

## Preparing For Prom

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Photo by Mary R. Vogton Morguefile

Signs of spring are in the air. The sun is still shining at dinner time. Bird chatter fills the mornings. And clusters of high school students can be seen entering favorite restaurants wearing high heels, fancy dresses and tuxedos! It's Prom time again. Whether you adore it, scorn it or endure it, Prom is an American institution and a teenage rite of passage.

Along with the excitement of Prom comes a host of potential risks and pitfalls for teens. But, wait, you say, "*What is the big deal?*" Kids have been surviving Prom for generations. Some drinking, make out sessions, and fast driving are all part of being young, right?

Well, "*yes*" and "*no*" actually. Some level of risk-taking is normal and even healthy for adolescents. Pushing the envelope and even making mistakes can help teens build character and improve their decision-making skills.

However, when unsupervised or under supervised many Prom customs can result in opportunities for thoughtless teen behavior. These behaviors can sometimes lead to short-term heartache and/or long-term harm. So in the midst of helping your teen find the right dress or that perfect corsage, here are some ideas to consider to prepare *yourself* for Prom as well.

## **DO NOT condone alcohol use!**

1. According to the Centers for Disease control, if your child has been drinking he or she is 17 times more likely to die in a car crash.
2. Drinking has a LARGE impact on the likelihood that your child will have unplanned sex, not use birth control and/or engage in risky sexual behavior, resulting in the potential for pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease and assault.
3. It is against the law to host.
  - It is illegal to give alcohol to anyone who is under age 21 (other than your own child). Even in your own home. Even with their parents' permission.
  - You cannot even knowingly allow someone (other than your own child) to remain in your home or on your property if they are under 21 and drinking or even holding alcohol.
  - If minors are allowed to drink alcohol on your property and they drive drunk, hurt themselves or someone else or damage property, you can be sued and risk losing your house, losing huge amounts of money, and even going to jail.

## **DO monitor your teen**

*This is one of the most effective things you can do to protect your teen.*

Ask ...

- *Who* will be in the group of kids they are joining for Prom?
- *What* will they actually be doing throughout the event?
- *When* will they be moving from location to location? What is the timeline for the evening?

Try not to let worry overshadow your pleasure in sharing in your teen's anticipation and enjoyment of the event. This is not only a milestone for your teen but one for you as well. So, while it's important to make sure he or she doesn't take any unnecessary risks or get into any serious trouble, it's also important to note the occasion and celebrate with him or her.

Share curfews or restrictions that you have for them.

- *Where* will they be going? And who will be supervising when they get there?
- *How* do they plan to get from place to place?

Finally, expect your teen to contact you if he or she changes location or revises his or her plans. Utilize your secret parenting tool - your connections with other parents - to verify everything that is claimed.

## **DO be cautious about your teen driving in a car with other teens**

*Even if he or she has been driving for a while; even if he or she has not been drinking at all.*

- Teens driving a car with two or more friends as passengers are three times as likely to have an accident.
- Researchers have demonstrated that the simple presence of peers in the car causes teen drivers to behave in a way that is akin to driving drunk.

## **DO help your teen to keep Prom night in perspective**

- Avoid lavish spending. Things like limos, hotel rooms, and overly expensive dresses can put too much emphasis and pressure on the event.
- Not being invited to the dance or having an invitation turned down can be devastating to young people at the time. Try to be sympathetic, but don't get overinvolved. Be prepared to offer a listening ear and help with alternate plans to help smooth things over if your teen asks for assistance.



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