

Prevention of Underage Drinking: How Limousine Services Help

By Joanna Jullien



Our culture today places great emphasis on zero tolerance for drinking and driving, and adopts widely the rationale that “if we don’t drive, it’s safe to drink”. Many children have been allowed to think that “alcohol is harmless if I am not driving”. This ethos and the fact that alcohol is easy to access puts all our children at risk because the perils of underage drinking are largely ignored. In March 2007, the U.S. Surgeon General’s office issued a call to action for public and private sectors of our nation to help prevent underage drinking. “Too many Americans consider underage drinking a rite of passage to adulthood,” said Dr. Moritsugu. According to Moritsugu, we have over 11 million underage drinkers, and statistics reveal that kids are starting at earlier ages. Kids under 15 who start drinking alcohol are five times more likely to have alcohol problems later in life. Over seven million are considered binge drinkers, and over two million kids are classified as heavy drinkers. (Source: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/underagedrinking>).

Prom Season is one of the times our children are at greatest risk of consuming alcohol as “the thing to do”. Reputable limousine service providers can be a parent’s final line of defense. Limousine services across the country have adopted policies for underage drinking. Their experiences with kids who attempt to smuggle alcohol in hand bags or backpacks, stash it at various destinations along the way, have people meet them at destinations with a supply, or who become drunk after being dropped at a location reveal that there is a need to establish and maintain ground rules for a substance free evening. When done correctly the kids will have a great time and stay safe.

Parents and kids often assume that when they hire a car service they are getting a safe and professional service. This is not always the case. According to Doug Dean, owner of *Top Notch Limousine and Executive Services LLS*, in Sacramento California (www.topnotchexecutive.com), it is important that parents know that the car service hired for their children to go to prom or another formal event are compliant with state regulations and have a zero tolerance policy for underage drinking, and their drivers are trained and rewarded to enforce the zero tolerance policy. “There is a big trust with transporting the kids”, says Chris Christian of *Send My Limo* in Dallas, Texas (www.sendmylimo.com). “I am on the phone ‘til every vehicle is in safe each night.” Christian has been in the business for 12 years and runs 20-30 proms during the season. He trains his drivers to sweep the vehicle at every stop. Adults may bring alcoholic beverage in their cars, but if there is anyone under the age of 21 then it is simply not allowed.



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John Riga, owner of *California Limousine Sacramento, California* (www.calimos.com/prom), has had to terminate trips only a few times for underage drinking over the 27 years he has been in the executive and luxury transportation business; he and his drivers work hard to ensure that the problem with alcohol and minors does not ruin the evening for the kids. Each prom season they do 200+ trips. All the passengers and their parents sign an agreement to be drug, alcohol and weapons free and they still have to exercise controls for substance or other contraband and give a warning to terminate the trip. One of Riga’s most dramatic experiences with minors and alcohol was in downtown Sacramento when the kids returned to the car from the prom dance completely smashed. One of the girls was so incapable of functioning she was dragged into the car by her friends, and then fondled and kissed by four of the boys taking turns holding her for each other in the back of the car. “She was a petite girl”, said Riga, “I worried she might have alcohol poisoning because she was clearly not responsive to anyone or anything. And she was incapable of consenting to or fending off what was happening to her in the car.” Witnessing this, Riga terminated the trip. He called the parents to come and pick up their children at the prom location. While this type of scenario is not common when limousine services enforce the rules as California Limousine does, Riga cautions parents who believe that drinking underage is harmless. Children can end up dead from alcohol poisoning or engage more in risky and depraved behavior. Riga points to the fact that the State of California adopted strict regulations for limousine service providers after two alcohol related deaths of students during one prom season in Southern CA. “This is not a California concern”, says Riga., “This is a national concern”.

Issues with kids and drinking on prom night are for the most part not a problem when the rules are clear and there is a contract that the kids and parents sign. The evening is usually a great experience for the students. John Chumbulich of *PrimeTime Limousine* in Cleveland, Ohio (www.primetimelimoldt.com) says most of the time the kids are polite, kind and compliant and they have a very memorable and special evening.



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