

Suspicion With a Smile: Hosting a Teen's Party

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Host our kid's birthday party? Sure, why not? My husband and I have always made our home available for our three children to invite their friends. So when our son asked to have a Friday night party to celebrate his 15th birthday, we said, "Sure, it'll be fun."

Well, now that the party is over, I hear from my son that it was lots of fun. However, it turned out to be the most exhausting party I have ever "attended." The four-hour event drove home to me -- again -- the heavy responsibility we, as parents of teenagers, bear in trying to keep our children safe and sound. My husband and I sure tried our best to keep things right with all the hormone-laden youth in our home that night in March.

First, the party had to be postponed because of snow. By the time it was rescheduled for two weeks later, word had spread because my son "sort of told" a lot of people to come on by at 7 p.m. Despite several attempts to have him give me a definitive invitation list, the roster of expected attendees remained somewhat fluid. I was assured that this situation was because some of my son's friends were going to be bringing some of their friends. I was told it would be "a great way to make new friends."

Three parents called before the event to verify that this was going to be a supervised party.

Party time came, teenagers arrived in bunches, music cranked up, basement got crowded and the fun began. About every 15 minutes, my husband and I took turns sweeping the perimeter of the house -- downstairs, back yard, front yard and driveway. During the first few rounds, kids were evidently having a good time, lots of noise, lots of munchies being consumed, lots of iced tea being drunk. On about the third visit downstairs, a clear smell of alcohol emanated from a bunch of boys who had just arrived and were huddled in the small front room. With no visible evidence of drinking, I left them alone, pulled my son aside and privately told him to tell any and all of his friends that any alcohol found would mean the end of the party for everyone.

About two hours into the party, on a sweep of the front yard, my husband surprised a kid with a stash of marijuana talking to a small group about smoking. My husband demanded the stuff be given to him, and the boy had the temerity to say, "No, I'll just put it away." Well, my husband became the possessor of a small plastic bag only because he took hold of this kid's hand and forced it out of his grip. Because no smoking had actually occurred that we were aware of, we allowed the group to rejoin the party inside.

A little while later, I took the dogs for a walk down the block. That's when I spied something ahead in the middle of the road. It was not until the dogs and I got closer that I realized it was three girls lying in the middle of the street -- stargazing, I suppose. The more amazing part of this was that the girls remained there while I stood over them, and moved only when I ordered them to do so. Okay -- kids will do dangerous and dumb things, right?

During a later sweep through the basement, I peeked into the tiny back room that I had purposely stuffed with all the basement clutter to keep people out. Well, in the two inches of private space allowed behind the closed door of this room, I surprised and promptly kicked out a pair of somewhat passionately entwined lovers. The two departed the room quickly, looking embarrassed but certainly not apologetic, and disappeared into the crowd. Maybe that was one of the reasons the overhead lights kept getting turned off downstairs, even though my husband and I kept putting them back on every few minutes. I think I remember playing light games with my kids at birthday parties a decade ago! HMMMMM.

Then, a firecracker in our backyard exploded. No one was around. I guess someone thought it would be fun. Okay. Just noise. No harm done. What else did these kids have in their arsenal, though? It was now 9:30 p.m. Only 1 1/2 hours to go.

Two girls came upstairs to tell my husband and me that some kids were outside on the driveway doing "nasty things." No elaboration. We thanked them for coming to let us know and my husband went to investigate. A few boys were smoking very thin cigars with plastic holders. My husband told them to extinguish the smokes and go back inside. They did. No big deal. Nothing really terrible!

At the height of the party, I estimate there were between 60 and 70 freshmen representing several public, private and religious high schools from our area. Every kid knew someone else at this party -- just not necessarily my son. How exactly they came to be in our home on that Friday evening, I'm not sure, but every kid who came upstairs, for fresh air, to use the phone, to use the bathroom, was polite, articulate and well dressed. Perhaps we could have limited the numbers at the party if we had set up a password at the front door, something like the name of the person hosting the party.

Promptly at 11 p.m., I turned all the lights on downstairs. "Please come upstairs and get your coats. Your rides are lining up outside and are ready to take you home. Party's over." The kids looked at me as if I had just spoken Swahili. Maybe the bright lights blinded them. Maybe the sound of silence stunned them, since I had also turned off the stereo. But they eventually moved, came upstairs and clambered into their respective chauffeured rides. Most everyone was retrieved promptly. Almost every kid thanked my husband and me for having the party. Several even apologized for leaving a mess in the basement. An hour after the party was supposed to end, the last of our charges, having made contact with someone to come get him, went home.

The basement floor was trashed, but there was nothing on it that the dog didn't enjoy devouring. My son spent a good part of the next day cleaning.

Just another typical teen party? I guess so. Will my son be allowed to "just sort of invite" a lot of people to our home again? No.

I won't tell my teenager this, but I do remember attending parties exactly like this one in my day. It was a whole heck of a lot different then, though. It was much easier being the teen and having the fun and not being the adult in charge. I can only hope that when my son attends parties at other kids' houses, their parents try to keep watch as my husband and I did.

Did we succeed in keeping all the kids on the straight and narrow? I really don't have a clue.