



# Why the school won't support the formal

For years now we've heard this same cry. Either from the committee members who seek assistance to plan a formal, or from the school administrators who are refusing that support.

There are some misconceptions and myths about formals that schools tend to rely on when withholding their support and endorsement of formals. We'll try to dissolve some of that here.

25 or 30 years ago, the school formal was an out-of-control drunken free-for-all. There was little or no format, little or no security and little or no regulation. By the time a Principal has worked through the teaching system to gain that high position, their memory of formals past is pretty much this sort of picture.

When Principals reach the top position, they have many issues to worry about, including the name and reputation of the school as well as the overall safety of the students. One of the most tender points is anything that exposes the school or its staff members to any form of legal liability if something goes wrong. It's these concerns, coupled with their memory of what formals used to be like, that creates such fear and anxiety when faced by a committee wanting the green-light to organise a formal.

Now that you understand the reasoning behind the refusal, it tends to make sense, however, there are some fairly significant holes in that kind of thinking these days.

Firstly, the bad old days are long gone. Today school formals are a bona-fide national industry turning over \$3.5 Billion and every state has a deluge of legislation in place for the strict regulation of the industry. At the same time, the teen culture has changed quite significantly and people prefer to play the formal as a "Straight-Edge" event. No longer is the formal a mess to clean up, it's now a glamorous, well regulated, heavily secured cultural icon filled with serious fashion, top-class cuisine and premium venues.

Our events for instance carry up to \$60 Million worth of multi-tiered insurances and expert teams of licensed, trained and seriously professional experts to run, secure and control these events.

Secondly, the "Ostrich" mentality that Principals sometimes adopt (**"If I say no the formal and don't know anything about it, it can't hurt us"**) is completely false and ridiculous. Here's the fact that will shock and amaze school administrators. **Even if the school has no involvement, even if they have no awareness of the formal, if anything goes wrong at the formal, the school automatically attracts an exposure to a potential legal liability.** This one's even scarier, **86% of all student committees that are refused school support will go ahead and book a formal in the school's name anyway.**

The best advice on offer is that if the school wants to minimise and control the liability exposure, the only way to do that effectively is to control the formal. This way they can be sure that all the bases are covered and that they have professional help to arrange and execute the event according to the law. Everyone wins. They shouldn't worry about the costs because everyone buys their own tickets so the schools have absolutely no costs at all.

There is another minor misconception schools often have, and that's the one about having a "duty of care" and needing to send staff down to the formal to supervise and run things. That's a big falsehood. It's actually not legal for school staff to act in any official capacity when on site at a formal venue. That goes likewise for parents. To take on any supervisory or security role at a venue, you must have Security Industry licenses, Public Liability insurances, OH & S procedures, first aid certification, RSA certification, WWC Clearance, Specialised training and be under contract for that role. Anyone else trying to do it without all of that can be locked up for offences to a variety of acts.

Interestingly, a student committee who is unsupported by the school can book a formal without the school's permission. There's no law against that. We're not suggesting that it's the best way to go, but it's a realistic and perfectly acceptable option.

Our advice to both committees and administrators is the same. The best way to get the formal over the line without anything going wrong that will leave anyone on either side holding the bag for legal liability is to get professional help from an agency like Prom Night Events. We can organise and run successful and fully covered formals with or without school approval, with or without school involvement but in either case, the liability exposure is taken by us so the school is shielded whether they approve the formal or not.

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