

XV. Stay out of trouble by evaluating your “situation”

The best way to avoid becoming a defendant in the criminal justice system is to stay out of trouble in the first place. More often than not, when an SA is arrested there is some legal merit and factual basis for the accusation. It is not just a “mistake” made by the police. Instead, the SA was involved in some activity that warranted an arrest. Whether the charge will result in a conviction can only be determined by the court.

There are several litmus tests that you can give yourself to assess whether you are in “over your head” and trouble is likely to follow. To some SAs, these “tests” may sound silly, stupid or obvious, but following them will help you stay out of the criminal justice system.

1. “Would I tell my mother about this situation?”

Mothers have great insight into life and assessing the truthfulness of their children. They also are very proud of their children’s accomplishments, both on the field and in the classroom. So before you do something that may lead to trouble, ask yourself, “Would I want to tell my mother about this situation?” If not, then you probably should not get involved in what you are considering doing. For example, drugs do not “just show up” in a car with three or four other people. Someone is responsible for bringing them. If you know there are drugs in the car, then do not get into that car. You certainly would not admit to your mom you got into a car when you knew there was cocaine in the glove box.

2. “Nothing good happens in a bar after midnight”

Whether it is a bar fight, underage drinking or some type of criminal mischief, “bad stuff” involving young people tends to happen after midnight and involves the use of alcohol or some other type of drug.

Because you have been out past midnight before and nothing happened, you may be thinking, “It won’t happen to me.” But it can and it does. Once it gets late and people have been drinking, inhibitions wane and bad decisions are made that can carry criminal consequences. If you are out, leaving any bar before midnight is a good idea – eleven p.m. may be even better. By leaving early, you reduce the likelihood of getting into trouble.

3. “Is this the best place for me right now?”

If your “gut” is telling you that what you are about to do is not right, listen to that instinct and back away. Because of your unique position, either on a college campus or in high school, you should always ask yourself if what you are doing may create a problem for yourself, your team or your school. You need to be aware of your circumstances and whether you are exposing yourself to an unnecessary risk that could have tremendous criminal consequences.

4. “Do I trust these people?”

You should spend your recreational time with friends you know and trust. For high school and college students, it is not unusual to be invited to a party or asked to attend some campus event by people you barely know. Unfortunately, this can give rise to a situation where you may feel pressured to engage in illegal behavior because the people you are with are doing it. For example, your “new friends” may want you to get high with them before a party.

While making new friends is an important part of the high school and college experience, you should carefully evaluate who you are spending your time with and what you are doing with them.

If someone you do not know very well does ask you to do something with them and you think you would like to get to know them better, you should consider suggesting that you get together at a location where potential problems, such as alcohol or drug use, are unlikely to take place. You could, for example, suggest that you meet for lunch in the school cafeteria. Take the time to get to know them better and properly judge their character in a public place first.

5. “Should I say anything to my teammate?”

If you see a friend or teammate going down the wrong path, you should say something to him or her about their risky conduct. For example, if your friend is in no condition to drive, do not be afraid to confront him or her. Provide your teammate with a solution, such as, “Let’s get a cab,” or “Let me drive.” While they may be mad at you for a time, they will thank you in the future.

6. Conclusion

While you may think these “tests” are silly or stupid, they are based on years of experience in the criminal justice system and examining why young people get in trouble. Think about these issues before you engage in risky behavior that may carry some very serious criminal consequences to you. Although your parents may hire your lawyer, they cannot serve jail time on your behalf.

As an SA, you cannot afford to make a mistake or get caught up in possible criminal conduct. The consequences to you, your teammates and your school’s reputation are too great.