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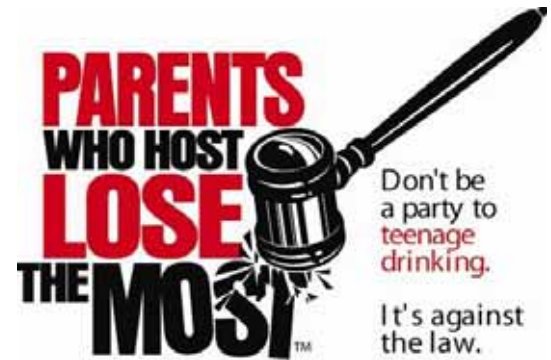
### **Parents Who Host Lose The Most Reminds Parents and Teens Of Underage Drinking**

It is hard to believe, but the end of the 2007-2008 school year is here. As you read this article, school may already be out or have only a few days left.

Summer brings graduation parties and end-of-the-year celebrations. It also brings warm weather and more social time. To teens, the word “summer” means “freedom”. Unfortunately this also means that summer is a time when teens are at high risk to start drinking. Parents need to be alert and band together to assure it is a happy time and not a tragic one.

It is common to hear such comments about underage drinking such as, “all teens go through it”; “why can our kids fight in Iraq yet not be able to drink a beer here”; and “I’d rather know that my child and his/her friends are drinking at my house where they will be safe.”

Everyone is entitled to an opinion – yet when it comes to underage drinking, people are often unaware the facts. A partnership of health, law enforcement, schools, businesses, community organizations, and citizens are supporting a campaign to raise awareness of teen drinking, especially among parents. The “Parents Who Host Lose the Most – Don’t be a Party to Teenage Drinking” program was developed by and is a project of the Drug-Free Action Alliance. Some key points from the awareness campaign:



- Most parents are unaware that underage drinking seriously increases the risks of alcoholism. **Forty percent** of those who start drinking alcohol before age 15 will become alcohol-dependent at some time in their lives, compared with 7% of those who wait at until age 21.
- Research shows that alcohol affects teens much differently than adults. The human brain is still developing until age 25. In adolescence there are critical spurts of growth and wiring that occur only once. Adolescent drinking can impede development of the prefrontal cortex (responsible for judgment and critical thinking), can prime the brain for addiction, and cause learning and memory deficits.
- Parents are often out of touch with their child’s alcohol use. Alcohol use starts earlier than most parents expect – average age is 13. Only 31% of parents of 15-16 year olds believe their child had a drink in the past year, compared to the 60% of teens in that age group who reported drinking.<sup>1</sup>
- Drunk driving isn’t the only risk. Underage gatherings with alcohol are associated with serious property damage, violence, other drug use, accidents, indiscreet sex, sexual

<sup>1</sup> Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc./American Viewpoint. "Results of a National Survey of Parents." June 24, 2003. <http://camy.org/research/files/hartmemo0703.pdf>

assault, and alcohol poisoning. Parents are responsible for having a safe environment for their children and any guests. Nothing is “safe” when alcohol and teenagers are mixed and parents can face criminal and civil prosecution. Liability should be a serious consideration for parents who allowing teen alcohol use.

**Practical Parent Tips for Summer:**

- Talk with your child about alcohol. Relate how drinking as an adolescent has additional and unique health and safety risks. Also explain that there can be serious legal consequences for them and the person who provides the alcohol.
- Visit [www.pcoparenthost.com](http://www.pcoparenthost.com) – read the fact sheets and visit some links. Download, sign and return the family pledge to local law enforcement. Encourage other parents to do the same.
- Don’t be an unknowing provider to your child and their friends. Keep track of the alcohol in your home. Make sure teens can’t get into it without your knowledge.
- Be frank about telling other parents that you don’t want them serving alcohol to your teen or condoning teen drinking. Talk to adults who host. Let them know that 96 % of adults agree that it is not okay to provide alcohol to someone else’s teen.
- Know your teen’s friends and their families. Talk with other parents to verify teens are where they say they are. Be wary of younger teens hanging out with an older crowd. When its curfew time be awake to greet them - perhaps with a hug and discreet sniff. Know the signs of substance use.
- Report outlets that sell alcohol to minors and report underage drinking to local law enforcement. It is a service to the entire community and could save lives.