

TEEN TOPICS



Drinking, Drug Use and Sex: Helping Teens Make The Right Decisions

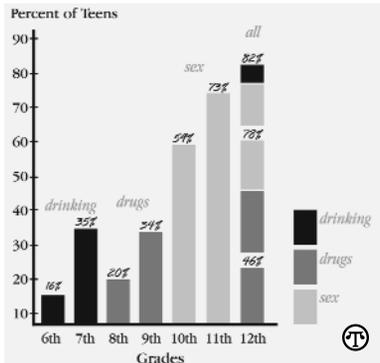
(NAPSA)—By twelfth grade, more than three-fourths of all teens are drinking and engaging in sexual activity, and almost half report using drugs, a new national survey reveals—while offering some time-targeted strategies that parents can use to help keep their children safe from such destructive behaviors.

Providing a rare glimpse into the thinking of today's teens, the "Teens Today 2002" survey identifies key "decision points" as adolescents mature:

- Drinking increases significantly between sixth and seventh grade.
- Drug use increases significantly between eighth and ninth grade.
- Sexual activity increases significantly between tenth and eleventh grade.

"This is compelling information that takes parents beyond the 'whats' to the 'whens' and 'whys' of teen behavior," said Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of the national SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) organization. "It's a road map that identifies the dangerous intersections and some alternative routes to avoid them."

The new research conducted by SADD and Liberty Mutual Group, one of the largest multiline insurers in the property and casualty industry, confirms many parents' fear: young people have easy access to alcohol, drugs and sex. Good decision-making thus becomes the last, best line of defense for teens. Understanding what factors influence those decisions can help parents best pre-



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pare young people to avoid trouble:

- Mental states—depression, anxiety, stress, boredom, curiosity.
- Personal goals—to feel grown up, to fit in, to take risks.
- Potential outcomes—Are others doing it? What are the chances of getting caught? What are the potential consequences?
- Significant people—parents, friends, siblings, clergy.

Despite what many teens might have adults believe, engaging in destructive behavior is not just about "having fun" or "feeling good." Key drivers of decisions may also include anger, peer pressure and stress.

Other key findings from "Teens Today 2002":

- Close friends are teens' number one influence to make destructive decisions.
- Parents are teens' biggest influence not to drink or make other destructive decisions (followed by close friends), regardless of the age of the teen—but that influence declines as teens mature.

• Younger teens are more likely than older teens to be influenced to use drugs by "external" goals—e.g., to fit in. Older teens are more likely than younger teens to be influenced to use drugs by "internal" goals—e.g., to feel good.

Teens who report regular, open communication with their parents about important issues say they are more likely to try to live up to their parents' expectations and less likely to drink, use drugs or engage in early sexual behavior. Parents can:

- Educate teens about the physical and emotional risks of sexual behavior and discuss mutually caring, respectful relationships.
- Stress how drug use adversely affects health, grades and athletic performance.
- Provide alcohol-free outlets for recreation, socialization; demystify use of alcohol through discussions of its use in society.

"Parents are the key to helping young people make smart choices," says John Conners, executive vice president and manager of Liberty Mutual's personal insurance operations. "The evidence is mounting that adults who recognize the choices that children face every day and who are prepared to intervene with age-appropriate guidance are our best weapon against self-destructive behavior among young people."

For free brochures, videos and other information about family communication, contact Liberty Mutual at 1-800-4-LIBERTY or www.libertymutualinsurance.com. You can also call SADD, Inc. at 1-877-SADDINC or visit the Web site at www.saddonline.com.