Skyline High School

We're fortunate that Skyline is full of good kids. But, teenage brains can still act on impulse, engage in risky behavior, and are less likely to think before they act.

What is Social Hosting? Important Information for Parents

As summer approaches, we wanted to remind you what social hosting is and what the risks are for engaging in "social hosting" as defined by state law. Please read on to see how the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board defines it. And for more resources, please visit their website here. It contains very clear information about the consequence of underage drinking for teens as well under "Teens and the Law." The damage alcohol does to the adolescent brain is also very clearly explained in the section called "The Teen Brain."

Social Hosting

We know underage drinking parties take place in communities throughout our state. It might begin innocently with a few friends getting together for Friday night movies and someone brings alcohol. It might be young college students home for summer vacation meeting friends, and an older sibling buys alcohol for them. Or it might be a party hosted by parents who have decided that it is safer to take away the keys and let young people party in their home.

In any case, what is not being considered is the wide range of harmful and sometimes devastating consequences that underage drinking can have. One need look no further than news articles in the past year to find real-life examples. Because we know that the large majority of underage drinkers get their alcohol from social sources (parents, siblings, friends, at parties, etc.), some states and local communities including Washington have taken steps to hold liable those persons who provide or serve alcohol to minors or allow drinking on their property.

What do we mean by "social hosting?"

Regarding commercial entities such as taverns, bars and restaurants, State laws create a "duty of care" to persons who may be affected by the establishment's sale of alcoholic beverages. For example, they may be held liable if a person becomes intoxicated, leaves their establishment, and injures a third party. Social host liability laws, by contrast, create responsibilities on the part of "social" hosts, such as homeowners, to persons affected by drinking on property that the host owns, leases, or otherwise controls. States vary in the level of responsibility placed on social hosts.

What does Washington law say?

RCW 66.44.270 states, "It is unlawful for any person to sell, give, or otherwise supply liquor to any person under the age of twenty-one years or permit any person under that age to consume liquor on his or her premises or on any premises under his or her control." The penalties include a fine of up to $5,000 and one year in jail. In addition to having this statutory obligation, a social host owes a "duty of reasonable care" to a minor to whom the hot furnishes alcohol. This means the host may be held liable if the minor is injured in any way. However, in Washington, a social host is not liable for merely permitting a minor to consume, on the hosts premises, alcohol that the host did not furnish.

What parents should know

When you host a party and allow underage drinking, you cannot predict the behavior of the teens who are drinking. Even if you take away the keys, alcohol poisoning, fighting, risky sexual behavior, sexual assaults, and other harmful situations may occur. There are countless stories of tragedies that have taken place when young people were allowed to drink in what the adults felt was a “safe” environment.

In addition, you are sending the message to young people that underage drinking and breaking the law are okay. If it is okay to drink at their friend’s house with adults present, then why wouldn’t it be okay to drink elsewhere? And if it is okay to break this law because it is unreasonable, then what other laws can be broken?

What you can do

The best thing you can do for your son or daughter is to draw the line on underage drinking.

- Know where your child is and have them check in regularly.
- Do not allow underage drinking parties in your home. Do not supply alcohol to anyone under 21.
- Talk to your adult children about not providing alcohol to their underage siblings and friends.
- Be at home when your teen has a party.
- Drop into the party occasionally to make sure alcohol is not brought in by others.
- If you are going to be away overnight, have a relative or neighbor check on your teen, or have the teen spend the night at a friend or relative’s home with adult supervision present.
- Talk to other parents to make sure they are not providing alcohol to your child. (The Washington State Parent Teacher Association has a Parent Pledge program that facilitates communication among parents and encourages the signing of a pledge to try and make sure gatherings are alcohol and drug free.)
- Provide alcohol-free activities in your home and make your child’s friends feel welcome.

Report underage drinking violations to local law enforcement.

Local social host ordinances

Many communities across the country are implementing local social host ordinances to send a clear message that parents and other property owners need to be proactive in preventing minors from drinking alcohol on their property. These ordinances allow those who control the property to be cited without having to prove that they provided or “allowed” the drinking to occur. Local ordinances can be tailored to the needs of the community, and, with support from local government, law enforcement, and individuals, can help to change the social norms in the community that condone underage drinking as a “rite of passage.”

There are many resources available for communities as well including the Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking. A link to the guide is provided here. If you are interested in learning more about social host laws or ordinances, see the following websites:

- MADD Social Host Educational Initiative
- Model Social Host Liability Ordinance

Should you wish to report social hosting, you may call 911 and say “non-emergency.” From there you can report what you know to the police who can respond to community-based concerns.

You may also call the non-emergency line at (206) 296-3311.
Thank you for all you do for your kids and our students.
SHS Admin

What's happening outside of school?
Check out Skyline's Community Fliers electronic bulletin board**.**