



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 13 – June 11, 2008 – Alcohol-Free Graduation Celebrations

Written By District Judge Leslie Dutchcot

District Judge Leslie Dutchcot serves district 49-2-01 and presides over cases of College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, and Patton townships. 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.

Not since a child's first steps does a parent anticipate any walk more than the march across the high school graduation stage. Soon high school seniors across Centre County will celebrate this milestone. This event marks entry to adulthood and is often punctuated by celebration. Whether your new graduate is a host or a guest, now is the time for family discussions about the link between graduation parties and underage drinking.

As a district judge, I wish to share some ideas to help your family celebrate graduation season safely and legally. If your family is hosting a party, plan to have at least one, preferably more, adult chaperones that will not drink alcohol. Set clear ground rules prohibiting guests from arriving under the influence of alcohol/drugs, or bringing alcohol/drugs. Contact parents of guests and give them detailed party plans, including clear beginning and ending times. Review the guest list with your child to avoid crashers. Finally, have lots of festive non-alcoholic drinks and snacks.

If your child is a party guest, call the parent-hosts and verify details about the party. Give your child clear expectations of acceptable behavior. Offer to personally drop them off and pick them up, or share duties with another trusted parent. Check in on them during the event. If your child is a guest, some of the following signs might point to trouble: vague or incomplete plans, an unusual need for extra cash or involvement with new and older friends. Underage drinking cannot occur without adult assistance.

If there will be any alcohol at your child's party, it is only fair to make this clear to other parents. They need to be able to make an informed decision about whether their child will attend the event. How would you feel if someone else made parental decisions for your child without your input?

Do you need additional incentive to discuss underage drinking with your family? 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 also illegal and has the same consequences; you do not have to be over 21 to furnish alcohol to a minor. 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. Carrying a false I.D. has the same penalties as underage drinking, even if you only have possession of the I.D., regardless of whether it was used to obtain alcohol.

I remember these conversations with my own parents at my high school graduation. In all honesty, there was friction on each side. But, I can admit that my parents had my best interests at heart and THEY WERE RIGHT. Remember, your kids have plenty of friends, they need you to be their parents.

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