



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION

A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition

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June 10, 2009 – Alcohol-free Graduation Parties

Jill Engle practices family law with Engle & Engle, P.C. in State College and is a key leader with Care Partnership: Communities That Care. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

High school graduation looms large these days. Most of us know at least one teen who will experience the rite of passage this year. Like it or not, many teens look to include alcohol in their graduation celebrations. Parents play a dangerous game by lulling themselves into a false sense of security about the “safety” of teens drinking at home or under adult supervision at times like these. In a few short years, I will face this same dilemma. We do not have to succumb to the pressure. In fact, to do so would put ourselves and our kids at serious risk.

As explained by District Judge Leslie Dutchcot of State College, “there is no ‘family exception’ to the underage drinking law. Even mom and dad can be charged with furnishing alcohol to minors, resulting in a one year jail sentence and/or a \$2,500.00 fine.” Peer-to-peer” alcohol sharing is just as illegal and has the same consequences. Bottom line? You do not have to be over 21 to furnish alcohol to a minor.

As for the kids who choose to drink? Dutchcot explains that underage drinking can result in a fine of up to \$300.00, a jail sentence of up to 90 days and suspension of the minor’s driver’s license by PennDOT. Minors need to be aware that carrying a false I.D. has the same penalties as underage drinking. Even if you only have possession of the I.D. you can be charged, regardless of whether it was used to obtain alcohol.

Many teens are drawn to alcohol for obvious reasons—their friends are doing it, it is glamorized as an integral piece of partying, and the sense of getting away with something can be palpable. But the results are often chilling—alcohol poisoning, sexual assault, car crashes, physical confrontations, and sometimes even death.

On July 14, 2008 a Mexican immigrant in Schuylkill County died after allegedly being beaten to death by two 17-year-olds and a 19-year-old in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. The three alleged assailants were drinking beer and malt liquor in the woods prior to their assault on 25-year-old Luis Eduardo Ramirez Zavala. One of the teens, and another man not charged with the beating (23-year-old Joseph P. McTiernan), were charged with furnishing alcohol to minors in the tragic incident.

Teens and booze do not mix. This year, let’s all make sure the Centre County graduation parties are alcohol-free. Don’t we have enough to worry about?