

Peer Pressure and Underage Drinking

Parents: You probably wield more influence than you realize

The story line of a high-achieving middle- or high-school student falling in with “the wrong crowd” and suddenly engaging in dangerous behaviors, such as drinking or other drug use, might well be every parent’s nightmare. In truth, you as parents have more influence than you might think. Prevention experts point to research that shows young adolescents are more likely to be influenced by their *parents* than their *peers* with regard to choices around drinking and other drug use.

Experts at Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation’s Freedom from Chemical Dependency (FCD) Educational Services work with young people, families, and communities worldwide to provide school-based substance abuse prevention services. Below, Desirae Vasquez, director of program services for FCD, and Tim Ryan, senior prevention specialist for FCD, discuss the latest research on adolescent attitudes and behaviors regarding underage drinking and other risky behaviors.

1. Peer pressure? Not so much.

In making choices about risky behaviors such as drinking and other drug use, adolescents in grades 6–9 are more likely to be influenced by parents than peers, according to the FCD Student Attitudes and Behavior Survey. After that, in grades 10–12, a young person’s own opinions, thoughts, and feelings outweigh any outside source of influence, including same-grade peers and older students.

Desirae Vasquez of FCD Educational Services makes another important distinction about the dynamics of peer influence. “Adolescents most often fall into peer groups that support their own behavior, not the other way around,” says Vasquez. Students who strive to get deeply involved in academic, artistic, and athletic pursuits, or a variety of other prosocial activities that prevention experts at FCD term “healthy highs,” tend to find peer groups that support those behaviors. Likewise, over time, adolescents who consistently choose alcohol or other drug use as a primary activity tend to increasingly find peer groups who support that behavior.

2. You have their trust.

While adolescents are likely to speak more often with their peers about alcohol and other drugs, they themselves report that they are most likely to believe in the accuracy of information that comes not from friends but from the trusted adults in their lives—parents, aunts and uncles, coaches, teachers, and counselors. It’s a golden opportunity for parents, says FCD’s Tim Ryan. “The kids who drink are a small but vocal bunch. Your kids will hear all kinds of misinformation from them.” Against that backdrop, parents and other adults are in a trusted position to not only provide accurate information but to celebrate and support the good decisions and healthy choices kids are making.

3. Keep the conversation going.

Adolescents who hear about the risks of alcohol and other drug use from their parents are significantly less likely to get into trouble with substances than are adolescents who do not hear such messages, notes Vasquez. Additionally, the FCD Student Attitudes and Behavior Survey reveals that adolescents whose parents set clear family rules and boundaries are less likely to drink.

To start the conversation, Vasquez suggests bringing up the topic in everyday, nonthreatening situations—while riding in the car, watching a television show, or sitting around the dinner table. That way, the conversation will be ongoing, with you as parents assuming your rightful role as primary prevention agents in the lives of your children.

4. The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation can help.

Hundreds of young people find freedom from addiction every year through Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation's programs for adolescents and young adults, and parents often serve as powerful change agents in that process. But it's not an easy road for parents, and the path isn't always clear. That's why the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation provides extensive help and support for parents and other family members. Learn more today by visiting hazelden.org/youth or by calling **855-348-7027**.

* *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance*, 2013 Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

** *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use 1975–2013*, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institutes of Health

“Adolescents fall into peer groups that support their own behavior, not the other way around.”

—Desirae Vasquez

Director of Program Services

FCD Educational Services

A part of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

HAZELDEN

A part of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation

Hazelden's Adolescent and
Young Adult Services

hazelden.org/youth

855-348-7027

11505 36th Ave. N.
Plymouth, MN 55441-2398

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, a national nonprofit organization founded
in 1949, helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction

4717-15 (08/14)
© 2014 Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation