

An Unforgettable
AFTER-GRAD

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Your guide to creating
and operating a successful
all-night safe, dry, grad event



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For my family
who make every adventure worthwhile
and who continue to teach me the meaning of 'fearless'

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Why Dry?

An introduction to the dry After-Grad concept

For grade twelve students and their families, high school graduation – a milestone recognizing over a decade of school achievements – is a time of celebration filled with social events. This special grad year often culminates in a graduation ceremony, sometimes followed by a school-sponsored celebration, and then, for many, the all-important “all-night grad party.”

Unfortunately, many of these all night parties have come to represent a rite of passage and include underage drinking, drugs, unsafe sex and other high risk behaviours, and in some cases, the worst possible outcome, the death of a teen. While many parents have done their utmost to provide an organized “safe” environment – with parent volunteers, controlled quantities of liquor, and on-site first aid – the fact remains that the risks at these all night “wet” or “damp” grad parties are far too high. Too often the fun turns to tragedy.

Having seen the fallout from these parties firsthand, Constable Ravi Gunasinghe of the Sidney, BC, RCMP states, *“Parents are justifying allowing minors to consume alcohol, some of these children being two years away from being able to legally purchase and consume alcohol. Hosts of these parties are also at risk of liability when allowing minors to consume alcohol on their property. So, aside from corrupting a minor, how many parents know just how much*

alcohol a given child can tolerate and how can a parent or other adult, determine when a child is no longer impaired or intoxicated? A person who drinks 12 ounces of alcohol throughout a ten-hour time frame at a party may not be intoxicated when they prepare to leave the event, but may still be impaired for several hours after. Potential consequences include verbal and physical violence, alcohol poisoning, introduction of other drugs, medical distress and impaired driving crashes” – along with the possibility of liability and litigation issues for the adults involved.

The truth is *there is an alternative to risky parties* that not only reduces the risk and possible harms, but provides an exciting and memorable finalé that grads will not only want to attend, but will talk about for years to come. The solution is a safe, “dry” (non-alcoholic) After-Grad (AG) – an all-night, all-inclusive, controlled celebration where no one has to make a decision about using alcohol or drugs because it is taken completely out of the equation. Typically, an After-Grad follows the convocation ceremony and/or school-sponsored dinner/dance and can run anywhere from 9 pm through to 5 or 6 am – leaving no opportunity to join any other party that night.

This high energy and highly entertaining event can represent a new tradition that eliminates uncontrolled underage drinking, driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and other high risk behaviours. It shows students that they are cared about and valued, and it sends a clear message that a sober celebration is not only encouraged and supported but can represent the time of their life not the end of their lifetime!

The secret to making this After-Grad truly successful and unforgettable is:

- ✓ a group of dedicated and caring adults,
- ✓ a supportive school community, and
- ✓ an event ‘blueprint’ that really works – which you have in this book, born as a result of five successful years of fabulous AG events!

I was fortunate during my 20 plus year career as a professional conference and event planner to enjoy a great deal of flexibility which allowed me to spend much of my time at home with my children. And having nurtured and now watched my three children graduate, I have experienced firsthand the angst and joy that comes with parenting teens as they

navigate those final high school years, learn to drive, and begin to take responsibility for their own decisions, including how to spend their time on Friday night! It made sense and was a great fit for my organizational talents to lend my time and event planning expertise to our local high school as it made the shift to an all-night, safe, dry grad event, which we came to call the After-Grad.

The year our first teen was in grade 11, our high school, Parkland Secondary in Sidney, BC, was ready for some real change. In early 2005, Vice Principal Steve Newlove was thinking about grade 12 graduation day and how each year, a growing number of students were leaving the organized school dinner/dance for less organized beach or field parties, events that included underage drinking. In June, after that year's grad celebration had ended, Steve and a small group of parents and upcoming graduates came together to talk about an all-night, safe, "dry" and secure grad event.

In September, the grad executive for the upcoming 2006 graduation class (our daughter's class) gave their endorsement for a dry safe event. Together with some supportive parents and grade 12 grad executive students, Steve made his sales pitch at the Grad Parent Orientation presentation that October. He had the students onside which meant they could help sell the idea to their own parents. The students wanted an alternative to the field or beach party – and to make memories, a "night to remember" not one they would forget. It couldn't be boring or dull, it had to be exciting, interactive, and had to keep them busy and awake all night, after an already long and emotionally charged day. Everyone – parents, students and teachers – wanted the grads to have the time of their lives, in a safe and secure environment, and not risk their lives doing it. There were other successful dry grad events in BC and in Canada to look to for ideas and guidelines, and there was time – nine months to pull it all together. Parkland Secondary was up for the challenge!

So, when Steve and a very supportive graduating student's parent – Sharon Woods – invited me to meet and talk over some ideas, I walked in with an open mind. I had my own graduating daughter who I wanted to keep safe that night, and I had the advantage of those many years of corporate conference planning and event organizing on my side.

We had the desire and enthusiasm, now we just had to figure out what they would do all night!

And with that, the “All-Night Parkland Safe After-Grad” was born, out of a desire to provide our students with an all-night event they would never forget, in a safe and secure environment they wouldn’t want to leave.

Today, as we move into 2011 and our sixth year, our all-night event has become a tremendous success story. Boasting over 96% attendance in each year, the After-Grad has become part of the culture at Parkland Secondary, a real tradition and one that graduates are excited about in September and grateful for in June!

Parkland Secondary’s AG event has inspired other high schools in British Columbia, and I have been corresponding with school representatives in other provinces to provide advice and planning suggestions. Parents have invited me to make presentations and to teach our ‘system’ for planning a successful event, and since I can’t be at every school, it made sense to create a book and a website that could be. The book and its website are the most effective way for me to explain the process step-by-step, and provide parents, grads and teachers with all the checklists, schedules, forms and other tools. I believe, that by following the system, your school will be well on its way to hosting a fantastic After-Grad that will exceed everyone’s expectations.

“Our school community greatly supports this parent-sponsored evening as it provides a safe and dry graduation activity. It is comforting to parents and school staff knowing our graduates are safe on their graduation evening.”

— Bob Lee, principal, & Steve Newlove, vice
principal, Parkland Secondary School



How to use this book

My intent in writing the book was to provide an easy-to-use and informative resource, as well as a support as you work on a project that may seem daunting at times. I hope that some of the ideas inspire you, and that the information will help you stay on track, while making it a manageable and enjoyable process, one that you can be proud to be a part of, and one that helps create a truly memorable event for your graduating class.

Each year, when we begin our After-Grad work in September, we look forward to having ten months in which to create a truly memorable event. Whether you have the luxury of time or have just picked this book up in March, I will take you through the process from beginning to end, providing you with a step-by-step approach. I use the same approach to every event, breaking down the project into small, very manageable chunks. This is especially important because if you are like me, you already have a job, a family, a life... and you are working on the After-Grad in your “spare” time.

This book does not make any promises or provide you with any guarantees that your event will be successful, that nothing will go awry, or that you won't encounter challenges along the way or during the event. What it does provide you with is a framework, a place to start, and a process to follow – one that works, and one that has brought us tremendous success for the past 5 years.

As most After-Grad events are designed and operated by a volunteer committee or

Dry Grad Society, this book has been designed using a committee approach, listing various tasks and duties assigned to sub-committees and coordinator positions. We've used the following icons to identify the recommended eight positions and sub-committees:

Chair	Communications & Publicity Co-ordinator	Finances Co-ordinator	Volunteer Committee	Transportation, Operations & Safety Committee	Decorating, Food & Beverage Committee	Entertainment, Games & Contests Committee	Fundraising & Prizes Committee
							

Within this book, each monthly section begins with a calendar filled with action items for that month, listed by committee or coordinator, along with a suggested weekly order for completing those items. You may, of course, complete the “action items” in any order you like, however, keep in mind that other committees or individuals may depend on your completing one task before they can move on to another on their own list, hence the calendar concept. Follow the book, or move along at your own pace, include some, all or none of the suggestions, but however you decide to make it happen, the monthly calendar will serve as a reminder of where you are in the process, and while your event may look very different than ours, many of the components and ‘action items’ will most certainly be on your list too.

