

# Commentary | Marin Voice: Riotous teen behavior a reminder of communication tools parents need

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When more than 100 youths, many believed to have been fueled by alcohol, took to the streets of Mill Valley after a party was ended by police earlier this month, they did not hesitate to disturb local businesses, throw cans and bottles at officers and jump on a police car.

The riotous behavior of these teens was out of the norm for Marin County – but the drinking was not. The 2022 California Healthy Kids Survey indicates that 23% of ninth graders and 44% of 11th graders in the Tamalpais Union High School District report using alcohol or drugs in the past 30 days.

Marin County has almost twice the average rates of youth alcohol and substance use compared to the state of California.

I come from the perspective of a long-time volunteer and current staff member of Marin Healthy Youth Partnerships (MHYP), a local nonprofit made up of volunteers from the Marin County community who come together as leaders to address the local conditions that lead to underage substance use. Our organization stands firmly on the prevention and solution side of tackling this challenge.

MHYP members are saddened and disturbed by the event that occurred Nov. 5. While we do not understand all the factors that led up to the incident, we do want to underline the fact that the youth were consuming alcohol and other substances. While alcohol or other drugs cannot be blamed for all that transpired, the high rate of use in Marin needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

So now what?

First, we know from evidence-based prevention research that no one sector of the community can tackle this issue and make a difference alone. Parents, youth, schools, health care professionals, law enforcement, media and the community as a whole must work together in true partnership. Below are a few practical steps that parents can take to do their part:

- **Adult and parent modeling:** A simple way to contribute to reshaping community norms that drive youth substance use is through positive modeling. Local youth learn more from what we do than what we say. Ask yourself “what messages do I want to communicate about

alcohol and drug use?” Raising the Bar is a parent modeling campaign that supports substance-free youth centered events. Learn more at [RaisingTheBarMarin.org](http://RaisingTheBarMarin.org).

- Know legal obligations and potential liability: Parents can become familiar with and also talk to their teens and fellow parents about local social-host ordinance laws and other civil and criminal liability. Social-host ordinances generally provide for civil fines when there are two or more minors at a private residence or other private property and alcoholic beverages, marijuana or other controlled substances are possessed or consumed by one or more of the minors. In addition, parents can discuss the importance of respecting law enforcement with the understanding that officers are there to protect and ensure safety.
- Join the “Be the Influence” pledge: Consider signing the pledge whereby parents who agree to only host substance-free parties for youth have access to a parent directory of other Marin parents who have signed this pledge. It is meant to create a community of like-minded parents who are watching out for your children and providing safe and healthy spaces for teens to socialize. Sign online at [BeTheInfluence.us](http://BeTheInfluence.us).
- Parental monitoring: Teens who have rules and know that they are being supervised are at less risk for substance use. Allocate time for frequent conversations around family expectations and attitudes surrounding substances. Discuss consequences for breaking family rules so everyone understands ahead of time. Call or text other parents to verify plans.
- Listen: Our kids are carrying a lot. They live in an environment very different from what we experienced growing up. Keep an open line of communication around what they are navigating. The “Let’s Talk Marin” booklet is filled with tools for navigating teen substance use in Marin County. Read it online at [LetsTalkMarin.org](http://LetsTalkMarin.org) and find community discussions, which are excellent resources for parents to know current trends and tips on communicating with your child.

Please contact MHYP via email at [info@mhyp.org](mailto:info@mhyp.org) to get involved and be a part of the solution. Check out [MHYP.org](http://MHYP.org) for more resources.

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