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Adults must deliver consistent message opposing underage drinking

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Recently, Glenbard parent Doug Petit shared the heartbreaking story of his teenage son's death after attending an underage drinking party in the community. As Doug spoke to parents in the theater at Glenbard North, he said it's interesting that there is no word in the English language to describe him now; there's a word for when a man or woman's spouse dies or when a child's parent die, but no word for when a parent's child dies. Jonathan Petit died nearly 11 years ago, but the pain for his parents remains fresh.

Underage drinking is a problem in many of our communities. The Illinois Youth Survey, which is given to many 10th- and 12th-graders in our area high schools, provides honest feedback from our students on alcohol and drug use. For the Glenbard schools, 42% of sophomores who responded to the survey in 2014 noted that they consumed alcohol regularly. And 18% said they rode in a vehicle driven by someone who was high or drunk.

Research indicates there are three key reasons why parents will intentionally allow their underage children to drink alcohol:

1. Parents' belief that it is important to pass along the knowledge about drinking responsibly and appreciating alcohol.
2. Parents, due to pressure from other adults, will spontaneously let their teen drink.
3. A desire to reduce potential harm. These parents fear that forbidding underage drinking would harm their relationship with their teen and eventually lead to drunk driving.

The young adults in our communities need strong boundaries and guidance, particularly during prom and graduation season. The signals and messages – from parents, law enforcement, school officials and the general community – should be clear and consistent: it's illegal for anyone younger than 21 to drink alcohol.

Successful Prevention Strategies

The following are key prevention approaches that communities have enacted and have been successful in preventing underage alcohol abuse:

1. Enact clear, consistent policies and procedures that discourage underage



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alcohol abuse. Local ordinances, police and school district procedures and intergovernmental agreements regarding cooperation and sharing of information all need to be aligned.

2. Parents need to stay involved, be proactive and band together when enforcing the rules and boundaries they have for their teens. We must have high expectations for appropriate behavior and help our teens learn how to protect themselves.

3. Build a culture of awareness and prevention through materials, resources and events. The Glenbard Parent Series is a great resource for DuPage parents to gather knowledge and best practices for drug and alcohol prevention and learn parenting skills that will enhance our teens' social and emotional development and encourage responsible decision-making.

What Can A Concerned Parent Do?

The DuPage County Prevention Leadership Team offers the following suggestions:

Talk early and often about your expectations when it comes to your teens behavior.

- Make it clear to your children – and their friends – that you don't approve of illegal drug use or under-age drinking and you don't allow it in your home.
- Be home whenever there's a non-drinking party on your property. And make sure you're on duty as a supervising parent.
- If you drink alcohol, make sure your wine, beer, and liquor supplies can't be accessed or stolen by under-age people.
- Talk to other parents to make sure that alcohol and illegal drugs are not available at parties in their homes.
- Talk to your children about the laws and liabilities that put you at serious risk if one of their friends drinks or uses drugs in your home.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your children about drug and alcohol abuse. In an age when almost every teen knows someone who's abusing alcohol or drugs, good communication between parents and children may be the most important preventive measure of all. Stress that you will pick up your child no questions asked if necessary -consider a text code to alert you.

It's critical, particularly during prom and graduation season, that teens in our communities hear and see a consistent message from parents, neighbors and leaders within our communities. A famous quote notes, "Parenting is not for the



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weak and faint hearted". This is especially true when we are building the capacity and maturity for teens in our communities to make good choices and decisions. Sometimes loving your child means setting limits, giving consequences and saying no.