Keep in mind that our event examples are based on a group size of 200; you will need to adjust if you have a smaller or larger graduating class or if your event includes multiple schools.

Along with the monthly action items, I have also included samples of the forms I use each year to help make the process easier. They are all available to download from the website – www.safegradevent.com

- ✓ You may decide to simply use them as a guide, and create your own forms, or
- ✓ download the Word and Excel versions and change the sample information to suit your unique event needs, or
- ✓ download the PDF version if you don't have Word or Excel.

- ✓ How about uploading the forms onto an online sharing site so that everyone has access to them and you can revise them as you move along? Some forms are used by more than one committee so sharing them can be a very useful tool, especially the calendar which can be updated and seen by everyone at all times.

We've learned a lot along the way, and are pleased to share it all with you. And, remember that while this graduation year will go by far too quickly, the memories of the After-Grad you are creating, really will last a lifetime. It's such a worthwhile and meaningful journey, and I wish you a truly successful and unforgettable event!

“Linda has established the ‘after-grad template’ for new parent organizers to go forward with. And not just for Parkland, but other high schools are learning from her talents and her experience.”

— Heather McAughtrie, Catering and
Conference Manager, University of Victoria
Students' Society



Making it UNFORGETTABLE!

What makes an After-Grad unforgettable? Community support; a safe & secure environment; exciting, interactive and fun entertainment; fabulous food & beverages; and fantastic prizes. Add to that mix: a group of dedicated and supportive parents to organize and run the event, and you have the makings of a truly memorable After-Grad. And while no two events are ever exactly the same, there are certain components that are a “must” for an After-Grad to be truly unforgettable!

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Whether it’s the school administration, grads and their parents, or the community at large, you cannot go it alone. A safe, dry After-Grad is a daunting prospect for anyone who is trying to run their first event, and you need support. You must spread the “positive” message of the value and importance of the event, and what it means to everyone involved.

SAFETY & SECURITY

An After-Grad must take into consideration the well-being of everyone in attendance – systems and measures need to be established to ensure the best possible environment. Having both a Security and a Wellness Team as part of your event ensures the necessary level of safety, security and comfort.

It makes sense to partner with your local police department and/or fire department, a professional security firm, and medical personnel including doctors, nurses, first responders, and emergency medical support/paramedics. A professional security firm will have their own thoughts on how to handle the registration and security check, but be sure to also make your expectations known along with any unique concerns or considerations related to your guest group.

ENTERTAINMENT

For an After-Grad to be the one “party” that Grads *want* to attend, the entertainment has to be exciting, interactive, energetic, awesome, cool, amazing, fun, outrageous, memorable.... you get the idea – they must be “entertained”!

To ensure the highest level of enjoyment, we believe you need to include a range of activities and different kinds of entertainment. This generation of teens is used to a high level of interaction and instant gratification. A selection from the following list of activities will go a long way to keeping your grads and their guests “engaged” for the entire six or more hours:

- ✓ roaming and stationary “live” entertainment – magicians, jugglers, fortune tellers, tattoo artists, caricaturists, actors, dancers, street performers, stilt walkers
- ✓ performances – comedians, hypnotists, skits, cultural performances
- ✓ games – video games (*XBOX 360, Rock Band, DDR, Nintendo Wii*), arcade games (*Pac-Man*, pinball, simulators, sports games), air hockey, foosball, billiards, life-size board games (chess, checkers, *TWISTER*), casino games, bingo, darts)
- ✓ contests – limbo, hula hoop, relays
- ✓ music (a very important component) – dancing and dance contests, music videos, karaoke, live bands, open microphone, battle of the bands
- ✓ sports and inflatables – hockey, swimming, tennis, volleyball, soccer, Sumo wrestling, climbing walls, bungee run, obstacle courses, gladiator games, jousting, bouncy castles (you read that right)

- ✓ photographs and videos – videographers, photographers, photo booths, digital photo loops, full length movies, television shows
- ✓ souvenir T-shirts are the number one After-Grad souvenir. Every grad receives a plain white T-shirt, a coloured fabric/permanent marker and they spend hours writing and signing shirts as a permanent memory of their grad year and great night.

