

Don't Give Kids Alcohol.

One bad decision about alcohol can change a life, or many lives, **FOREVER.**

IT'S NOT WORTH IT.

Don't give kids alcohol.

You will have to answer to yourself.

You will have to answer to parents.

You will have to answer to the courts.

You will have to answer with your wallet.

Don't give kids alcohol.

It's not worth it.

*As your children grow, **you** can affect their decisions if you have clear rules about not drinking alcohol.*

*Alcohol **can harm** their health and can cause significant financial, legal, and emotional costs to you and your children.*

*Alcohol **causes** immediate and long-term damage to the brain. Adolescents suffer the same negative effects as adults, even when they drink only half as much. (American Medical Association, 2003)*

What will it COST "YOU"?

1. Can I be sued if my child or a teenage guest at my home drinks alcohol and harms another person?

Yes. Under the principle of social host liability, you can be held financially responsible if your guest harms or kills another person after having consumed alcohol at your home.

2. Why should I be liable for the criminal or negligent acts of my guests? If my guest kills or injures someone in a drunk driving accident after drinking in my home, why should that be my problem?

If your guest was under 21 and you allowed him to consume alcohol, you committed a crime. Violation of a criminal statute is powerful evidence that you were negligent.

There is **no good reason** to allow anyone under 21 to drink alcohol. If your guest was an adult who was visibly impaired, you were negligent if you permitted him to drink alcohol at your home. There is no good reason to serve any impaired guest more alcohol.

3. One of my underage twins is in college and the other is in the military. What's wrong with serving alcohol to them and their friends in the safety of our home if their friends' parents give permission?

The legal drinking age in Massachusetts is “**21**”. It is against the law for you to serve alcohol to underage guests or to allow them to consume alcohol in your home. You could also be civilly liable for their acts if they injure or kill someone else after drinking at your home. Parents who gave permission for their underage child to drink alcohol could also be civilly liable.

4. I do not keep alcohol in my home and my child does not drink. If I allow her to have a party when I’m not home and she allows friends to bring alcohol and drink it, might she or I be liable for injuries her friends cause to another person?

Your child may be charged criminally for allowing minors to drink alcohol at your home. If you do not give permission to your child to allow drinking at your home, you might not be civilly liable. Even if you claim that you did not know your child’s guests would be drinking, it may still be up to a jury to decide whether you are civilly liable.

5. Will my insurance policy cover a judgment against me as a social host?

It might, but your coverage will most likely not be enough to pay the judgment. If you are also charged criminally, then it is possible that your policy will not cover the civil judgment.

6. If my guest caused the injury and we both get sued, why should I have to pay?

Under the principle of joint and several liability, if two or more parties are civilly liable, then any one of them may be required to pay the entire amount of the judgment. If an underage guest who drinks alcohol at your home injures or kills someone, you and that guest could be sued and found liable. You could be forced to pay the entire judgment if the underage guest cannot afford to pay. Recent judgments in these cases have been over **\$1,000,000.**

7. If someone gets a judgment against me as a social host and I later declare bankruptcy, will I have to pay it?

A drunk driver who is ordered to pay a civil judgment cannot avoid paying by declaring bankruptcy. It is possible a social host can avoid paying a civil judgment if he is bankrupt, but there is a growing trend to prevent this from happening.

**Stop.
Think.
DON’T DO IT.**

It can cost more than you think.

IT’S NOT WORTH IT.

Did you know...

- The legal drinking age in Massachusetts and every other state is 21. It is against the law to serve or provide alcohol to underage guests or to allow them to drink alcohol in your home or on other property you control. If you do, you may be prosecuted criminally. The penalty is a fine up to \$2,000, imprisonment for up to a year, or both. G.L. c.138, sec. 34.
- You may also be sued civilly. If you are sued civilly, a jury may decide whether you are liable and how much you will have to pay for injuries caused by your guests.
- You could be civilly liable if your child has a few friends over when you are not home, it develops into a drinking party, and a partygoer injures himself when fleeing after police arrive.
- Even if you win a criminal or civil lawsuit, it is an expensive process. Lawsuits can take years to conclude. They put a tremendous amount of strain on you and your family.

Important Facts

- Four out of ten youths who start drinking before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some point in their lives. (*Grant & Dawson, 1997*)
- Four out of ten middle school and high school students (ages 12-17) who drank alcohol in the past year had a serious problem related to drinking. (www.health.org/govpubs/RPO990) Incidents of sexual assault, date rape, motor vehicle accidents, drowning, and suicide can occur more commonly among these youths.
- 45% of 7th and 8th graders in Massachusetts said that it was easy to obtain alcohol. 78% of high school students reported that alcohol was easy to obtain. (*Massachusetts Youth Alcohol Prevention Task Force, May 2002*)
- Parents often don't know that four out of five teens have the opportunity to drink alcohol; only three out of five parents believe children have access to alcohol. (www.libertymutual.com/personal/teen/2001_executive_summary.html)
- On a typical weekend in the United States, an average of one teenager per hour dies in a car crash. More than 45% of these crashes involve alcohol. (MADD, 2002)
- If drinking is delayed until age 21, a child's risk of serious alcohol problems is decreased by 70%. (*Grant & Dawson, 1997*)

Resources

If you are worried about yourself, a friend or a family member who may be abusing alcohol or other drugs, please call for information and treatment options:

Massachusetts Substance Abuse
Information and Education Helpline
(800)327-5050
www.helpline-online.com

For more information on the prevention of alcohol and other drug use, go to:
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas

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