

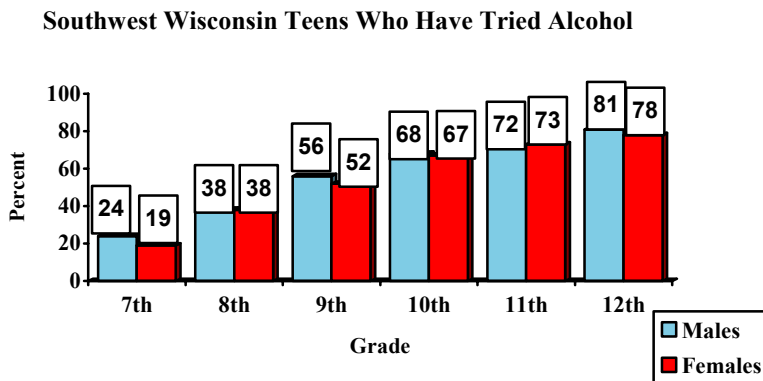


# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teens and Alcohol

March 2003

Among the difficult issues for parents to deal with is the issue of teen alcohol use. Research from the recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders shows that 56% of our teens have tried alcohol. The chart below illustrates the percentage of teens who have tried alcohol at each grade level.



SWYS also found that 12% of teens report that they have tried alcohol but they do not use it anymore, 21% use alcohol a couple of times per year, 15% use it monthly and 8% use alcohol at least once a week.

Teens who begin using alcohol before age 15 are at a higher risk for future alcohol-related problems including abuse and addiction. One in three females and four in every ten males surveyed by SWYS report that they have tried alcohol by age 15.

The survey also found that binge drinking is a serious problem among teens in southwest Wisconsin. Overall, one in four teens reported that they binge drank (i.e. drank five or more alcoholic drinks at one time) in the month prior to SWYS. Among 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 10% of males and 6% of females reported binge drinking in the month prior to the survey. The percentage increases steadily to 48% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade males and 39% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade females reporting binge drinking in the month prior to the survey.

### Parents Make A Difference!

Parents have a critical and influential role in the decisions and choices their teenagers make, especially with the tough issues like alcohol. Research from SWYS demonstrates at least six ways that parents can make a difference in teen alcohol use. Analysis of the survey data found that high levels of parental monitoring, eating more than three evening meals a week as a family, communicating that you believe it is wrong for teens to drink alcohol, consistent rule enforcement, reporting school code violations to school

officials and family love and support are all related to lower levels of alcohol use by teens.

**Parental Monitoring** refers to the extent to which parents are tracking who their teen's friends are, expecting calls if a teen will be home late, and knowing where their teens are after school and when they go out at night (see Parental Monitoring Newsletter January 2003). Of the teens whose parents practice very high levels of parental monitoring, only 35% currently drink alcohol and 17% binge drank in the month previous to the survey while 67% of the teens whose parents practice low levels of parental monitoring currently drink and 58% of these teens binge drank in the month before the survey.

### Eating Dinners As A Family.

Research from the Search Institute suggests that eating three or more dinners per week as a family is associated with lower levels of teen alcohol use. SWYS confirms this. In fact SWYS data shows that, in general, the more nights per week a teen eats dinner with their family, the less likely they are to consume alcohol.

**Communicating Your Values** about teen drinking is linked to teen alcohol use. According to SWYS, 53% of the teens who say their parents think it is wrong for them to drink alcohol have not tried alcohol. In comparison, only 18% of the teens who did not know what their parents' values were regarding teen drinking and 16% of those who said their parents thought it was okay for teens their age to drink had not tried alcohol.

**Consistent Rule Enforcement** when family rules are violated is tied to lower rates of alcohol use. According to SWYS, 57% of teens whose parents consistently establish and enforce consequences for violating family rules had not tried alcohol.

**Reporting School Code Violations.** Teens who said that their parents would report them if they violated a school code (behavior, academic, athletic or activity) were less likely to use alcohol, regardless of whether or not parents would assign consequences at home (see September 2002 newsletter). One in three teens who say their parents would report them to school officials for violating a school rule currently use alcohol, while 53% of the teens who say their parents would not report them currently use alcohol.

**Family Love And Support.** Teens who agree that their family loves them and gives them support when they need it were less likely to report using alcohol or binge drinking (see December 2002 newsletter).

### **REMEMBER: PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

#### **HOW PARENTS CAN EFFECTIVELY MODEL APPROPRIATE USE OF ALCOHOL**

- Help your children understand that drinking alcohol is an adult activity by not involving them in your drinking: don't have them get beer or drinks for you or your guests. This goes for your 7-year old as well as your 17-year old.
- Your children look to you as a model for acceptable behavior. If your children see you drunk, they will view this as acceptable for them as well.
- Avoid using drinking as an escape, rather model healthy ways to relieve stress.
- Avoid placing pressure on others to drink. When children see this, they will be more inclined to give in to pressure to drink and pressure others to do the same.
- Be sure to offer a variety of non-alcoholic drinks to your guests. Make sure your guests do not drive home after drinking.

#### **HOW DO I TALK TO MY TEEN ABOUT ALCOHOL?**

Talk with your teen or pre-teen NOW about the risks of drinking, and how you feel about teen drinking. Don't wait until a problem arises.

Both parents should discuss alcohol issues with their children and be united in their message of no-use.

With your teen, agree upon the rules, expectations and consequences regarding alcohol use.

Avoid "bargaining" with your teen, such as allowing drinking if there is no driving or allowing drinking at home when a parent is present. This sends mixed messages to teens and encourages them to push the boundaries even further.

Don't give in to the "everyone does it" argument, because not everyone does!!

Encourage your teen to participate in healthy behaviors, such as youth clubs and team sports or to volunteer after school or on weekends in the community.

If your teen chooses to use alcohol, do not accept or ignore the use. Approach your teen and impose the agreed upon consequences. Following through on consequences (when rules are broken) and rewards (when rules are followed) is essential.

"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 newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" **Teens and Alcohol** newsletter which was originally written by Mary Huser, Donna Doll Yogerest, Karen Hintz and Stephen Small. This issue of "Parents Make a Difference" was written by Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey UW-Extension Iowa County and Christina Kenney, UW-Extension Grant 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 <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html> for more information, or by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391.