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Teens eat a lot! My teens eat even more! An After-Grad has to keep grads well fed and well hydrated. This keeps headaches and fatigue at bay and helps the group stay energized – it's a long night. It has to be easy and convenient to grab a bite or they will avoid the buffets. So make it easy for them by serving foods that appeal to teens, are healthy with an emphasis on fresh fruit, vegetables and proteins, and less dessert or sugary items. Choose food items that are small, easy-to-snack-on finger foods, that don't require cutlery, and can be eaten quickly. Offer foods that they can walk around with, eat while they are in a line-up and that aren't too messy. Include lots of bottled water, in lots of places, to keep them hydrated without a lot of added sugar. Offer a limited selection of fruit juices, soft drinks and coffee, only in the early hours, and definitely disallow energy drinks.

Why no energy drinks? The Canadian Medical Association Journal raised alarm in July 2010 that 'energy drinks' are potentially addictive and contain very high levels of caffeine, and may be crossing the line into the 'drug' category.

PRIZES

Prizes are a huge draw for an After-Grad. Each year, we have given away thousands of dollars in prizes and tuitions/bursaries – gathered through fundraising efforts, a raffle and local business support. Each and every attending grad has received a prize along with chances to win an additional 10 to 25 larger, more expensive items including the latest

electronics and computers, and tuitions/bursaries for post secondary education. We even gave away a car in our first year (an older car, refurbished free of charge) and many schools give vehicles away as their grand prize.

EVENT FLOW

One of the best ways to keep everyone present and engaged is to “build up” the excitement throughout the night. We have done that by making most of our entertainment available from the event start, then introducing “live” performances such as bands and hypnotists in the wee hours (a typically “flat” time for the event), and finishing up with the Prize Draw, where you must be in attendance to win.

“To this day I remember every detail of the After-Grad because alcohol was not a part of it.”

— Rhys, graduate



BUILDING THE EXCITEMENT

Here's a description of a theoretical After-Grad that you can use to “paint a picture” of what's possible if your parents, school administrators and grads have no experience with a safe, dry, unforgettable event.



YOU ARE INVITED TO...

An Unforgettable After-Grad

As you leave your graduation dinner/dance with your fellow graduates and guests, a parent volunteer checks your name off the attendance list and hands you a coloured wristband – allowing entry to an unforgettable all-night fabulous experience. You make your way to the awaiting double-decker bus. Onboard, finding a selection of coloured bandanas, beachcomber hats, sunglasses and flashing rings, you pick out something that goes with your outfit, and sit back and relax, while your tour guide takes you on a little journey to your ‘island paradise’ where the party is waiting!

Everything is black outside – it's 10.30 pm after all. As you listen to the tour

guide announce all of the great things there are to do tonight, in the distance you can just make out the edge of a huge flashing 'Welcome to Paradise' sign, and then more lights, hundreds of lights, the building is aglow. Arriving in style, walk the red carpet walkway, under a lighted archway of flowers, over the bridge and through the doors, all while the tropical music is blasting through the air. A mermaid hands you a lei, and a pirate – parrot and all – hands you some gold doubloons from his latest ship raid.

Toting your change of clothes, you make your way through the main entrance doors, pass through the security check, where you are met by more pirates (friendly ones, thankfully) and two local police officers who pat down everyone and may use a breathalyser (don't want any alcohol or drugs spoiling this once-in-a-lifetime party!). Next, three merry buccaneers serve everyone a 'welcome mocktail' along with a canapé or two. Leaving your personal belongings at the coat check, you head to the commemorative T-shirt table and the signing begins – it's a sight to see, hundreds of grads, all signing their fellow classmates' shirts, with thoughts and expressions about graduation, friendship and future wishes, creating a souvenir to last a lifetime. Donning your T-shirt, beachcomber hat and lei, you are 'in theme' and ready to try out one of the over 23 activities available tonight.

