PENALTIES FOR PARENTS WHO ALLOW UNDERAGE DRINKING AT THEIR HOMES

Results of a survey of students conducted in the Ramapo Indian Hills Regional High School District regarding alcohol usage were just released. It is troubling to note that over 90% of the students in grades 9 to 12 who participated in the survey reported that alcohol is fairly easy or very easy to get. Not surprisingly, among those who reported trying alcohol, the majority have used it at parties. But it is most distressing to learn that nearly 40% of the students tried alcohol at parties where the parents of the teen hosting the party were aware of the drinking. Almost half of the juniors responding said they used alcohol at a home party without the parents' knowledge. Nearly 50% of 11th and 12th graders who responded that they used alcohol reported that they couldn't remember what happened after drinking and about 35% reported passing out.

Please remember, the legal drinking age in New Jersey is 21. Parents providing alcohol for minors or allowing minors to consume alcohol at their homes are violating the criminal code. Fines up to $1,000 and up to 6 months in jail can be imposed for this offense. Serving alcohol to minors also places significant liability on the parent.

As a parent, you have the most influence on your child's decisions about drinking. Preparing your teen for the challenges and decisions about alcohol consumption must begin before they are faced with these situations. Parents need to educate teens that their actions have serious consequences. Not only do statistics show that alcohol-related car crashes are the number one cause of death for persons between the ages of 14 and 22, but incidents of alcohol poisoning are not uncommon. The law holds parents responsible for these serious consequences when they allow underage drinking at their home.

Talk, talk, talk and talk some more with your teen about dealing with peer pressure, and discuss feasible ways to turn down alcohol and other drugs. Some of the things to discuss with your teen include: drinking at home or at friends’ parties and the consequences that will result; set guidelines that they may attend only parties that will be supervised and where no alcohol will be served; agree that they will never get into a car with a driver who has been drinking; and let your children know that they can always call you at any time to pick them up if they find themselves in difficult circumstances.

Get to know your teen's friends and their parents. Talking with their friend's parents will also help to reinforce the message. Let's keep our kids on the right track.