

Parent Networks and Safe Homes Pledges

Why would our community group or coalition want to do this project?

Research suggests that parental involvement with their teens is a strong deterrent from teens using alcohol. Please refer to the packet piece entitled "Great Handouts From Three Websites" in this packet. The research brief used as an example describes one study in Maryland that indicates one of the strongest deterrents to teen alcohol use is when parents always check if other parents are present at teen parties. Parents are often on the receiving end of criticism and blame when it comes to their teen's behavior. By facilitating a parent network and Safe Homes initiative, your community group would be providing a tool to help parents and a program that seems to show promise in reducing underage alcohol use.

What area of underage drinking prevention does this project address?

This initiative addresses youth access to alcohol and creating or strengthening community (family) norms that support not providing alcohol to minors.

Project Description

This project involves helping parents of middle schoolers network and communicate for the good of their teens. The best known component of the initiative is a Safe Homes project. Called everything from a Buzz Book to a Safe Homes Directory, it involves working with the school and sending a letter to all parents of the group you choose to work with. It can be all sixth graders, all seventh graders, all middle school students, district wide, or by neighborhood. This decision will need to be made locally. If there is too small of a group, parents won't have the information they need to help keep tabs on their teen, if there is too large a group it can become overwhelming and parents may not feel like they are part of the group. In the letter, explain that those parents who are willing to sign a pledge to host only alcohol, tobacco, and other drug free parties and be present at any parties their family hosts will be included in the book. Another option is to include all parents willing to be listed, with a special identifying mark or section of the book for those parents who have made the above pledges. This allows parents to keep in contact with each other and stay informed of their teens' social lives and safety at other teens' homes.

Who needs to be involved?

Your community group will need to work closely with the schools for this initiative, since they will have the lists of families of teens attending the schools and their addresses. In some cases, schools will be reluctant to release the addresses without the families' consent. In this case, you may be able to provide labor and copies of the letters to do the mailing and offer to pay for the postage. However, if your community group has an already existing relationship with the schools, they may be willing to provide address labels or a list of addresses.

Although there is a great deal of work on the community group's part, the end result is parent involvement. This will result in your community group empowering parents to stay engaged with their children at a time when few others are able to provide this assistance.

An added benefit to doing this project during the early middle school years is that the parents will have a few years to get to know one another before their children enter high school. This will strengthen their peer network as the teens mature and face tougher issues. Examples include out-of-state or out-of-country Spring Breaks, weekend parties, driver's licenses, and increased contact with those who have recently turned 21 who are willing to provide alcohol to their still-in-high-school friends.

What resources will we need?

The community group will need access to the names and addresses of the population they are planning to work with. This can be obtained by working with the schools. An initial letter to the families asking for their participation will be sent. This requires copies being made, envelopes being purchased, and postage for the mailing and for the returned pledges. As the responses come in, someone will need to keep track of those who have pledged to host alcohol, tobacco, and other drug free parties and supervise any parties that their family hosts.

A guide will need to be created with either the families' names who signed the pledge, or all families in the identified group with a special indicator for those who have signed the pledge. One advantage to listing all parents is that a parent can contact anyone who has a student in their child's school. Parents may have a variety of reasons to not sign the pledge. This should not necessarily allow the assumption to be made that there will be alcohol at a party at their house.

There will be a cost associated with both the mailing and the creation of the guide.

How and why do we get the media involved?

The media can be involved throughout this project. Many parents will appreciate the reminder in the local paper to fill out and return the pledges by the due date. Additional information about both your group and the impact of alcohol use by teens can also be reported on. Media releases at strategic times of the year can also help remind parents to use the guide at times when parties are more prevalent, like three or four-day weekends, Winter and Spring Breaks, and Prom and Graduation seasons.

How and why do we evaluate this project?

This can be evaluated by the number of parents who participate, and the amount of media coverage generated. If you have a relationship built with law enforcement, they may be able to provide anecdotal information, as can parents who feel more empowered by having the directory and the assistance to keep in touch with other parents.