



—parents make a difference—

Some Basic Facts

- The three leading causes of death among adolescents — unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide, as well as unsafe sexual behavior — are closely yoked to alcohol use.
- Of adolescents' emergency room visits, as many as 40% had a positive blood alcohol level.
- A national survey found that 40% of parents think they have little influence over their adolescent's decision to use drugs or not.
- Approximately 45% of parents indicate that it is likely their teens will use illegal drugs.
- By the age of 17, approximately 12% of adolescents can be categorized as at risk for substance abuse.
- There is a genetic component associated with the presence of alcohol or drug dependence. In the same way that diabetes, or hypertension, or breast cancer can run in families, the same is true of alcohol and drug dependence.
- Adolescents consistently have a very inaccurate perception of actual alcohol and drug use patterns of friends.
High school students in one study thought that twice as many of their peers were regular weekly drinkers than was actually the case.

Appreciate your influence

- Parental influence operates as a natural harm-reduction mechanism.
- Parents influence their children's drinking in many ways.
Through family interactions, modeling and reinforcing standards, and attitudes that children learn and use to guide their behavior in new situations. Thus, parental influences endure.
- An important predictor of whether a teenage boy will have an alcohol related driving offence or accident is whether his parents are negative (rather than neutral) about teenage drinking.
- The type of family— whether living with both parents, a parent or step-parent, a single parent home, or living with non-family members — is less important than the quality of family relationships and the amount of time adolescents spend with those they live with.
- Adolescent's perceptions of the parenting style.
Teens who view their parents generally as authoritative (know what they are talking about), as not permissive (who have standards and clear expectations), and as less authoritarian ("do it because I say so") do better in school and also are less likely to use substances.
- Experimentation and use among elementary age children is associated with parenting.
Along with parent's substance use encouraging risk taking increases pre-teens use.
- Family environment is more important than the family economic status.
Adolescent drinking is largely unrelated to the socio-economic circumstances of the family. A supportive family environment is associated with lowered rates of alcohol use.
- Parents health habits influence their children.
This goes from wearing bike helmets, to using seat belts, to drinking patterns and being a smoker. The younger the child the more powerful is the parent's model. If you have any concern about your own substance use, act on this. People don't often worry about their alcohol or drug use needlessly. If you are a smoker, maybe now is the time to quit.
- Parental use of illegal drugs substantially increases the risk of their teens drug use.
- Risk factors for adolescent drinking encompass sociocultural factors, such as regulation of alcohol availability; parental behavior and drinking patterns; the influence and drinking habits of siblings and peers; personality traits, particularly those related to impulsiveness and risk-taking, and positive beliefs about alcohol's effects.
- Parents are more potent influence than peers and siblings.

Be realistic

- Parents who recognize the potential for their adolescent's becoming involved with alcohol are more likely and able to intervene if this were to occur. They are also more likely to supervise teen parties given at their home.
- Parents and teens often see the same thing differently.
Views of parents and their own teens were compared. Parents were more likely to attribute drug use to factors with negative connotations (such as boredom, rebellion, loneliness, or social pressure). Their children were more likely to mention things with more positive connotations (such as curiosity, fun, insight/experience).
Parents under-estimate use of alcohol and marijuana relative to their teens' estimates.
Both parents and teens estimate substance use by other students at school to be higher than that of the teens' close friends for all drug categories. Parents' estimates of intoxication or getting high are lower than their children's estimates.

Finally, parents' ratings of the effectiveness of drug prevention strategies are consistently higher than those given by their teens.

- Adolescents' decisions to experiment with or to use drugs are complex. Think of this as a number of cross currents at work. The perception of friends' approval/disapproval of substance use, perceptions of the level of other's use, and the assessment of the risk of use all play a role.

Be informed

- Correct adolescents misconceptions.
Teens frequently over estimate how often friends and fellow students drink alcohol.
- Teens perceptions of friends use influences a teen's own use.
Perceptions of friends' use and perceptions of family use are better predictors of substance use than friends' actual use.
- In discussing the dangers of illicit drugs beware of making legal drugs sound "safe."
Commonly there is much more emphasis on dangers of the illicit over those of the licit drugs tobacco and alcohol.
- The desire for a "good" social image can prompt experimentation
Friends who use and don't discourage substance use may make this seem socially desirable. Parents views may be less important than that of friends as define whether substance use is "in" or "out. However, parents play a role, if indirectly, by influencing their children's choice of friends.
- Access to alcohol.
Access is an important factor — and even more important than parental or peer's views.

Factors associated with problems

- Access via licensed premises.
This is one of the strongest predictors of drinking and alcohol problems. Among 15-18 year olds, the ability to get served is more significant than peers or parental influences.
- Early use
The earlier that children begin to drink, the greater the likelihood of later problems.
- Adult roles too early.
Taking on adult roles too early increases the risk of substance use problems.
Becoming a teenage parent, or living independently rather than with parents or family, or dropping out of school are more common among those who used alcohol or other drugs in early adolescence.
- Permission attitudes in the home.
Young people growing up in homes with permissive attitudes to alcohol e and who are introduced to alcohol at an earlier age may be more vulnerable to alcohol-related problems in adolescence.
- Teenage smoking
Be concerned about teenage smoking, as a health risk and as a "gateway drug".
Daily pack-a-day smokers are three times more likely to drink alcohol, seven times more likely to use smokeless tobacco, and 10-30 times more likely to use illicit drugs than nonsmokers.
- Support smoking cessation.
Appreciate how addictive nicotine is. Very quickly smoking moves beyond experimentation. For teens who do smoke, promote smoking cessation programs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ?

Use your influence . . .
with your children
with parents of your children's friends,
and in your community.

Support efforts to reduce teenager's access to alcohol.
Access via licensed premises is one of the strongest predictors of drinking and alcohol problems. It is even more significant than parental or peer influences.

Find out how others are discussing alcohol/ drugs with your child —
your child's pediatrician, coaches,
clergyman/rabbi/or priest.

Promote anticipatory guidance.

Support policy initiatives to reduce alcohol use.
Appreciate the impact of beverage price on adolescent use. How do you think the cost of a six pack of beer should stack up to a six pack of soda?

Alcohol/drug emergencies
Be sure your son or daughter knows how to respond to an alcohol/drug emergency.

Help make the real norms in your community apparent.

Talk to other parents

Set an example

Let where you stand be very clear
... *it make a difference*