



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens, Parents and Values

October 2004

Values influence the way we view the world, the decisions we make, and ultimately our behavior itself. Many things and people influence our values. Many things impact our teen's values: friends, teachers, religion, music, media, etc. When it comes to dealing with sensitive topics such as smoking, drinking, and sex data from the recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 7th to 12th grade youth shows that parents play a critical role in the values their teens hold, and the behaviors they exhibit.

Table 1 shows that more than 4 out of 5 teens in southwestern Wisconsin (83%) either **"agree"** or **"strongly agree"** that their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to smoke cigarettes. Nearly 3 out of 4 (73%) either **"agree"** or **"strongly agree"** that their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to drink alcohol, and 72% believe their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to have sex.

My child knows how I feel about:

- *Teens and drinking*
- *Teens and smoking*
- *Teens and sex*

Don't they????

Unfortunately, Table 1 also shows that one in ten teens are unsure of how their parents feel about teens their age smoking tobacco. The number of teens who are unsure of their parent's values regarding teen alcohol use and teen sex is even more troubling.

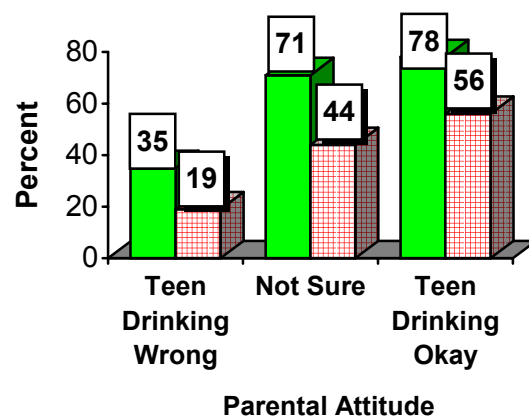
What Do My Parents Think? (Table 1)

My Parents Think It Is Wrong For Teens My Age To:	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
Smoke Tobacco	83	9	8
Drink Alcohol	74	15	12
Have Sex	72	19	9

"Being clear about your values and beliefs – committing to them – is critical to being assertive in resisting negative pressure," according to Dr. Peter Benson of The Search Institute. "One of the reasons assertiveness is lacking in some kids is that they are just not clear what matters to them."

For example, a teen who is committed to waiting to have sex is better prepared to resist sexual pressures than teens who are not sure, or have not given it much thought. Parents can help teens think about and clarify their beliefs, giving them the confidence to stand up for those beliefs.

Drinking Patterns vs. Perceived Parental Attitudes
(Figure 1)



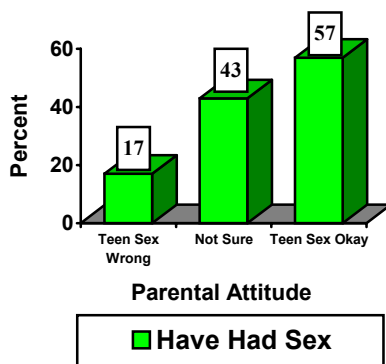
■ Drink Alcohol ■ Binge Drank Last Month

Do Parents Make a Difference? – YES!!

Figure 1 shows the percentage of teens in southwest Wisconsin who drank alcohol or binge drank in the month before the survey, and their perception of their parent's attitudes towards drinking. The percentages of teens who drank or binge drank were significantly higher (more than doubled) if their perception of their parent's attitudes were that it was okay for teens their age to drink or if they were not sure.

This holds true when looking at smoking and sex with teens in southwest Wisconsin. As shown in Figure 2 below, teens are more likely to abstain from sex if they believe their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to have sex.

Sexual Behavior vs. Perceived Parental Attitudes (Figure 2)



In terms of smoking; 15% of teens who smoke perceive their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to smoke compared to 39% of those who are unsure of their parents' beliefs, and 47% of those who perceive their parents think it is not wrong for teens their age to smoke.

Communicating Values

Parents communicate values through straightforward discussions with their teen, supporting their teen's interests and setting the example the parents want them to follow. Ultimately, parents need to be consistent in their actions and words for teens to fully understand the values they hold, so that the teens can incorporate them into their decisions and values.

Questions to ask yourself in regard to teaching values to your teen...

- ♥ Do you know what your own values are?
- ♥ Are you consistent in what you say or do, or do you say one thing and behave differently?
- ♥ Do your children clearly understand what your values and beliefs are?
- ♥ What opportunities do you provide to share your values with your teen?
- ♥ Do you provide opportunities for your children to discuss values that you have?
- ♥ Are the rules of your house consistent with the values that you have?
- ♥ Do you reinforce positive behavior that reflects values that you believe in?

"As parents, you can't tell your kids how to think, but you can give them something to think about and a direction that you would like for them to head." ☺

PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series. This issue was written by Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette Counties. Edited by Deb Ivey, Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier UW-Extension Iowa County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information, or by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>. References for this edition of Parents Make A Difference include: The Search Institute, and Activities That Teach Family Values, by Tom Jackson.