

Raves and club drugs: How do I protect my kids?

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YOUR KID WANTS TO GO TO RAVES, and you're worried. Newspaper reports have you scared. You've heard that kids use drugs there, and you've heard that some kids have even died. On the other hand, you want to teach your teen to take care of themselves, make their own decisions, and take responsibility for their free time as well as their schoolwork and household chores.

You need to talk this over with your teen, but you need to be informed before you do.

What is a rave?

Raves are all-night dance parties, held outdoors or in dance clubs, old warehouses or other large indoor spaces. Kids hear about them from each other, through flyers, in rave culture magazines or on rave websites.

Why do kids want to go to raves?

Kids go to raves for the atmosphere (they call it the "vibe"). They like to dance to electronic music played by a disc jockey or "DJ," and they like to meet other young people. They may have heard that raves have a loving, accepting atmosphere where kids hug each other a lot and the common motto for the rave culture is "peace, love, unity and respect."

What are the physical dangers of raving?

Many of the concerns about raves are the same as your concerns would be about any party your teenager attends. At any party, you will want to know that your teenager will be able to say no to illegal or dangerous activities, to unwanted sexual advances, and to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. You will want to know that the person who drives them to or from the party is alert, sober and competent to drive. You also want them to go to the party with friends who are sensible and responsible, who will not pressure your teen to make unwise choices.

The dangers that are unique to raves come from the easy availability of drugs,

the strenuous physical activity and the physical conditions: crowding, poor ventilation and flashing strobe lights are common at raves. Very few deaths have happened at raves in Canada. Almost all deaths at raves have been the result of not drinking enough water or not resting enough: ravers danced until they got overheated and dehydrated. Almost all, if not all, of the deaths could have been prevented if simple safety rules had been followed.

How do I keep my teen safe?

If you let your teenagers attend raves, make sure they know what to expect and what they can do to stay safe. As with any other topic, you will want to talk honestly with your teens about raves. Remember to listen as well as talk. Encourage them to ask you questions, but make sure that you have some answers, and know where to find more information. Be very honest about what you know and what you don't know. Set guidelines for behaviour (for example, do you want to ban attending raves, or set a curfew? What alternative activity would you allow?). Be prepared to talk about your guidelines and to renegotiate them as your teens mature.

Raves and heatstroke

Most deaths at raves result from overheating and dehydration. Crowding, poor ventilation and nonstop dancing contribute to water loss through perspiration, and to dangerously high body temperatures.

You can also drink too much water. Drinking too much is not very common, and dying from drinking too much water is extremely rare. A maximum of one litre per hour has been suggested, but this varies according to each person's body and activities. People who are dancing should drink about two cups of water (500 ml) an hour, to rehydrate and to help the body regulate its temperature. Isotonic sports drinks like Gatorade® and Powerade® can be used occasionally, but shouldn't be the only source of liquids.

Raves usually have a "chill" area, a place for dancers to rest. A good guideline is to rest 15 minutes for every hour of dancing (just as you do a cool-down after a physical fitness class).

The warning signs of overheating and dehydration are feeling hot, unwell and confused; dark urine or being unable to urinate; not sweating even when dancing; being unable to speak properly; headache; vomiting; high resting heart rate; and fainting, collapsing or convulsing. As long as people are doing what they should do, the chances of this happening are very low.

At the first sign of dehydration, ravers should lie or sit down, sip water slowly and splash some on their skin, and ask a friend to stay with them, perhaps fanning them, until they are well again.

Drugs and raves

Many of the dancers at a rave are not there to use drugs, although drugs tend to be available. The dancing and companionship are the biggest draw. Many ravers, disapprove of smoking crack cocaine, drinking alcohol or injecting drugs.

That said, there is a permissive attitude toward drugs at raves, with one of the drugs most commonly used being cannabis, the drug that ravers are most likely to have used. The drug that most people associate with raves, however, is ecstasy.

Ecstasy (methylenedioxymethamphetamine or MDMA) is a stimulant that allows ravers to dance all night, and makes them feel happy, confident and loving toward others. Ecstasy interferes with the brain's ability to regulate body temperature, so dancers who take ecstasy greatly increase the danger of overheating.

The cautions about using ecstasy are similar to the cautions about using many drugs, including legally prescribed drugs. Ecstasy is especially dangerous if you have a personal or family history of heart disease, kidney or liver problems, neurological problems (e.g., Parkinsonism, Tourette's syndrome, epilepsy) or psychiatric illness (e.g., depression, schizophrenia). Ecstasy should not be combined with certain

antidepressants (e.g., Prozac®, Zoloft®), with weight-loss medications, or with blood pressure medications.

