

How to Have a Better Relationship With Your Teen

MPC-46

The 2000 teen survey conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA) found that teens with “hands off” parents are at four times the risk of smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs as those with “hands on” parents.

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Only one in four teens in America (27 percent, about 6.5 million) lives with “hands-on” parents—parents who have established a household culture of rules and expectations for their teen’s behavior and monitor what their teens do: such as the TV shows they watch, the CD’s they buy, what they access on the Internet, and where they are evenings and weekends. These teens are at one quarter the risk of smoking, drinking and using drugs as teens with “hands-off” parents, according to a new survey of 1,000 American teens ages 12–17.

The 2000 **CASA National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VI: Teens** for the first time correlated each teen’s risk of substance abuse with a series of 12 possible actions the teen attributed to his or her parents. “Hands-on” parents consistently take at least 10 of these actions. “Hands-off” parents take five or less. Nearly one in five teens (18 percent, about 4.3 million teens) lives with “hands-off” parents and is at four times the risk of substance abuse as teens with “hands-on” parents.

“The loud and clear message of the survey is this: moms and dads should be parents to their children, not pals,” said CASA President and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr. “Mothers and fathers who are parents rather than pals can greatly reduce the risk of their children smoking, drinking and using drugs. They can counter negative media influences and the prevalence of marijuana and other drugs in a teen’s world. Whatever the family structure, whether the teen lives with both parents, a single mom or a single dad, their risk of smoking, drinking or using illegal drugs in “hands-on” household is dramatically lower than that of the average teen.”

The 12 actions against which parental conduct is measured are:

- monitor what their teens watch on TV
- monitor what they do on the Internet
- put restrictions on the CD’s they buy
- know where their teens are after school and on weekends
- are told the truth by their teens about where they really are going in evenings and on weekends
- are “very aware” of their teen’s academic performance
- impose a curfew
- make clear they would be “extremely upset” if their teen used pot
- eat dinner with their teens most every night
- turn off the TV during dinner
- assign their teen regular chores
- have an adult present when the teen returns from school

“Hands-On” Parents Have Better Relationships with Their Teens

Despite the conventional wisdom that many teens don't 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, only 13 percent living in “hands-off” household do.
- 57 percent of teens in “hands-on” households report an excellent relationship with their mother, only 24 percent living in “hands-off” households do.

“Hands-Off” Parents

“Hands-off” parents consistently fail to set rules and monitor their teen's behavior. Teen risk goes up when parents **fail to:**

- **monitor their teen's television and Internet viewing, and restrict the CD's they purchase.** These teens are at twice the risk of those teens whose parents monitor these activities.
- **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.** These teens are at twice the risk of teens whose parents do these.
- **have dinner with their teens six or seven times a week.** These teens are at one and a half times the risk of teens who have dinner with their parents nearly every night.
- **give teen a clear message about marijuana use.** Parents whose teens think they would “not be too upset” about their teen smoking pot have teens at more than three times the risk of teens who think their parents would be “extremely upset.”

“It is time for every parent to look in the mirror rather than look outside to what everyone else can do,” said Califano. “Parents should ask themselves: do I know where my teen is after school and on weekends? Have I set a curfew for my teen? Have I made it clear that I would be extremely upset if my teen used marijuana? Do I monitor what my teen watches on television and on the Internet, what CD's he or she buys and listens to? Do we have dinner together as a family six or seven times a week—without the television on? Parents need to ask themselves every day: ‘What am I doing today to keep my kids drug-free?’”

Reprinted from *www.casacolumbia.org*, “CASA Releases 2000 Teen Survey on February 21,” National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), press release, February 21, 2001.