

From the Office of the Sheriff:

As our weather becomes warm and the daylight hours are extended, law enforcement can predict an increase calls for service for specific incidents. These incidents have already begun. They include acts of Vandalism, Underage Drinking, and Juvenile Runaway's.

Vandalism – Webster defines it as “the willful or malicious defacement or destruction of public or private property.” My definition is Class A Misdemeanor, nine-months jail and \$10,000.00 fine! Our most common victims of vandalism include mailboxes, cemeteries, and homes. These senseless acts do nothing but cause financial hardship to the victim and impress nobody but the perpetrators themselves. As school draws to a close, spring parties and graduations will generate a significant increase in vandalism. If your children have spray paint, egg cartons, damaged baseball bats, and paint guns in their vehicles after a night out, please question them as to their activities. This is in your best interest as parents may be held accountable for damages caused by their children.

Underage drinking – Dodge County deputies actively patrol the back roads and public ground of the county. These are the same areas that teenagers will choose to drink and entertain themselves. Often, upon the sight of a law enforcement officer, these teenagers will flee on foot to avoid arrest. With underage drinking citations ranging from \$249 - \$735.00, the thought of arrest is pretty serious. A trend of the past few years in that same area brings great concern to law enforcement. That trend is the house parties when the parents are out of town for the weekend. These teenagers barricade themselves in the home upon sight of law enforcement. This poses some serious issues and concern.

Often, several wish to leave and are prevented from doing so by others. We call that kidnapping. At times we will get a search warrant if we feel the party and the numbers involved require intervention. Upon checking registrations of vehicles at the scene, we will call the registered owners of the cars, usually parents. We ask them to come and retrieve their vehicle so it is not driven away later by a drinking teenager. We will also tow those vehicles that remain to protect the driver as well as the innocent motorists who may come upon these drinking teenagers. If you are a parent and will be out of town, have a responsible party check your residence. If your teenager is driving your car, establish the rules as to where they may go and what activities you condone and those you will not tolerate.

Runaway's – Each weekend we receive several calls from concerned parents who wish to report their son or daughter as a runaway. We require those parents to come to the Sheriff's Department to make out that report. The personal information is entered into the system so the juvenile is flagged as a runaway should he/she has interaction with law enforcement. The parent is also responsible for picking up the child wherever they are located. Some are located locally, some out-of-state. We feel reporting runaway's is important. It is important that parents are familiar with their children close friends as often this is where they find safe refuge. The ability to locate these runaways soon saves valuable resources for other calls for service.

These three areas are all related. The perpetrators that conduct vandalism are usually drinking during the act. Many times this type of planned activity is what encourages your children to run away when you deny them permission to go out for the evening. Parenting is tough business. What is important for you to know is that you are not alone if you're dealing with these issues. Finally, it is not your fault or lack of parenting that stimulates our youth to these types of activities.