



**AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PARENTS**

Springtime excitement is in the air and as a parent of a High School student you have two special events quickly approaching, prom and graduation. These events are times of celebration and building memories to last a lifetime. We want remind you to help your child keep Prom and Graduation memories happy ones. It is extremely important to emphasize the importance of celebrating responsibly.

During this exciting time your teen will likely be traveling area roadways with other teens, as a driver or a passenger. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administrations reports that over one-third of teens killed in alcohol related accidents died during the months of April, May and June. Unfortunately, it can be all too easy for teens to get alcohol from their older siblings, friends, or even their parents. Now is the time to talk to your children about the dangerous consequences of alcohol and drug use.

It is illegal for persons under 21 years of age to possess or drink alcoholic beverages. Minors who do so can be charged with a criminal offense and face criminal penalties.

Adults who provide a minor with alcohol, or host a party where minors are consuming alcohol, are also criminally responsible. And when a young person dies after consuming alcohol, the adult who provided it to him or her can face up to 10 years in prison and can be sued for the deaths or damages that result.

Studies have shown that parents are the biggest influence on a teen's decision to use or not use alcohol. There are several things you as parents can do to influence your teen's decision. Keep an open line of communication with your teen and set clear rules and consequences regarding alcohol and drug use. Monitor your teen's social networking. Host and monitor a safe, alcohol-free event for your teen. Make a plan about what to do if they find themselves in a situation where alcohol is present. Let them know they can call you or a responsible adult at any time for a ride home. Remind them never to drink and drive or ride with a driver who has been drinking. Lastly, never provide alcohol to anyone under the age of 21.

Even sober teens need to exercise caution behind the wheel or as a passenger in a vehicle. Car crashes are the #1 killer of teens in the United States. Today's teens have access to more electronic devices, such as cell phones and mp3 players than ever before, and often succumb to their use while driving. More teens than ever before are traveling on Michigan's roadways while distracted.

A recent AAA Foundation in-car study showed that teen drivers were distracted almost 25% of the time they were driving. Electronic devices, such as texting, emails, and downloading music, were among the biggest distractions. Passengers, eating, grooming, and in-car technologies are among other distractions.

The Michigan Legislature has recognized the dangers of distracted driving on our young drivers. On March 28, 2013, a law banning cell phone use for anyone driving on a level 1 or level 2 graduated driver license went into effect in Michigan. Known as "Kelsey's law," after 17-year-old Kelsey Raffaele, who died in a cell-phone related car accident in 2010, the law is intended to keep young drivers focused on the road. Please talk to your teen about the dangers of distracted driving.

As your local law enforcement officials, we ask for your support in helping to avert tragedy. We encourage you to communicate with your teenager about the dangers of alcohol use during this momentous and joyful time in their lives. The enclosed agreement is a great way to start the conversation with your teen and to take steps keeping the memories of this momentous time happy ones. Let's all work together to ensure a safe and happy prom and graduation season!

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C.A.S.S. Community Coalition thanks Cass County Prosecutor's Office, Dowagiac Rotary and AAA of Michigan for their financial support.

