



Five Tips to Understanding Your Teen's "Mindset" Around Drug Use and Parties

1. A party for a teen is like the equivalent of a child's first birthday—supercharged, meaningful, a big deal. Parties are not purposeful attempts to make you upset; they are metaphysical events about:¹
 - ❖ Establishing meaning
 - ❖ Creating and maintaining sexual and social relationships
 - ❖ Finding fun
 - ❖ Creating and maintaining friendship
 - ❖ Taking risk (feeling a lot, all at once/feeling extremes)
 - ❖ Testing limits
 - ❖ Becoming an adult, through being without adults
 - ❖ Establishing autonomy (an adult-free zone)
 - ❖ "Planned spontaneity" (even though the same predictable things usually happen at parties)
 - ❖ Forging identity (finding oneself) and belonging (finding oneself as a member of a group in certain roles, like "party animal" "hunk" "stud" "follower" "sidekick" "player" "responsible person" "princess" "clown")
 - ❖ Losing oneself (getting distance from one's responsibilities, worries, troubles, difficult emotions, etc.)
 - ❖ Establishing social standing (a "good" or successful party raises the street credibility of the student and their likeability)
2. Parties often begin small, with a few students and then mushroom out of control, sometimes with but sometimes without the knowledge and assent of the original students.
3. Drug, alcohol use and sexual behavior happens at parties without knowledge of other partygoers and chaperones (in other rooms, back/front yard, in cars near or outside the home).
4. Each school has its own "Culture" around parties. Your child's school has its own culture, but cultures clash when students from another high school "crash" the party. Each school and its students provide a twist on the "setting" of each party, and parties rarely stay attended by students from just one school, whether that's the original intention or not.
5. Parties, like almost all other "events" are motivated by arguably the two most important values for teens: a) Having Fun and b) Avoiding Embarrassment. When you deal with parties, be aware that you are trying to maximize safety and they are trying to do these two things (have fun and avoid embarrassment). If you think "safety," they'll think hassle. Don't worry about that reaction, it's normal.

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¹ Thanks to colleague Mike Riera for this great list on the "metaphysics" of parties (See *Field Guide to the American Teenager*).