

Dear YFS,

I'm a parent of a senior who hopes to go a rental home at Suncadia for the Prom "after party" with a large group of friends. I heard this was a tradition for some MI teens, but it feels it is difficult for us as parents to say no. I think an event of this magnitude is unnecessary and worry about late night driving and drinking that will inevitably happen at the unchaperoned event. My daughter says, "this is a tradition Mom," but I am sure there must be some safer, closer alternatives.

How can we talk about changing traditions that pose risks for our kids, and how do we change the culture in our community so parents don't feel compelled to support them? I am hoping there does not have to be a tragedy to bring this conversation into the open. ~WP

Dear WP,

You've captured the worries faced each year by a relatively small group of Island parents. Off-island, after-parties are not an all-Island tradition, but they do happen among a minority of graduates. You are correct, these parties pose many risks. Parents need to weigh the pros/cons against, perhaps, insisting on a safer, but less cool, alternative. Yes, it is okay to say "no."

Alcohol/drug use is often a key motivation behind destination parties. In addition to the illegality, consider that youth who use alcohol are also at risk for unwanted or unprotected sex, aggression, car crashes, and alcohol poisoning. Marijuana and other drug use are especially dangerous when mixed with alcohol as well. In terms of intoxication, think  $2+2=6$ . Some youth get in trouble when they think they have tolerance to alcohol then drink in a new location and become dangerously impaired on the same amount they usually drink. This is due to the expectancy effect where the body anticipates intoxication based on familiar surroundings and can process alcohol more effectively—when youth "surprise" their systems and drink heavily in a novel location, they get drunker faster. This is one reason there are so many cases of alcohol poisoning the freshman year of college. There are also risks to the adults renting the venue and helping with arrangements. Providing or allowing alcohol to be consumed by a minor is a crime. Consider also the consequences for accidents, personal injury and damage to the rental. So, should you forbid it, or perhaps insist on some "harm reduction" strategies? At similar events in the past, parents themselves have chaperoned the event (on site) and insisted on safe behaviors. Parents can contract with their grads for safe behavior as well. While 40-60 seniors may leave the prom early for a rental house, clearly MOST seniors are doing something else—and this is a good reminder for your grad. All parents should remind youth of the Good Samaritan laws in effect for minors just in case someone is in distress. I suggest the site [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org) for ideas for parents and safety around substances and youth. Helping your grad put an exclamation point on their high school career is also very important. Typically, this involves their social group, so now is a good time to cash-in on those relationships you have with other parents to brainstorm ideas. These discussions, armed with good information, are how the culture can start to change. At YFS we follow best practice guidelines and suggest parents should hold a firm line with any drugs and alcohol for minors—as the risks more than likely outweigh the reward. Congratulations and best of luck to both of you in your next chapter in life!

Dear YFS,

How much screen time is appropriate for my child and for people in general?

GC

Dear GC,

This topic is one of the most common question from parents and yet remains a very real concern for this generation of youth. In general, appropriate limits on screen time vary depending many factors including age, developmental level, and one's relative social-emotional-behavioral health.

Children's brain development depends on human connection and relationships. Developing a child's brain and body requires human interaction, movement, and cognition. Screen-based media generally cannot replace these activities so there are inherent risks in regular excessive use.

The general age guidelines are NO screen time for children under 18 months old; for families who want to sit with their young child and use learning apps this should not start before 18 months; one hour with an adult watching for 2-5 year olds; and from 6 years through childhood the amount will vary depending on many considerations.

However, not all technology is created equal when it comes to its impact on brain development. As you think about the screen limits for your child over six, consider some of the following issues: is the app your child uses engaging and interactive or simply a stare and swipe game?

When deciding on daily limits, remember to account for time your child has already been on media while at school or on a play date. Consider if the app is age and developmentally appropriate.

A challenge for youth and adults is determining the impact electronic media is having on sleep, physical activity, interaction with family and friends, play time, down time with elements of boredom (necessary and good for brain development). While there may be a certain social connectedness in games that connect users with using headphones and microphones in a shared fantasy world, research suggests this is different than the real thing. Human brains are adaptable, but evolution still ties our wellness to engagement in "old fashioned" social interactions that come with nuances that cannot yet be replicated on a screen.

For youth, there is the real concern of online safety and insuring any user of interactive social media has the appropriate social skills to understand and act upon online safety rules. Social media programs use us; we don't use them. Consider the almost every on-line action is tracked and used by complex algorithms that in turn individualize and shape one's on-line experience to be most likely to keep you on line as long as possible and exposed to advertising.

Furthermore, the idea of internet addiction is gaining traction as many specialty treatment centers are treating this condition. Common Sense Media ([www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)) can help you determine appropriateness of games and apps as well as provide information on media contracts to help families establish and enforce limits.

Parents should look at their own media use and model and enforce consistent family limits. Consider 100% media free days, events or vacations. Simple rules such as not media during car rides or at meals can make a difference.

Adults need to consider the role social media and screen time is playing in their lives. Is it a replacement or an enhancement? Do couples interact with their tablets at bedtime, or with one another? Screens are evolving faster than we are; we all need to be conscious of their influence and be mindful about their impact in our lives.

Glad to see you are thinking about this issue –

Best,

YFS