their teens to have at home. But a third of teens report that parents are rarely or never present at the parties they attend.

99 percent of parents say they would not be willing to serve alcohol at their teen's party. But 28 percent of teens have been at parties at a home where parents were present and minors were drinking alcohol.

Only 12 percent of parents see drugs as their teen's greatest concern. But twice as many teens (27 percent) say drugs are their greatest concern.

"Parents need to wake up and smell the pot and beer," Califano said. "If your teen is having a party at your home, you should not only be there, but be aware of what is going on. And if your teen attends a party at someone else's home, confirm that the parents will be present and that alcohol and drugs will not. The reality is that even when parents are present at a party, some kids will try to sneak in substances."

The start of the holiday party season is the perfect time to remind adults that alcohol and teenagers don't mix and that a new state law went into effect on Oct. 1 to help them remember.

An Act Concerning Underage Drinking prohibits people in control of private property to allow minors to possess alcohol on such property and prohibits minors from possessing alcohol on private property, unless as otherwise authorized by law. Adults can face a fine of \$500, imprisonment or both. Minors can be fined up to \$500.

The new law gives law enforcement officers, who often are called to house parties for a variety of complaints, such as noise, a tool to help curtail underage drinking.

Parents are the keys to keeping teenagers from continuing destructive behaviors. The law, according to the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking, "makes it clear that adults cannot continue to allow this behavior to take place and empowers them to halt such activity if they see it happening on their own property."

Some people might say that the new law is an invasion of privacy. We disagree. If parents are not going to look out for their kids, someone must. "This new law sends a consistent message that underage drinking will not be tolerated, and both youth and adults will be held accountable for their roles in allowing underage drinking to occur. It also provides immediate reasonable consequences to the violators before a tragedy occurs."

Let's be safe, not sorry.