

My name is Mary and I live in Bloomington with my husband and our three daughters. Our oldest daughter was in her senior year and preparing to graduate from High School. I ordered graduation open house announcements for her, and I think you'll find the process I went through with my family to be quite interesting, but most of all, one that has the potential to make a positive difference for others.

Our daughter expressed interest in having a graduation party that culminated with a bonfire in our backyard. My husband and I thought that would be a great idea since she loves campfires, wrote her college essay about how much she loves going to summer bible camp, and plans to work summers during college as a camp counselor working with kids and leading songs around the campfire.

Since our backyard was in need of serious help, we even hired landscapers to install a new brick fire pit. We figured our other girls would benefit from it as well, and we hope to have many other parties around it with family and friends.

My daughter and I, without even realizing it, expected her graduation party to be alcohol free. When I brainstormed with my husband about what it would be like, we talked about the announcements, food, yard, tables, etc. We talked about the beverages, and I told him about the advice another experienced mom had given me as we visited in the Cub Foods grocery aisle, for organizing different kinds of pop and water in coolers. He mentioned that his friends that had invited us to their kid's graduation parties in the past had been very hospitable and served beer and wine to the adults. This arose as quite a glitch because I am very much a youth advocate and didn't feel right about serving alcohol at a graduation party.

I have also facilitated a parent network group at our church for years, and have been a spokesperson for the 40 developmental assets that kid's need to help them to be less involved in at risk behaviors. I've been involved in "Community House" as well, which is a wellness center run by St. Luke's church that is in advocacy of intergenerational health and wellness.

I started down the wrong road with drinking in my high school years and was brought up in a home troubled with alcoholism. Having been involved in these things, I've learned a lot about how what you model for children gives a much more powerful message to them than what you tell them.

Our daughter's party was in her honor of her accomplishments, and for her friends and family. I felt strongly about this but could understand that my husband wanted to extend the same hospitality to his friends that he had received from them. I asked my husband how he'd feel if we had the party early in the day, for brunch or an early lunch, so people would be less likely to expect beer or wine to be served. He thought that was a good idea. I had already given the ok to print the announcements with the earlier time, when I talked to our daughter to confirm our plans. She was very disappointed because her hope was to have the party end with a bonfire and that just doesn't work with an early party. To her credit, she expressed that we didn't need to serve alcohol, and that the party would

be tons of fun without it. She even suggested printing on the graduation cards that she had requested no alcohol to be served.

I talked with my good friend while we had our workout. I told her about the situation and she expressed that she thought that it was important not to serve any alcohol at graduation parties. She pointed out that she and her family had been to several graduation parties the year before, like the one for our mutual friend, where there was no alcohol served but they had a great time. This was peer parenting in action!

I went back to my husband and explained the dilemma. He understood and was fine and gracious about switching the time back to early evening with no alcohol. Luckily I was still able to e-mail the company who was printing the announcements and change to the later time.

Through all of this, my daughter and I came up with the idea of printing stickers that can be added to graduation announcements or other invitations that serve as a P.S. P.S. or P.S.S. that stands for Parents and Students for Sober Celebrations. This sticker would create awareness that, contrary to common belief, there are a lot of good kids out there who stand with us. As parents we stand in honor of our graduate, and the idea that the behavior we model and the choices we make are an extremely powerful thing that directly influences the health and safety of many. As students, we stand to say that we're in agreement that there is much fun to be had in sober celebrations. It's important to know that we too make a difference to other kids around us and we truly believe that choosing not to drink can make the world a safer and healthier place not only for ourselves, but for other kids as well.

It's our dream that the school district, students, parents, grand parents, businesses, churches, and youth advocacy organizations will stand with us in spearheading this campaign.

Enthusiastically,
Mary