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**HOLIDAYS CAN PRESENT DRINKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEENS**

Tips to Make Holiday Parties Merry and Safe for Everyone

**NOVEMBER 2007** – With all the fun and excitement associated with the holidays it's sometimes easy to forget that the season is among the most dangerous in many ways. It can also be a time when widespread availability of alcohol at holiday parties can create problems for families. Teenagers or younger children may view these parties as opportunities to sneak alcohol, spike their soda or juice drinks when nobody is looking, or convince a relative to assist them in getting an alcoholic beverage. Some parents, feeling it is part of the holiday spirit, may be more inclined to let their teenagers have an alcoholic drink to share in a family toast.

According to Rosecrance Health Network, a substance abuse treatment facility specializing in adolescent treatment, the younger a child is when he or she starts to drink, the higher the chances that an alcohol-related problem will develop later in life. "During the holidays some parents want to offer their teenager a treat of sorts," said Dr. Thomas E. Wright, medical director of adolescent services at Rosecrance. "By giving kids the go ahead to have one drink, parents are setting precedence. It may seem harmless enough, but by linking alcohol to special occasions parents are telling their kids that alcohol is a necessary ingredient to a good time."

"The first question I ask any parent who is planning a family gathering at home is this: How important is alcohol to your family function?," states Mary Roufa, Adolescent Family Program Coordinator for Rosecrance. "It's about making a safe environment for your child and the type of example you are setting." Roufa encourages parents to place the greater emphasis on the joy of being together and less on the availability of alcohol.

According to recent research, drinking and driving accidents increase between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Emotional challenges also surface during the holidays, including increased stress associated with finding the perfect gift, and bouts of depressions also appear to rise during this time period.

"For such a notoriously festive time, a lot of pressure and stress can surface during the holidays," added Dr. Wright. "For many people, including adolescents, alcohol is a popular way to manage stress or forget about problems."

**To help parents navigate the holiday season with their teenagers, Rosecrance recommends the following tips:**

- 1) Initiate a conversation with your kids about what they are most and least looking forward to over the holiday season. Ask follow up questions to get to the heart of their anxiety or excitement.
- 2) If you're hosting a party and plan on serving alcohol set a zero tolerance policy with your kids. Remind them that some adults at the party may choose to have a drink, which is fine. However, underage drinking isn't acceptable by you.

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3) If someone at your holiday party drinks too much, talk with your kids the next day about that person's behavior and the altering effects of alcohol.

4) If your teenager wants to host a party of their own, work with them to plan the event. This is a great way to steer your teen toward fun activities that don't involve alcohol. Remind them that no alcohol will be permitted.

5) If you do host a party, clear out or lock-up leftover alcohol. Keeping an abundance of alcohol in the house after the party can be tempting for teens, especially in homes where having alcohol isn't the norm.

6) In addition to alcohol, prescription drugs may also be a target of interest to teenagers or even adults in your home. Secure all drugs out of view in a location not likely to be visited by guests.

### **About Rosecrance**

Rosecrance Health Network is a leading provider of inpatient and outpatient substance abuse treatment services for adolescents and adults. For more information please call 1-800-ALCOHOL or visit [www.rosecrance.org](http://www.rosecrance.org).

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