

## **PROM SEASON 2015: Shorter Dresses, Fancier Parties, Same Safety Concerns**

*By Victoria Ellis, ECCC PTA Youth Services Chair*

It's that season again! But Prom Night 2015 does not look the same as it did when you attended your prom in 19???. While it is still a big social event, the dress is no longer long, the suit has replaced the tuxedo, and the perfect car is now a party van! But for parents, one thing has not changed: concerns for our children's safety.

We all want our teens to have a memorable prom night. It is important to realize, however, that many prom-goers may be tempted to disregard the rules when it comes to using and driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol and engaging in unsafe activities. While prom night can be viewed as a rite of passage, this one night often serves as a test of years of prep talks, an investment you've made teaching your teen to use good, sound judgment. By simply talking to your teen ahead of prom time, you can ensure your child has a fun, safe, and memorable night!

Your teen may ask for a later curfew. If you view this as an acceptable request, follow it up with a talk on safety. It is okay for you to ask about the need to stay out later. Have your teen present to you the detailed plans on what will occur during the extra time out and where they will be. All pre- and post-prom activities should be adult chaperoned, and restaurants must be no-alcohol-served establishments. Emphasize to your teen to never leave their possessions, food, or beverages unattended.

Your teen may ask to attend the prom without a date. This is a very popular and accepted way to go to prom now, and many prom goers prefer to have fun in groups. Ask your teen to give you a list of names and contact numbers for the members of the group, and the friends' parents. Make contact with these parents to review the agenda and timeline.

Your teen may ask to rent a limousine or party van. While this may seem like a great idea because the authorized driver will be an adult, do your homework and check out the driving company. Find out about their policy on alcohol in the vehicle and if they encourage the use of seatbelts. On prom night, talk to the driver about your expectations for an alcohol- and drug-free ride. Most importantly, be specific with the driver about not making any stops before or after the prom. Parents know it is illegal to serve alcoholic beverages to children who are guests in their home, so make sure all drivers know your alcohol-free policy, too.

Reassure your teen that your concerns stem from an understanding of prom night pressures and stressors. Make sure you are available for discussion on any topics, and reinforce to your teen that your primary concern is their health and safety, motivated by love. Always make it known that you will pick them up, regardless of the time, place, or circumstances.

In summary, you can prepare your teens for prom night by following four simple guidelines:

- Keep all communications open and limit your own prejudices.

- Plan the night's activities together, and be willing to rework the plan as needed.
- Set firm guidelines and positive expectations regarding behavior.
- Both parties must be willing to cooperate and make concessions as needed.

*East Cobb resident Victoria Ellis lives in the Spring Wood neighborhood with her husband of 27 years; they have 7 children and 7 grandchildren. She holds a Master of Education and is currently pursuing her doctorate.*

**East Cobb Prom Dates:**

- March 7 Walton (8-11pm at the Carolos Hellenic Community Center)
- March 14 Kell (7-11pm at the Marietta Conference Center)
- March 21 Lassiter (7-11pm at the Fox Theater)
- March 21 Wheeler ( 6-10pm at the King Plow Arts Center)
- April 18 Sprayberry (7-11pm at the Retreat at Perimeter Summit)
- May 2 Pope ( 7-11pm at the Fox Theater)