

Parents Must Be the Voice for a Safe and Successful Future
A Message for a Safe Prom and Graduation Season
By Mary Jane Burke
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Less than a year ago, Central Marin Police intercepted a planned excursion by a group of teenagers that could have ended in tragedy. A teen-rented party bus, containing 30 containers of hard alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs, was prevented from taking its planned six-hour tour with the under aged crowd. Recently, the driver of the bus, who was arrested for possession of his own drug paraphernalia and a switchblade, pled guilty to misdemeanor charges.

The “closure” of this incident is a strong reminder that our community must remain vigilant in educating our teens about the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse. Parents must take a strong stance to protect their teens from making irresponsible decisions that could end tragically. While I know that many people may think that “teens will be teens,” but I hate to think about what could have happened if those “silly” teens had continued on their party bus journey. Parents must establish an open dialogue with their kids about the dangers and consequences of alcohol and drugs. They should know who their child’s friends are and their child’s whereabouts. Invading your child’s privacy is your job and your duty...whether it’s in cyberspace or the real world...you could be the key to preventing a false move or tragedy.

This time of year in particular, as prom and graduation season approaches, kids are more likely to want to “go big” with party buses and hosting social engagements in celebration of these milestones. I urge parents to get involved with the planning of these events and require responsible chaperones. Inform your teens that the party bus rental comes with a responsible adult on board; a party is allowable but only with attentive adults present. Establish clear rules and boundaries for your teen when they are with friends. Establish a level of trust and be clear that if your child violates that trust, there will be consequences.

It is important to note that parents are not supposed to be “friends” with their children. The role of the parent is to protect, nurture and guide our children down a successful path in life. When we blur the lines, we send a mixed message. Be a model for your child...be their rock...be their foresight. No one ever said parenting would be easy...and we are fortunate to have strong resources in our community to offer support to parents in this journey.

There are efforts and organizations that can help parents communicate and educate their teens about the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. I encourage you to take a look at “[Be the Influence](#),” an effort established in Marin County, and commit to making your best efforts to discouraging teen alcohol and drug abuse. The [Marin Prevention Network](#) is a countywide collaboration of community coalitions working to establish norms and policies to promote healthy choices and reduce risk.

Being a parent is challenging...but it offers many rewards. Be the voice that guides your child to a successful future, that will be the reward of a lifetime.