Regular (e.g., weekly) use of ecstasy can be a problem, because you will build up tolerance, needing more of the drug to get the same effect. It is not physically addictive, but people do become dependent on the rave scene, including the drugs, to have fun and feel good about themselves.

Ecstasy often produces a "hangover" effect, which can last several days after it's taken. Symptoms may include depression, drowsiness, muscle aches, poor appetite, sleeplessness and poor concentration. Someone who uses the drug every weekend may find that the drug becomes the centre of their life. Again, as a parent you probably can see when your child is spending too much time on one activity—whether that is the dance culture or watching television.

There is some evidence that ecstasy can damage your memory long after you have taken it, even if you've had a small dose and have not used it habitually. There is conclusive evidence that it can damage the liver.

Sometimes kids think they are buying ecstasy, but they are actually buying more dangerous drugs, such as PMA, ketamine, GHB or LSD. The first three can be deadly; LSD will give kids hallucinations and can put them in danger when they can't judge distance, speed or time properly. Although people refer to these drugs as "club drugs," they are most often consumed outside dancing establishments.

As always, it is safest to use no drugs at all. Let your teens know that it's possible and acceptable to have fun at a rave without taking drugs.

For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

Activity Page

Index Card 1: What I want/what I feel

Each of you writes what you want on an index card, and underneath you write why you want that, from a feeling perspective. The second part should be in the form of an "I" statement: "When you do this, I feel..." or "If you did this, I would feel..."

Example:

Parent: I don't want you to go to raves. There may be drugs there, and people you don't know who can't be trusted. If you went to a rave, I would feel worried about your safety.

Kid: I want to go to raves with my friends. I want to be part of the crowd, I want to have fun, I want to have new experiences and meet new people.

When you worry about me, and forbid me to go places, I feel that you don't trust me, and I feel frustrated that everyone else is having fun and I have to stay home.

Index Card 2: Emotional goal-setting

Together, you write down emotional goals for each of you. This has to focus on you and your feelings. Wanting your child to be safe involves a goal that is outside you. What would you actually like to feel? Agree before writing this down that you cannot argue with the other person's emotional goals. In the example below, the kid cannot tell the parent not to worry. The parent is entitled to those feelings. In the same way, the parent can't tell the kid that having fun isn't important. It is important to the kid.

Parent: I want not to worry about you. I want to feel like I trust you.

Kid: I want to have fun. I want to feel trusted.

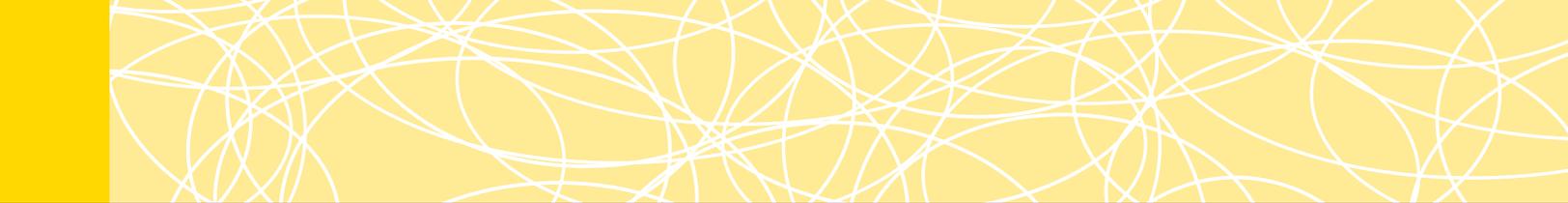
Index Card 3: Solutions

Exchange cards and read each other's card. Now, take turns suggesting solutions that will take care of everyone's emotional needs as much as possible. State the solution, and the other person writes it down on the third index card. Again, no arguments, no comments, no faces.

Parent: Last year, you asked if you could join the drama club and I said no because I'd have to drive you to practice. If I agreed to drive you, that would give you a place to have

fun. I would let you go to the drama club parties, and stay out late on performance nights. That would let you feel trusted.

Kid: To make myself as safe as possible at a rave, I could memorize all that rave safety information you have. I'd even let you quiz me. I could also bring my friends home and introduce them to you, so you can see that I have decent friends who'll look out for me. That would let me get some freedom, but would let you know that you don't have to worry so much.



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