

Teen Insights into Drugs, Alcohol, and Nicotine: A National Survey of Adolescent Attitudes toward Addictive Substances

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Abstract : Background and Significance: The influence of parents on their children's attitudes and behaviors is immense, even as children grow out of what one might assume to be their most impressionable years and into teenagers. This study specifically examines the potential that parents have to prevent or reduce the risk of adolescent substance use, even in the face of considerable environmental influences to use nicotine, alcohol, or drugs. Methodology: The findings presented are based on a nationally representative survey of 1,014 teens aged 12-17 living in the United States. Data were collected using an online platform in early 2018. About half the sample was female (51%), 49% was aged 12-14, and 51% was aged 15-17. The margin of error was +/- 3.5%. Demographic data on the teens and their families were available through the survey platform. Survey items explored adolescent respondents' exposure to addictive substances; the extent to which their sources of information about these substances are reliable or credible; friends' and peers' substance use; their own intentions to try substances in the future; and their relationship with their parents. Key Findings: Exposure to nicotine, alcohol, or other drugs and misinformation about these substances were associated with a greater likelihood that adolescents have friends who use drugs and that they have intentions to try substances in the future, which are known to directly predict actual teen substance use. In addition, teens who reported a positive relationship with their parents and having parents who are involved in their lives had a lower likelihood of having friends who use drugs and of having intentions to try substances in the future. This relationship appears to be mediated by parents' ability to reduce the extent to which their children are exposed to substances in their environment and to misinformation about them. Indeed, the findings indicated that teens who reported a good relationship with their parents and those who reported higher levels of parental monitoring had significantly higher odds of reporting a lower number of risk factors than teens with a less positive relationship with parents or less monitoring. There also were significantly greater risk factors associated with substance use among older teens relative to younger teens. This shift appears to coincide directly with the tendency of parents to pull back in their monitoring and their involvement in their adolescent children's lives. Conclusion: The survey findings underscore the importance of resisting the urge to completely pull back as teens age and demand more independence since that is exactly when the risks for teen substance use spike and young people need their parents and other trusted adults to be involved more than ever. Particularly through the cultivation of a healthy, positive, and open relationship, parents can help teens receive accurate and credible information about substance use and also monitor their whereabouts and exposure to addictive substances. These findings, which come directly from teens themselves, demonstrate the importance of continued parental engagement throughout children's lives, regardless of their age and the disincentives to remaining involved and connected.

Keywords : adolescent, parental monitoring, prevention, substance use

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