



—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. [5]
- A study of adolescents' emergency room visits found that 40% had a positive blood alcohol level. [12]
- A major national study found that 40% of parents think they have little influence over their adolescent's decision to use drugs or not. [13]
- Approximately 45 percent of parents indicate that it is likely their teens will use illegal drugs. [13]
- By the age of 17 approximately 12 percent of adolescents can be categorized as at risk for substance abuse. [13]
- 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, so too is this true of alcohol or drug dependence.
- Adolescents consistently have a very inaccurate perception of actual alcohol and drug use patterns.
For example, one study found that high school students thought that twice as many of their peers were regular weekly drinkers than was actually the case. [19]

Appreciate your influence

- Parental influence operates as a natural harm-reduction mechanism that helps protect teenage drinkers from developing alcohol problems. [18]
- Parents influence their children's drinking 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. [15]
- 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. [16]
- The quality of family relationships and the amount of time adolescents spend with family is a more important influence on adolescent's substance use than is the kind of family in which teenagers are living, whether it is with both parents, a parent or step-parent, in a single parent home, or live with non-family members. [1]
- Adolescent's perceptions of the parenting style in their home are linked to adolescents' substance use. 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. [6]
- Experimentation and use among elementary age children is associated with parenting styles that encourage risk taking, by parent's substance use. [10]
- Adolescent drinking behaviour is found to be largely unrelated to the socio-economic circumstances of the family. A supportive family environment is associated with lowered rates of alcohol use. [17]
- 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. [8] 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. [7]

- Parents who use illegal drugs have teens at much higher risk of drug use than other teens. [13]
- 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. [5]
- Parents are more potent influence than peers and siblings. [20]

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. [2]
- In comparing perceptions between parents and their own teens, the following were found: parents were more likely to attribute drug use to factors with negative connotations (i.e., boredom, rebellion, loneliness, social pressure) while their children tended to mention things with more positive connotations (e.g., curiosity, fun, insight/experience).
Parents under-estimate use of alcohol and marijuana relative to their teens' estimates. This is most true of more common substances.

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. Teens rated peer advice to be the most effective strategy, followed by educational programs emphasizing social skills, effects of drugs, and effective decision making. This highlights the need for parents to seek out and to understand teen points of view regarding drug use, as well as the need to recognize the importance of one's peer group in the formation of attitudes and perceptions about drugs. [24]

- 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. [25]

Be informed

- Correct student misconceptions about how often friends and fellow students drink alcohol [19]
- Children's perceptions of friends' use, perceptions of family use, and actual use of classmates were better predictors of substance use than friends' actual use. [23]
- Perceptions were found to be inaccurate in emphasizing the dangers of the illicit drug heroin over those of the licit drugs tobacco and alcohol. [21]
- Some experimentation with substance is prompted by hoping to acquire a desirable social images. Having friends who use and don't discourage substance use and more likely themselves to see this as socially desirable. Parents views may be less important than the opinion of teens in helping define whether substance use is "in" or "out. However, parents play a role, if indirectly, by influencing their children's choice of friends. [3]
- Access to alcohol. Access to alcohol through bars and, e.g. is even more important than parental or peer's views. [4]

Factors associated with problems

- Access via licensed premises is one of the strongest predictors of drinking and alcohol problems. Access is even more significant than parental or peer influences. Among 15-18 year olds, the ability to get served is more significant than peers or parental influences. [4]
- The earlier that children are initiated to alcohol, the greater the likelihood of later problems. [9]

- Taking on adult roles too early — becoming a teenage parent, or living independently of parents or family, or dropping out of school — are more common among those who used alcohol or other drugs in early adolescence. These situations increase the likelihood of substance use problems as young adults. [11]
- Young people reared in home environments that have permissive attitudes to alcohol and who are introduced to alcohol at an earlier age may be more vulnerable to alcohol-related problems in adolescence. [22]
- Be concerned about teenage smoking, as a health risk and as a "gateway drug". Daily pack-a-day smokers were 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. [27]
- Appreciate how addictive nicotine is. Very quickly smoking moves beyond experimentation. For teens who do smoke, promote smoking cessation programs. [27]

WHAT YOU CAN DO ?

Use your influence . . .

with your children
with the 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. [4]

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? [26]

Promote anticipatory guidance.

Find out how your child's pediatrician, coach, or clergyman/rabbi/or priest are approaching alcohol and other drug use.

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.

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