



Minors, Alcohol, and the Law

By Laura S. Otte

When the challenge of underage drinking arises, adults may be tempted to allow youth to consume alcohol in their homes to “keep them safe and off the streets.” Taking the keys might prevent an intoxicated teen from driving, but taking the keys won’t prevent potential brain damage, injury, risky sexual behaviors, or alcohol poisoning. Sometimes parents and caregivers think “being cool” and letting kids drink alcohol will keep them connected, or that kids are going to drink anyway so it really doesn’t matter where they get the alcohol from. However, when adults provide alcohol to minors they send a message to young people that it’s okay to disregard, or break the law.

According to Michigan law, it is a crime for any person to sell or furnish alcohol to a minor. Possible penalties include a \$1,000 fine and up to 60 days in jail for a first time conviction. If a minor dies as a result of alcohol consumption - whether it's alcohol poisoning, drowning, fall or traffic accident - the person who supplied the alcohol to that minor faces imprisonment for up to 10 years, a fine of not more than \$5,000 or both. Social Host laws against providing alcohol to minors make it possible for additional consequences through financially devastating civil lawsuits.

If a teen challenges your decision against providing alcohol, keep it simple and remember the law. Setting the right example could prevent youth from making poor decisions and suffering legal consequences of their own, such as:

Under Michigan DUI law (M.C.L. 257.625), it is against the law for a person less than 21 years of age to operate a vehicle if the person has any bodily alcohol content (0.02 grams or more but less than 0.08 grams per 100 milliliters of blood, per 210 liters of breath, or per 67 milliliters of urine, or, beginning October 1, 2013, the person has an alcohol content of 0.02 grams or more but less than 0.10 grams per 100 milliliters of blood, per 210 liters of breath, or per 67 milliliters of urine)

Minor in Possession (MIP), “ A minor shall not purchase or attempt to purchase alcoholic liquor, consume or attempt to consume alcoholic liquor, possess or attempt to possess alcoholic liquor, or have any bodily alcohol content,” consequences include a misdemeanor criminal offense on record, punishable by up to 93 days in jail and/or a \$500.00 fine. Michigan Secretary of State also imposes licensing sanctions on drivers convicted of a Minor in Possession. MIP conviction will be permanently displayed on public record and can impact eligibility for student loans, housing, employment, insurance rates, etc.