

Discussions About Grad With Your Teen

Graduation is a very exciting time for students and parents alike.

It is also a time when there are many decisions to make; from grad clothes to what party to attend. As a parent, it is important to have discussions with your teen about some of the potential decisions they will have to make during grad. Be sure to be clear about the expectations, boundaries and limits you and your spouse will be placing before you talk with your teen. Some of those discussion points would be about choices around drinking, driving, safety and friends.

Be very clear and straightforward about all of your decisions. Because of the developmental stage teens are going through typically they have difficulty with preplanning. This is where parents can be a great help to their teens by helping them to think in advance about some of the issues they may face at graduation time.

Start by talking about the decision whether or not they are going to drink at their grad party. It is important to have thought about your own beliefs around drinking before hand. Asking questions is a really good way to get a person to think about a topic. Be sure to ask the questions without

judgment so that a conversation is encouraged.

Some sample questions might be:

- What plans have been made for the after grad party?
- How are you getting to the party?
- Who are you going with to the party?
- Have you thought about what you will do if someone offers you a drink?
- Can you see any potential situations that could be dangerous?
- What would you do if that were to happen? (Brainstorm potential solutions)
- Are there designated drivers at the party?
- Do you want our help to get home after the party?
- You must be clear about your boundaries around this before you offer rides e.g.:
 - How many youth are you willing to drive?
 - What if your youth is drunk, will there be any repercussions?

Resistance skills can also be discussed. Talk with your teen about options that they can use if

they are being pressured to drink or use drugs.

1. Stand up to pressure and simply say "no" – only if they feel comfortable doing that – brainstorm ways of saying it.
2. Suggest an alternative – brainstorm alternative things to do i.e.: "No thanks, I'd rather get something to eat." – again, only if they feel comfortable.
3. Give a reason you can't – "I promised my Mom I wouldn't" or "I'm not feeling well."
4. Avoid the scene or leave the scene - develop a plan to leave or avoid (maybe a friend can run interference)
5. Humour – "Can't, I'm on the wagon!" or "I'm already hard to take when I'm sober!"

The most important thing to remember when talking with your teen is that they have their own ideas on things and if you hope to influence any of their decisions, your discussions have to be open and honest. If you are willing (and they are appropriate), you might want to share examples from your own past experience of a time when you had a tough decision to make and made a wise choice.

Communication is the key to staying connected to your teen. Be prepared to have a number of

discussions about this topic, you might find that having an opportunity to think over a previous discussion can create further points to explore during the next conversation. Choose the time you talk wisely; be sure to have the discussions when the teen is willing to talk. Driving is a great time to talk, you have a captive audience! With some preplanning and discussion graduation time can be a fun safe experience for both teens and parents.

For a complete listing of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource Directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County Family and Community Services, 276, 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard, Sherwood Park. Residents with questions about the strategy can call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 780-464-4044.

This article is one in a series written by the Strathcona County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Committee providing information about drug and alcohol issues. We are looking for feedback from the community regarding these articles.