

*Dear OU Parenting,
I am concerned about my teenager on Purim. I'm not okay with his drinking, but drinking seems like a common practice here. Is there something I can do as a parent on Purim? A.D.*



Dear A.D.,

Each year, on a holiday that is meant to be among the happiest on the Jewish calendar, we hear tragic stories of life-changing injuries related to alcohol use, including alcohol poisoning, car accidents, burns from firecrackers, and broken limbs. Increasing numbers of communal organizations have called for a reduction or elimination of drinking, especially for youth. However, the reality remains that drinking on Purim is prevalent in many Jewish communities around the world.

There are many aspects of your question worth exploring that are beyond this column, such as fostering a trusting relationship based on open communication throughout the year; deciding as parents what types of activities you are okay with, and what level of supervision you deem necessary for these activities; what type of discipline you want to consider for breaking the rules; or whether to speak with your kid's friends' parents or rabbeim to inform

them of your guidelines.

I want to focus on the specific conversation with your son about the coming holiday, which is by its nature very uncomfortable for a number of reasons. First, opening this conversation means that we have assessed there is a reasonable chance our child may confront a dangerous situation, which is often something we don't want to consider. Second, our child is likely going to be resistant to this conversation because it's awkward, and he doesn't want limits imposed for such a fun day. Third, it's complicated as we are trying to communicate two opposing messages simultaneously: 1. You may not drink; and 2. If you do drink, or are around others who are drinking, you need to be responsible. We don't want to come off as condoning behavior that we want our children to avoid—why should we talk about alcohol safety if the message we want to get across is “don't drink”?

Despite these concerns, in most circumstances speaking about this issue with your kids will help them make better decisions on Purim, and will also foster a stronger relationship over time. In my view, this conversation has a few elements, although, of course, the particular wording would need to be one that is genuinely yours.

Frame the conversation: “As parents, your safety is a top priority for us, and we are concerned about alcohol use on Purim.”

State clearly what you want: “On Purim,



we do not want you to drink” (or, if you have a different limit, state clearly what that is)

Give a brief explanation for your assertion: “Drinking at your age is illegal, it can be dangerous in the short-term, and you or one of your friends can get seriously hurt or end up in the hospital.”

Validate that your child may not agree with your decision: “We understand that you may not agree with our point of view and that you may be upset about it. We can talk about how we can help you have the best Purim possible, but we are not okay with your drinking.

Teach responsibility if he chooses to drink: “If you do choose to drink, or you are around others who are drunk, you need to know how to stay safe. You should not binge drink, as this can lead to alcohol poisoning, and you may not realize how drunk you are getting until it is too late. You absolutely should not get into a car with anyone who has been drinking, even

if they say they are not drunk. If you are stuck somewhere, or feel unsafe or uncomfortable for any reason, you can call us or take a taxi, and we will pay for that.

This conversation is likely to be one of many about complicated topics as your child gets older. The more practice you get with it now, the more comfortable your child will be to look to you for guidance as he confronts other challenges of his teenage years. And, hopefully, we can all have a safe Purim filled with happiness and celebration! ■

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Feel free to send in any parenting questions you may have to parenting@ouisrael.org (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).