A walk through the tropical lounge and it's the karaoke you hit first (who says you don't sound like Celine Dion?). Behind the karaoke, there is a continuous loop of After-Grad digital images showing... oh and look, now there's one of Celine. Get inside the photobooth and take a picture strip of you and your friends, play a little pinball or Pac Man, take a stab at foosball or air hockey, and then a little competition among friends playing the XBOX or Wii. Among the palm trees, fishing nets and sea shells, the buffet table is loaded, so grab a little some-

thing on your way out, maybe a mini-wrap, some veggies and a bottle of water, and then it's off to see what else the evening has in store. Just before you head out, game to try the limbo or hula hoop contest, anyone?

Moving along the hallway, you find a hot dog vendor and fresh hot popcorn – hmmm, maybe later, more to do first. The magician is doing some unbelievable sleight-of-hand tricks or how about a caricature of you and your best friend, one that will last forever? You can leave the finished masterpiece at the coat check, and then move on to the temporary tattoo stand where you can have your arm airbrushed with a beautiful tropical flower. A little further down the hall, join in the beach relay contest, and then head straight into the casino.

This noisy place is filled with the sounds of tropically-clad dealers and lots of hopeful players, looking for Lady Luck. Huge tropical palm trees, grass-skirted tables, and all kinds of casino games await, so why not try your hand at blackjack, the wheel, poker, or maybe a little bingo or a game of billiards, all with faux money and real fun. Another buffet means more snacks, a bottle of juice, and now it's time for a little dancing in the nightclub.

The nightclub is bouncing with lots of flashing lights, videos playing on floating screens, and glow sticks for everyone. Dancers are joining in the contests and requesting their favourite dance tunes. It won't be long now until the live band takes over and after that you won't want to miss the hypnotist's performance.

You are back in the main hallway, fresh hot pizza is being made to order, and friends are playing Rock Band. It's been hours since you first arrived, so how about a little break – you can freshen up with the washroom amenities that have been provided, drop into the wellness room if you need to rest, or head down to the buffet for a hot cup of coffee and a little dessert. This has been an amazing night, and it's not over yet.

The hypnotist is ready to take the stage, so back to the nightclub to enjoy his performance and to watch your grad class make fools of themselves, or chickens, or rock stars! And just when you think it doesn't get better than this, the chicken-fool-rock-star performance is over, and you are waiting for the grand finale, the prize draw worth thousands, and hopefully a nice little souvenir to take home – new laptop anyone?

Still in the nightclub, this becomes the final stop on this amazing After-Grad journey. Everyone, and I mean everyone, is gathered together, for the big prize draw. There are hundreds of prizes, and every grad in attendance will go home tonight with at least one prize – maybe a local restaurant or gas gift card. And then, everyone's name is thrown back in the raffle drum for the really big draw – for the latest electronics or a shopping spree, and maybe even a college tuition prize. It's been a winning night for everyone, and now it's time to gather up your prizes, grab a granola bar and juice to go, and make your way to the buses, for the early morning ride home. It's 5 am and you have just had the night of your life – along with your entire grad class, the friends you will never forget, and all in a safe, secure, energized, and fun-filled environment – unforgettable!













SEPTEMBER

September marks the beginning of the school year, an exciting and busy time. As a parent, my first week is usually filled with signing forms, paying fees, adjusting to class schedules and developing new “waking teens” strategies, leaving little time or inclination to think about graduation!

If your school already has an established AG committee or Dry Grad Society, it may take a few weeks to get it started. If your school’s parent group has never offered a dry, safe After-Grad, then it’s time to take the first step in establishing a new tradition by presenting the idea to the school administration, parents and grad students, and getting them to embrace the idea and “buy” in. One of the challenges of selling the “dry” idea to resistant grads and oftentimes parents, is a society view where some parents and graduates believe that it is a “rite of passage” to include alcohol on graduation night and where fun equates to liquor. And while there may be some resistance at your school, most parents will want to be a part of an event that keeps their children safe, and their own sleep intact. You may not have any elected committee positions as of yet, so you may have to be the voice, and assume the responsibilities of the chair, while waiting for the formal creation of an AG committee.

