

Family is fundamental to keeping children away from tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs

Information taken from:

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University

The loud and clear message of the survey is this: **moms and dads should be parents to their children, not pals**. Mothers and fathers who are parents rather than pals can greatly reduce the risk of their children smoking, drinking and using drugs. They can counter negative media influences and the availability of marijuana and other drugs in a teen's world. Whatever the family structure, whether the teen lives with both parents, a single mom or a single dad, their risk of smoking, drinking or using illegal drugs in "hands-on" households is dramatically lower than that of the average teen.

PARENTS: "HANDS ON" VS. "HANDS OFF"

For the past four years, CASA has identified parents as the key to keeping kids drug-free. Our 2000 survey makes an even stronger case. The extent to which the household culture is "hands-on"--the more parents establish appropriate rules and standards of behavior and monitor their teens--the lower the teen's risk of substance abuse.

This year, for the first time, CASA correlated each teen's risk of substance abuse with a series of 12 possible actions the teen attributed to his or her parents. We then categorized parents in three categories--"hands-on," "half-hearted" or "hands-off." Teens living in "hands-on" households have parents who consistently take ten or more of these 12 actions: monitor what their teens watch on TV; monitor what they do on the Internet; put restrictions on the music CD's they buy; know where their teens are after school and on weekends; expect to be and are told the truth by their teens about where they *really* are going; are "very aware" of their teen's academic performance; impose a curfew; make clear they would be "extremely upset" if their teen used pot; eat dinner with their teens most every night; turn off the TV during dinner; assign their teen regular chores; and have an adult present when the teen returns from school. The survey found:

- Only one in four teens (27 percent) lives with "hands-on" parents. Teens with "hands-on" parents are at one-fourth the risk of teens living with "hands-off" parents.
- Nearly one in five teens (18 percent) lives with "hands-off" parents--parents who fail to consistently set down rules and expectations--and are at four times the risk of substance abuse of teens with "hands-on" parents.

"Hands-off" parents consistently fail to set rules and monitor their teen's behavior (they take five or less of the previously described 12 actions). Here are some examples of how a teen's risk increases when parents **fail to**:

- **monitor their teen's television and Internet viewing, and restrict the music CD's they purchase.** These teens are at twice the risk of those teens whose parents monitor these activities.
- **know where their teen is after school and on weekends or expect their teen to tell them where they are going at night or on weekends.** Teens whose parents do not keep track of their whereabouts are at twice the risk of teens whose parents do.
- **impose a curfew.** Teens without a curfew are at one and a half times the risk of teens who have one.
- **have dinner with their teens most every night.** Teens who do not regularly eat dinner with their families are at one and a half times the risk of teens who have dinner with their parents nearly every night.
- **closely monitor their teen's academic performance.** Teens whose parents are "very unaware" of how their teen is doing at school are at nearly three times the risk of teens whose parents are "very aware" of their teen's schooling.
- **give their teen a clear message about marijuana use.** Teens whose parents would "not be too upset" about their teen's pot use have teens at more than triple the risk of teens whose parents would be "extremely upset."

Despite the conventional wisdom that many teens don't want their parents to establish rules and expectations, the survey found that teens with "hands-on" parents are much more likely to have an excellent relationship with their parents than teens with "hands-off" parents:

- 47 percent of teens living in "hands-on" households report an excellent relationship with their fathers compared with 13 percent of teens living in "hands-off" households.
- 57 percent of teens in "hands-on" households report an excellent relationship with their mother compared with only 24 percent living in "hands-off" households.

PARENT POWER

Over the past few years, CASA's surveys have told us that parents have a significant opportunity to influence their teens. As in 1999, far more teens surveyed in the 2000 survey who had *not* tried marijuana credited their parents (49 percent in 2000, 42 percent in 1999) with this decision than any other influence. Parent power is the most underutilized tool in combating substance abuse.

It is time for every parent to look in the mirror rather than look outside to what everyone else can do. Parents should ask themselves, "Am I a parent to my teen, or a pal? Do I monitor what my teen watches on television and on the Internet, what music CD's he or she buys and listens to? Do I know where my teen is after school and on weekends? Have I made it clear that I would be *extremely upset* if my teen used marijuana? Do I know how my teen is doing in school? Have I set a curfew for my teen? Do we have dinner together as a family most every night--without the television on?" The more CASA examines teen risk of substance abuse, the more it becomes clear that parents have enormous power for good. Parents need to ask themselves every day: "What am I doing today to keep my kids drug-free?"

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