

Parents: "Hands-On" vs. "Hands-Off"

For the past six years the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) has conducted a major survey of public opinion on substance abuse, seeking answers to this question: "*Why do some teenagers succumb to the use of illegal substances while others do not?*" This survey continues an analysis aimed at revealing the factors which contribute to teen substance abuse risk. The risk of substance abuse can be attributed to identifiable characteristics of teenagers, their household, their parents and their school environment. By identifying factors which contribute to a teenager's apparent risk of substance abuse, we discover targets for prevention and intervention.

For the past four years, CASA has identified parents as the key to keeping kids drug-free. Our 2000 survey makes an even stronger case. The extent to which the household culture is "hands-on"--the more parents establish appropriate rules and standards of behavior and monitor their teens--the lower the teen's risk of substance abuse. This year, for the first time, CASA correlated each teen's risk of substance abuse with a series of 12 possible actions the teen attributed to his or her parents. We then categorized parents in three categories--"hands-on," "half-hearted" or "hands-off."

Teens living in "hands-on" households have parents who consistently take 10 or more of these 12 actions:

1. monitor what their teens watch on TV;
2. monitor what they do on the Internet;
3. put restrictions on the music CDs they buy;
4. know where their teens are after school and on weekends;
5. expect to be and are told the truth by their teens about where they *really* are going;
6. are "very aware" of their teen's academic performance;
7. impose a curfew;
8. make clear they would be "extremely upset" if their teen used pot;
9. eat dinner with their teens six or seven times per week;
10. turn off the TV during dinner;
11. assign their teen regular chores;
12. have an adult present when the teen returns from school.

The survey found:

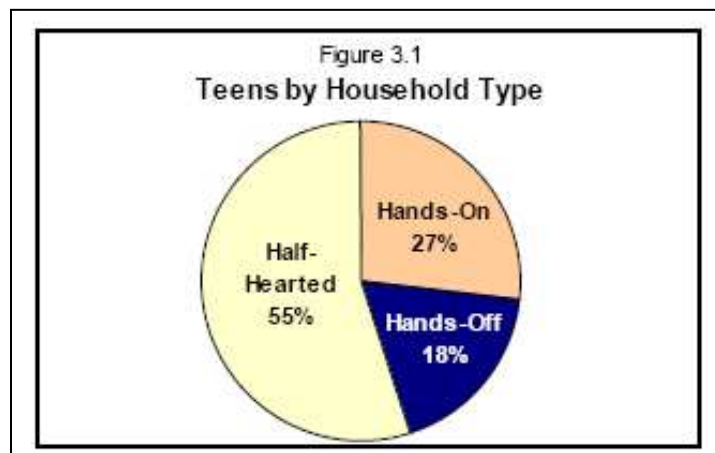
- Only one in four teens (27 percent) lives with "hands-on" parents. Teens with "hands-on" parents are at one-fourth the risk of teens living with "hands-off" parents.
- Nearly one in five teens (18 percent) lives with "hands-off" parents--parents who fail to consistently set down rules and expectations--and are at four times the risk of substance abuse of teens with "hands-on" parents. "Hands-off" parents consistently fail to set rules and monitor their teen's behavior (they take five or less of the previously described 12 actions).

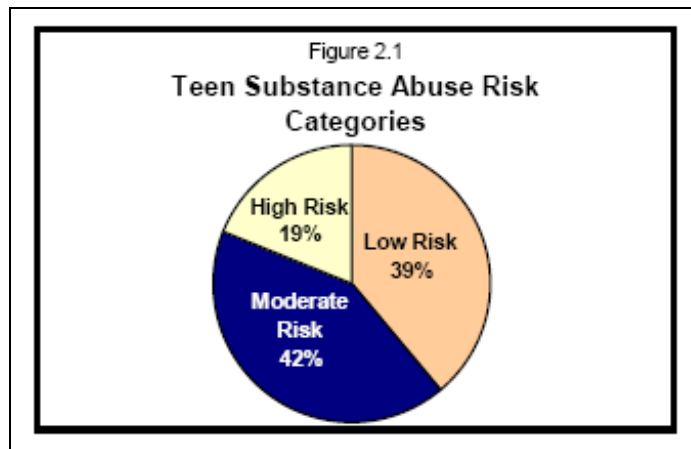
Here are some examples of how a teen's risk increases when parents fail to:

1. **monitor their teen's television and Internet viewing, and restrict the music CDs they purchase.** These teens are at twice the risk of those teens whose parents monitor these activities.
2. **know where their teen is after school and on weekends or expect their teen to tell them where they are going at night or on weekends.** Teens whose parents do not keep track of their whereabouts are at twice the risk of teens whose parents do.
3. **impose a curfew.** Teens without a curfew are at one and a half times the risk of teens who have one.
4. **have dinner with their teens six or seven times per week.** Teens who do not regularly eat dinner with their families are at one and a half times the risk of teens who have dinner with their parents nearly every night.
5. **closely monitor their teen's academic performance.** Teens whose parents are "very unaware" of how their teen is doing at school are at nearly three times the risk of teens whose parents are "very aware" of their teen's schooling.
6. **give their teen a clear message about marijuana use.** Teens whose parents would "not be too upset" about their teen's pot use have teens at more than triple the risk of teens whose parents would be "extremely upset." Despite the conventional wisdom that many teens do not want their parents to establish rules and expectations, the survey found that teens with "hands-on" parents are much more likely to have an excellent relationship with their parents than teens with "hands-off" parents:
 - 47 percent of teens living in "hands-on" households report an excellent relationship with their fathers compared with 13 percent of teens living in "hands-off" households.
 - 57 percent of teens in "hands-on" households report an excellent relationship with their mother compared with only 24 percent living in "hands-off" households.

"Hands-On" Parents and Excellent Relationships

Teens with parents who are "hands-on" are much more likely to have excellent relationships with their parents than are other teens. Only 24 percent of teenagers living in "hands-off" households report an excellent relationship with their mother vs. 57 percent living in "hands-on" households. Thirteen percent of teens living in "hands-off" households report an excellent relationship with their father, while 47 percent of teens living in "hands-on" households report an excellent paternal relationship.





Age Increases Substance Abuse Risk

Substance abuse risk (as we have measured it) increases dramatically with the age of the teen.

Among 12 year-olds:

- 78 percent are at low risk of substance abuse
- 20 percent are at moderate risk, and
- 3 percent are at high risk.

By comparison, among 17 year-olds:

- only 17 percent are at low risk
- 47 percent are at moderate risk, and
- 37 percent are at high risk.

Risk Categories

High Risk Teens (19 percent of 12 to 17 year olds)

- Many smoke (63 percent smoke, 44 percent daily)
- Most have tried alcohol (38 percent currently drink alcohol in a typical week)
- Most get drunk (54 percent at least once per month)
- Most have friends who use marijuana (86 percent)
- Most know of friend or classmate using acid, cocaine or heroin (71 percent)
- More than half could buy marijuana in less than one hour (62 percent)
- A vast majority have tried marijuana (85 percent)
- More than half say future drug use "likely" (53 percent)

Moderate Risk Teens (42 percent of 12 to 17 year-olds)

- Very few smoke (95 percent did not have a cigarette in past 30 days)
- Few drink alcohol (17 percent)
- Few get drunk (27 percent)
- Many have marijuana-using friend (43 percent)
- More than half know a friend or classmate using acid, cocaine or heroin (61 percent)
- Many could buy marijuana in a few hours or less (42 percent)
- Few have tried marijuana (12 percent)
- Half admit any possibility of future illegal drug use (54 percent)

Low Risk Teens (39 percent of 12 to 17 year olds)

- Almost none smoke (99 percent did not have a cigarette in past 30 days)
- Almost none drink alcohol (97 percent)
- None get drunk (100 percent)
- Very few have friends who smoke marijuana (3 percent)
- Few know user of acid, cocaine or heroin (15 percent)
- More than half would be unable to buy marijuana (53 percent)
- None have tried marijuana (100 percent)
- Majority say they will never try illegal drugs (77 percent)

