

**Washington State**

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# Parent Pledge Program

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*Parents Who Host, Lose The Most: Don't be a party to teenage drinking*

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The goals of this program are:

- To build a communication network to reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- To host only Alcohol-Free, Tobacco-Free & Drug-Free parties for teens;
- To not allow teens to possess or consume alcohol, tobacco or other drugs at their homes; and
- To discourage their teens from attending unsupervised parties.

Washington State PTA is introducing the Parent Pledge a program in which local units can implement items from the National PTA Alcohol and Drug Resolution. The Drug Free Action Alliance has developed *Parents Who Host, Lose The Most: Don't be a party to teenage drinking. "Its against the law."* Public awareness campaign designed to educate parents about the legal ramifications as well as the health and safety risks associated with serving alcohol to teens other than their own children. While the campaign runs throughout the year, special attention is given to prom and graduation season

(April through June) when underage drinking parties are prevalent.

The high school and junior high school years are a time of great change in a student's development. Our children mature during these years; learning and experimenting. They are faced with choices that are difficult.

By communicating with other parents, we can reduce peer pressure on our children, thereby limiting the circumstances where they will feel pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol. The Parent Pledge Program builds a communication

network among the parents of your local school and the students to reduce the use of alcohol and other drugs and foster a positive social environment. As students enter middle and high school, it is common for parents not to know their children's friends and their families as well. By signing the Drug Free Homes Pledge, parents are letting other families know that they intend to supervise social gatherings in their homes to try to make sure youth parties and get-togethers are alcohol and drug free. It also indicates that they can be contacted by other parents.

**PROGRAMS**

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**Washington State PTA**

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## Why you should care

Two reasons: First and foremost “our” kids are indeed our future. Their actions today will affect their future and ours for many years to come.

The presence and use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, inhalants and other drugs is absolutely linked to many health, social and economic problems that slowly but most surely erode our families and communities.

Illnesses, addictions, accidents, premature deaths, birth defects, violence, domestic or partner abuse, other crimes, unwanted teen pregnancy, school failure or dropout, delinquency, depressed communities, joblessness, and homelessness - all have strong correlations to substance abuse.

If these aren't enough reasons to get involved and get active, try this: drug and alcohol abuse costs you and every member of your family. It is estimated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that substance abuse-related problems cost every man, woman and child in America \$800 a year - or nearly \$200 billion. These costs are reflected in higher health care costs, higher insurance, more tax dollars for law enforcement and incarceration, lost worker productivity, and on and on.

Prevention is everybody's business and must involve people, groups, and systems at every level of society.

School functions, academic and social, are always well supervised. Unfortunately, this is not always the case when social gatherings are held outside of school. Unsupervised social gatherings may result in situations where our children make poor choices.

### What Parents Should Know

#### Underage drinking laws:

- It is unlawful for any person to sell, give, or otherwise supply liquor to any person under the age of twenty-one years or permit any person under that age to consume liquor on his or her premises or on any premises under his or her control. This does not apply to liquor given or permitted to be given to a person under the age of twenty-one years of age by a parent or guardian and consumed in the presence of the parent or guardian.
- You cannot knowingly allow a person under 21, other than your own child, to remain in your home or on your property while consuming or possessing alcohol.

#### If you break the law:

- These offenses are punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.
- Others can sue you if you give alcohol to anyone under 21, and they, in turn, hurt someone, hurt themselves or damage property.
- Police Officers can take any alcohol, money or property used in committing the offense.

#### Things you can do as a parent:

- Refuse to supply alcohol to anyone under 21.
- Be at home when your teen has a party.
- Make sure that alcohol is not brought into your home or property by your teen's friends.
- Talk to other parents about not providing alcohol at other events your child will be attending.
- Create alcohol-free opportunities and activities in your home so teens will feel welcome.
- Report underage drinking to local law enforcement.



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## Frequently asked questions about this program

### **1. Why should I sign a pledge to declare that I have a drug free home?**

Signing the pledge is a way of letting other parents know that you support the ideas in the pledge and are making efforts to uphold it. The pledge is NOT a legally binding contract. As a parent, you cannot control absolutely everything related to your children, but you can demonstrate your commitment to the pledge ideas and encourage other parents to do so.

### **2. Why do I need to list my name and phone number in the resource guide?**

Being listed in the guide is optional, and you are welcome to sign the pledge without being listed. Putting your name and number on the list lets other parents know that you welcome phone calls when their children will be socializing with yours. It is one step toward making communication among parents easier.

### **3. I've looked at the list and I know there are people on there who have served minors in the past.**

#### **What does that mean for the network?**

The Drug Free Homes parent network welcomes all parents who are committed to making the effort to ensure a safe social environment for local youth. We assume that anyone who signs on is doing so in good faith, with the intention of upholding the pledge now, even if they may have made other decisions in the past.

### **4. If I sign the pledge and youth drink at my house without my knowledge, will I be removed from this list?**

No, the pledge is there to support parents in their efforts, not to punish them. We hope that if something like this happens, you will be able to turn to other network parents for support and to help you in working to ensure that teen social gatherings at your house are substance free.

### **5. If I sign the pledge, does that mean that I cannot drink at home?**

No, this is not the intent of the Drug Free Homes pledge. It is, however, important for parents to model appropriate behavior (not necessarily abstinence) to their children. This includes showing that adults of legal drinking age may drink moderately, if they choose. Think carefully about how your behavior will be perceived by your children. Make sure you communicate that the drinking age exists to postpone use of alcohol by young people until they reach an age when they are less likely to develop a drinking problem. It is also important to show that excessive drinking is not appropriate at any age.

### **6. What happens if my child is going to someone's house who is not on the list?**

You are encouraged to contact that family anyway. See if your child can get a phone number for you or look in the school directory. Just because they are not listed does not mean they do not support the pledge. Direct communication is the best way to find out what will be happening at another family's house.

### **7. What if young people are at my house socializing and they want to stay up later than I can? Can I go to sleep and let them stay up?**

The best solution is for you or another trusted adult to stay up as long as there are young people at your house, especially when you are less familiar with the kids attending. It is important to agree in advance with your child about how late you want friends to stay, and then be awake to stick to it when the time comes. To be able to provide late night supervision, getting some extra rest before the gathering and planning a restful day for yourself afterwards may be helpful.

## Planning your program

1. Describe the program to members at a general PTA meeting. Invite interested parent(s) to volunteer to chair or cochair the program.
2. The chair would then work with the Board of Directors to determine how the names of the parents that sign up with the program will be published. Directory and/or website?
3. This parent-teen pledge can be a “signed and returned” item as part of your school’s drug awareness week, Safe Spring Break week, or Safe Prom/ Graduation events.
4. Involve the community - work with your local media, law enforcement, other parent groups, churches, etc.
5. By getting the media involved, you can spread the message beyond those you contact. Send a copy of the pledge along with a media release.
6. At the end of the school year, recognize the volunteers that helped out with this program.

## Publicizing your program

### Tools

- Parent Pledge directory information
- Back to School checklist
- Parent Letter example
- Eckstein MS Drug Free Program - <http://www.preventionworksinseattle.org/Default.aspx?>
- Washington RCW 66.44.270 - Furnishing liquor to minors
- Oregon Partnership - Spring Break Underage Drinking Project Ideas <http://www.orpartnership.org/>

There are quite a few schools using this type of program all over the country. This is by no means the first, some resources are listed. Please tailor this to your school and PTA. Ultimately we are working to protect our children.

### Community

- Have the mayor sign a community proclamation about the campaign
- Hold a kickoff with local dignitaries to promote the campaign
- Write letters to the editor about the importance of campaign message

### Schools

- Put campaign information in school newsletters from the principal or superintendent
- Mail fact cards to parents of students through school mailings

### Business

- Place fact cards in local hotels to discourage teenage parties in hotel rooms
- Place campaign logo and information as ad in local papers

### Law Enforcement

- Increase monitoring of teen house parties during prom and graduation weekends
- Inform public that there will be an increase in monitoring teen house parties