

## **Know! Underage Drinking is NOT a given!**

Kathy Radigan, a writer for the Huffington Post wrote, “An Open Letter to My Teenage Son About Drinking.” In the article, she talks about how fast time has gone and how so many things have changed; like how the little boy she was arranging play dates for, not so long ago, has now become a full-fledged teenager, heading out to eat and to the movies with his buddies - many times without an adult. She says what used to be sitting at a kitchen table chatting with another parent while the kids played, has now become a drive-by wave at best.

Kathy also says that her son’s “teen status” prompted many new questions about alcohol and other drugs from her friends and family. She was asked things like, “What will you do the first time your son comes home drunk?” and, “How will you handle it if you find out he is using drugs?” Kathy took such questions to mean that people just assumed her son (along with other teens) would automatically drink underage and possibly use other drugs. When she questioned the assumption, the most common response was, “Of course he will.”

Baffled by this mindset, Kathy decided to do what she does best, write about it. She says her son, like most of his peers, has been learning about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs in school since the time he was in kindergarten. She knows he is aware that substances affect judgment and increase a person’s likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors, like having sex or driving under the influence. In fact, just before entering his freshman year, her son willingly participated in a class assignment in which he promised not to smoke or drink in high school. With all this in mind, Kathy says it is maddening for people to believe that substance use among teens is a given.

Kathy makes it clear that she is not living in “La La Land,” like some people believe. She is simply saying that the thought of “kids will be kids” and “we did it at that age,” is not criteria we should base our parenting on, and that such attitudes and beliefs are likely to only confuse young people in their decision-making.

To ensure her son would not be confused and to make her expectations clear, Kathy wrote the following letter to her son (which all parents and children are encouraged to read and discuss):

*Dear Tom,*

*The legal drinking age in this country is 21. Please know that dad and I will never allow you to have alcohol in our house or in our presence until you reach that age. Please also know that no good has ever come from a group of teenagers drinking. It's a recipe for all kinds of disasters.*

*If you should choose to drink, you'll not only be breaking the rules of our house, you'll be breaking the law.*

*If you get stopped for driving under the influence, or the police get called to a party where you have been drinking, you may be in a position where we can't protect you.*

*Always call me and your dad. ALWAYS. No matter what you have done.*

*Don't ever follow up a bad choice with one that's worse just because you're afraid of disappointing us or making us angry.*

*Will we be happy? Of course not. But we would much rather get you and any friend who wants to come with you home safely, than get a call saying you are NEVER coming home.*

*Let me be clear that the fact that we love you and will stand by you does not in any way mean we will stand by while you do things that you know aren't good for you.*

*There are those who will tell you that your parents are being unreasonable and totally unrealistic. Some may tell you that you are a teenager and it's a rite of passage to get drunk. They may even regale you with stories of their own youthful mistakes.*

*Listen to your own heart and trust your gut. Also know there is nothing cool about waking up in your own vomit, or having a DUI before you are 18.*

*Your father and I are so proud of the man you are becoming. We love you so much that we don't care if you hate us. That's our gift to you -- we are your parents, not your friends.*

*Always, Mom*

For the full article published in the Huffington Post, written by Kathy Radigan, [click here](#).

Source: Radigan, Kathy, Huffington Post: An Open Letter to My Teenage Son About Drinking, July 22, 2014.