

Two mothers are on the phone:

Jane: Hi, Amina. Michelle's begging me to let her go to Shane's party. Are you going to let Leila go?

Amina: I really don't know – I don't know these people – and it's half an hour's drive!

Jane: And you hear what happens at these parties!

Amina: Kids drinking, getting drunk, getting into fights.

Jane: There's no reason I shouldn't trust Shane's parents – it's just that I don't know them. Maybe they think it's OK to give the kids alcohol?

Amina: You must be joking! We've agreed Leila won't drink until she's 18.

Jane: Or what if someone dares them to try dagga? Michelle says I can trust her – and I do – but you heard about that girl whose drink got spiked. These things happen.

Amina: I guess lots depends on whether Shane's parents are going to be there the whole time.

Jane: And what if they decide to go for a joyride? Drunk?

Amina: What are we going to do? I think we must tell the girls they can't go.

Jane: That's not going to go down well – not in our house, at any rate. It's going to lead to a huge battle.

Amina: This situation is going to come up again and again. We have to find a way of dealing with it.

*Seek to be neither  
obsessively vigilant nor  
negligently laissez-faire*  
– St Marcellin Champagnat,  
founder of Marist schools



- 1 On what basis do I say yes or no to a party, dance or social?
- 2 How do I ensure my child's safety at the party?
- 3 How do I equip her to deal with out-of-control situations?
- 4 Do my house rules apply outside our home?
- 5 What if my child is drugging/drinking/having sex?
- 6 How can we as parents work together to build a safe environment for our children?

## Discussion

Parents have fears when their children are out: alcohol, drugs; supervision; reckless and/or drunken driving; fighting; sex; physical danger. These fears are real and need to be taken seriously, and strategies put into place to ensure children's safety.

### Talk to her

Communication is key. Talk to your child about your concerns. Talk about real-life situations: The grade 11 girl whose drink got spiked with Rehypnol; the grade 12s who drove around drunk and crashed the car; the kid from KZN who died after a fight with his friend. Talk about what your child would have done and develop strategies together. But talk on an ongoing basis and not just when issues arise. Talk openly about sex. Read up about drugs so that you are clued up about their effects and dangers. Talk about good and bad role models. Watch TV programmes or movies of your child's choice together and discuss them. Talk about the magazines and books she is reading. Ask her what she thinks about things, and tell her what you think. Listen to your child's fears and needs. Also, she will learn from you. If she sees you getting drunk and out of control she may think that that's OK.

### Rules

You need clear rules that your child understands. You have a right to set rules in your family. Your rules must fit your values, your child's age and your cultural reality. They don't have to be the same as every other family's. Be consistent about applying the rules. Make sure your child knows that there will be consequences if she breaks the rules, and what those consequences are. Be specific: 'There may be drinking at this party, but if you drink, you will not be allowed to go to another party this term.'

If your child wants to change the rules (to stay out later, go to different kinds of parties), you could agree to some milestones: 'If you show that I can trust you in this situation, we can change your curfew', etc. You can also change the rules as she gets older and has shown she can cope with situations. If your child really thinks that you are too strict – listen to her, do some research, think about her arguments and if necessary, consider changing the rules – but in the end, it is your decision as a parent. It is a great help in these situations if one can turn to supportive friends and a caring, pastoral school community.

### Before the party

Find out details about the party. Contact the host parents before each

party and check the details. If you don't know them, your child must get the phone number. Tell your child that you won't allow her to go if you can't talk to the hosts beforehand. School socials or, for older kids, clubs, are major attractions. These are essentially 'open'. Do some research into those places and events. You have to be satisfied with the level of supervision at the party, or that the club or social has a good reputation. For younger children, supervision is non-negotiable.

Ask the following questions:

- Who will supervise the party? Did they sound committed to being present, and keeping the party clean? How comfortable did you feel with their attitude?
- Who will be at the party – kids from where? What age group? Invited guests or anyone? Will there be access control?

If you are hosting, discuss music, food and décor with your child. Send out invitations clearly showing starting and finishing times. Provide good food, décor and soft drinks. Remain visible and ask that guests remain within the 'party area'. Perhaps hire a DJ to ensure that guests are entertained ... and they don't get up to mischief! You can have swimming parties or braais for smaller parties. Ten-pin bowling and paintball are 'off-site' party ideas that provide a lot of activity.

### At the party

Parties for school children should not provide alcohol. But you have to deal with the fact that some of your child's friends are legally able to drink – and will have alcohol. Nonetheless, school children need permission to drink, and supervision when there is alcohol around. Drink and drugs may be smuggled into the party and the host parent should maintain a presence and make it as difficult as possible for secret drinking and drugging to take place.

Drinks can be spiked. If kids are at an open event, they should have a drink that they open and pour for themselves, and watch continuously.

Give your child exit strategies: 'If you feel pressurised to drink, tell your friends you feel sick/there is a problem at home – your mom is coming to get you etc., and phone me.' Make sure your child knows that you will always back her up in a situation where she has to say no. Sometimes it is easier if the child can shift blame on to you. 'If I do this I will be punished.'

Set an unbreakable rule: 'If you are in trouble, phone and we will

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pick you up immediately – we will not argue, harass or cross question you’.

Keep your rules straightforward and don’t overload her with your own fears. Remember that your child is entitled to have fun!

#### After the party

As parents doing the fetching, you have the right to set a time that works for you, as well as for your child. Otherwise make sure your child is getting home with someone reliable, sober, and licensed, and that you have the driver’s cell phone number. For older kids consider arranging AA Cabs which you can book and pay for in advance. Cars and drivers are properly licensed and safe.

If your child comes home drunk and/or stoned, don’t do battle with her on the spot. Grit your teeth, send her to bed – but make sure you are around when she sobers up to talk about it. It is OK to be angry and disappointed, but she must still feel safe and loved enough to talk to you. You don’t want to lose your connection with her. Remember

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she is in a learning process. Give another chance... and another – but point out the real world will not necessarily do the same. This does not mean there shouldn’t be consequences. She knows she can expect to be punished. Follow through.

In some circumstances you may want to have her tested immediately to ascertain alcohol levels and whether or not she has taken drugs and what these are. After testing and once the child is sober, go through:

- why she got drunk/stoned
- consequences for her and you as the parent and family
- appropriate and negotiated punishment.

#### Meet the parents

Talk to other parents. Meet your child’s friends and their parents – invite them home, offer to give lifts; say hi when you pick up or drop off, have coffee. Go to school events – you will meet other parents and have the opportunity to share views. It may be unrealistic to expect all parents to agree on these issues, but if there is a critical mass of parents who share views and are prepared to implement and enforce basic rules, it will go a long way to alleviating fears. Encourage the school to organise discussion forums for parents.

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*An initiative of the Sacred Heart parent body*

Parties and dates

#### Useful contact information

Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre	011 484 1734
Childline	08 000 55555
Famsa: Parktown	011 788 4784
Soweto	011 933 1301
Lifeline	011 484 4554
DARE (formerly Drugwise)	011 788 0717

#### Further reading

<http://www.family.samhsa.gov/get/involvement.aspx>  
*Parenting with Panache* by Dereck Jackson, Wordsmiths,  
 Johannesburg: 2001  
[www.kid-safe productions.com](http://www.kid-safe productions.com)  
<http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org/en/pubs/html/makeadifference.htm>

#### Other titles

*in this series include:*

Peer pressure  
 Moodiness  
 Fear  
 Pressure and suicide  
 Materialism  
 Balancing one’s time  
 Bullying  
 Self esteem  
 Sleepovers  
 Death  
 Parental presence  
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 Discipline  
 Drugs