

Parents Give Mixed Messages to Teens on Drinking Alcohol



New Study Examines How Parents' Actions and Behaviors May Inadvertently Encourage Teenage Drinking

PHILADELPHIA, PA (July 6, 2010) — Despite the good intentions of many parents to address substance abuse with their children - new research shows that their behavior may unintentionally contribute to teenage alcohol abuse.

Two parallel surveys were conducted examining attitudes and behaviors around these topics from both parents' and teens' perspectives. The polls were conducted by Harris Interactive and commissioned by Caron Treatment Centers, a world renowned non-profit addiction treatment center offering alcohol and [drug rehab in Pennsylvania](#), Florida, and Texas.

"It's encouraging that the majority of parents polled are aware that substance abuse needs to be discussed before children reach their teens," said David Rotenberg, Executive Director of Adolescent Treatment at Caron. "Most parents are well intentioned but there can be a disconnect between their words and actions based upon the findings in this study. For example, if one parent says a teenager should not drink, but the same parent or co-parent allows him or her to do so on special occasions or under parental supervision the lesson is lost."

The online omnibus parent poll was conducted on May 5-11, 2010 in the United States among 1,144 parents of children age 17 years or younger. The online omnibus youth poll was conducted on March 17-23, 2010 in the United States among 973 12-18 year olds. Respondents for these surveys were selected from among those who agreed to participate in Harris Interactive Surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. youth (12-18 year old) and parent populations. Based upon the survey findings and Caron Treatment Centers' extensive experience in both substance abuse prevention and treatment, Caron has developed a package of [free educational materials](#) to help empower parents to better manage these sensitive issues with their children.

Caron has more than 20 years of expertise in substance abuse prevention and treatment through its award-winning [Student Assistance Programs](#) and Adolescent Treatment Center.

Study highlights include:

What parents aren't saying can make an impression.

Nearly a third of the 12 -18 year olds surveyed said they have observed one or both of their parents drinking alcohol to "relax" or "relieve stress" after a hard day (32%). "Parents need to talk about why it is acceptable for adults to drink alcohol in moderation. Otherwise they may unknowingly be communicating a mixed message," said Rotenberg.

Teens perceive grades as more of a worry to their parents than alcohol.

Overall, 12 -18 year olds believe parents are more concerned about their grades in school (57%) and time spent on the internet (50%) than whether they drink alcohol (37%) before they are legally allowed. Meanwhile only half (47%) of parents surveyed were concerned their kids would become addicted to drugs and alcohol.

Many teens have their first drink at age fourteen.

Twenty-five percent of the 12 -18 year olds surveyed said they drank alcohol and agree with the statement "it is

okay for people under the age of 21 to drink alcohol.” Fourteen is the average age when they have their first drink and about a third do it in the company of another family member (31% with their mothers, 25% with their fathers).

Drinking fuels drug use and sex.

One quarter (25%) of teens 12-18 who have had a drink of alcohol say they have engaged in some kind of harmful and/or illegal activity while under the influence of alcohol. These behaviors include:

- Use of a drug, such as marijuana, cocaine or an inhalant – 15%
- Engaging in sexual behavior they regret – 11% (This was divided evenly between teen girls and boys).

“Drinking alcohol is serious enough in its own right because of its impact on a developing brain. But it also ups the chance of a teenager putting himself or herself in a dangerous situation,” said Dr. Harris Stratyner, Vice President of [Caron's office for New York rehab services](#).

Parents allow drinking under certain circumstances.

Three out of ten (30%) of the 12-18 year olds surveyed indicated that their parents allow them to drink alcohol at certain times:

- 25% say their parents allow them to drink on “special occasions.”
- 17% say their parents allow them to drink at home and under parental supervision.
- 30% say their first experience with alcohol was with a family member – mother (31%), sibling (29%) and father (25%).

“The fact that 1 in 3 teens surveyed said their first experience with alcohol was with their mother was truly shocking to me,” said Mylene Krzanowski, Executive Director of Caron's Student Assistance Services. “We want to help empower moms and dads to know and do better. It's a total misperception that children can learn to drink 'responsibly' with their parents. A developing teenage brain is simply not capable of handling that responsibility.”

Parents believe in discussing the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse.

When asked the critical age to start addressing the dangers of alcohol and drugs with their children, 75% of parents said age 10 years or younger. Another 18% indicated the conversation should take place as early as age five years or younger. In general, mothers felt more strongly than fathers about having these discussions with their children starting at age 10 years or younger (81% versus 67%).

Parents' response to underage drinking varies.

Most parents agreed that they would take some type of action if they discovered their son or daughter had been drinking alcohol. Check out our tips on [what to do if you think your child is drinking alcohol](#).

- 32% said they would share stories with them about their own alcohol drinking experiences. However, fathers were slightly more likely to talk to their sons (34%) than mothers to their daughters (27%) about their own experiences.
- 31% said they would punish or discipline their children and forbid them from drinking alcohol until they were 21.
- Almost 10% said they would encourage their children to only drink alcohol under their supervision.

Caron Treatment Centers

Caron Treatment Centers is a nationally recognized non-profit provider of alcohol and [drug rehab in Texas](#), Pennsylvania, and Florida. With more than 50 years in the field, Caron is one of the oldest and largest facilities offering primary, relapse and extended residential treatment for young adults, adults and adolescents, as well as families affected by the disease of addiction. Caron's gender separate and gender specific programs are housed in

modern, state-of-the-art facilities. Caron has extensive experience in the treatment of co-occurring psychological/psychiatric disorders within its patient community. Nearly 70% of patients at Caron have co-occurring disorders. Caron utilizes research on Recovery For Life from leading institutions such as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and The University of Pennsylvania's Treatment Research Institute. Formerly the Caron Foundation, Caron Treatment Centers operates a residential treatment center in Wernersville, in southeastern Pennsylvania; a regional office in [Philadelphia](#); Caron Renaissance, offering extended care [addiction treatment in Florida](#); and recovery centers in New York City and Bermuda. For more information visit www.caron.org or www.assessmyfamily.org.

Survey Methodology

The survey of parents was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of Caron Treatment Centers from May 5-11, 2010 among 1,144 parents of children age 17 years or younger. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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Note: The complete Caron study that includes two parallel polls of parents and adolescents reflecting their attitudes and behaviors around alcohol and substance abuse is available to the media upon request. The survey methodology, including weighting variables is also available.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is one of the world's leading custom market research firms, leveraging research, technology, and business acumen to transform relevant insight into actionable foresight. Known widely for the Harris Poll and for pioneering innovative research methodologies, Harris offers expertise in a wide range of industries including healthcare, technology, public affairs, energy, telecommunications, financial services, insurance, media, retail, restaurant, and consumer package goods. Serving clients in over 215 countries through its North American, European, and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms, Harris specializes in delivering research solutions that help the company – and its clients – stay ahead of what's next. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.