SEPTEMBER – ACTION ITEMS								
Week	Chair	Communications & Publicity Co-ordinator	Finances Co-ordinator	Volunteer Committee	Transportation, Operations & Safety Committee	Decorating, Food & Beverage Committee	Entertainment, Games & Contests Committee	Fundraising & Prizes Committee
								
Week 1	Meet with School Administration & Confirm Dates							
	Meet Last Year's AG Committee							
Week 2								
Week 3	Attend Parent Advisory Group/ Council (PAC) Meeting							
Week 4	Create Initial Parent Contact List							

Sample “Action Items – September” is available as a PDF document or an Excel document at www.safegradevent.com/tools/forms/actionitemsseptember



CHAIR

Meet with School Administration & Confirm Dates – week one

A great place to begin your “dry grad” conversation is the principal’s office (this time you *want* to be there!). If the option of a dry, safe After-Grad is a new concept for the school, then this is a great time to determine the level of support you can anticipate and to discuss moving forward.

If the date of the graduation ceremony and/or dinner/dance has already been set, then this may become your event date, if you want to have the After-Grad take place on the same night. Even if the After-Grad takes place on another date, it’s important to know the actual graduation date as it may impact your planning.

Meet Last Year’s AG Committee – week one

If your school had an After-Grad last year, now is the time to meet last year’s chair and to discuss moving forward with this year’s event and striking a new committee. Be sure to review the committee notes from the previous event as these will help create an even more successful event this time around. If that committee is having a September debrief meeting, ask to attend, so you can hear about the event first-hand.

Attend Parent Advisory Group/Council (PAC) Meeting – week three

Attend the first parent group/council meeting of the year, and ask for a spot on the agenda to be devoted to a discussion about After-Grad. Opening a conversation with this group will hopefully garner their support as they are a group of already dedicated parents who are giving time and energy to the well-being of the students and their school community and who will likely support a healthy and safe event for graduates. The council can be your greatest support as well as a source of funding – use this meeting to inquire about their

requirements for funding requests. We have been generously supported each year by our PAC and have received monies for both the event and bursaries.

The first council meeting may be advertised through the school website or newsletter, so this is also a good opportunity to request parents to attend the meeting and to mention that the After-Grad will be on the agenda. It may also be worthwhile to include school administrators at this first meeting, to show their support and to include them in some meaningful discussion with parents who will be invited to share ideas and concerns. Ask your school-police liaison or other local police representative to come to the meeting, to speak to the statistics on drinking and driving, along with the legalities and liabilities associated with the alternative of planning/participating in a “wet grad”.

Talk about the *advantages* of a Dry Grad – it’s an all-inclusive, all-night, amazing party that creates lasting, lifelong memories – the entire grad class is welcome, and they won’t forget this night – in fact they will still be talking about it at the 10-year reunion. Be prepared to share any information you have available that will help parents understand why this event is so important, and how they too can successfully operate a dry, safe After-Grad. If other schools in your area have held successful dry grad events, ask them to share those successes. Those committees are a valuable resource. When we started working on our first event in late 2005, another local school (Claremont Secondary) shared a great deal of their information, including their challenges and suggestions for change, which saved us time and allowed us to avoid similar pitfalls in our first event. We have since gone on to share our successes and recommendations with other schools, ensuring that the message continues to be spread.

And, if people still want more proof, offer up some of the testimonials in the book – quotes from real grads who attended our all-night event, many of them who would have been at a booze-included “wet grad” if that had been their only alternative.

Use this council meeting as an opportunity to secure parent email addresses that can be used to build a comprehensive data base, which will enable you to continue to connect with parents and provide information throughout the year. Student emails can be gathered