

Prevention Connection

A Newsletter from the Tiverton Prevention Coalition

Issue 1

November 2006

ONE HABIT THAT PREVENTS ANOTHER
The more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use illegal drugs.

CASA The National Center on
Addiction and Substance Abuse
at Columbia University

Family Day A day to eat dinner with your children™
CELEBRATE MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

CASA Report Finds Teens Who Have Fewer Family Dinners More Likely to Smoke Daily and Get Drunk Monthly

Teens who have infrequent family dinners (two or fewer per week) are twice as likely to smoke daily and get drunk monthly, compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (at least five per week), according to a new report from The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University and sponsored by TV Land and Nick at Nite's Family Table.

The report, *The Importance of Family Dinners III*, also reveals that, compared to teens who have five or more family dinners per week, those who have two or fewer are:

- More than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes;
- One and a half times likelier to have tried alcohol;
- Twice as likely to have tried marijuana; and
- More than twice as likely to say future drug use is very or somewhat likely.

The report's findings, released this past August, underscore the significance of family dinners as a sign of parental engagement. Compared to parents who say their families have dinners together frequently, those who have infrequent family dinners are five times more likely to say they have a fair or poor relationship with their teen; and one and a half times more likely to say they know the parents of their teen's friends not very well or not at all.

"This year's findings prove that family dinners and the communication that occurs over the course of a meal are critical in building a relationship with your children and to understanding the world in which they

live," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. "Parents who have frequent family dinners are those who take the time to know their child's friends and the parents of these friends, know their child's teachers and chaperone their parties, and have healthier kids."

This year, 58 percent of teens report having dinner with their families at least five times a week, the same proportion CASA has observed over the past several years. This year, for the first time the study asked teens and parents who have infrequent family dinners to tell us the main reason why their family does not have dinner together more often. More than one in five of these parents and teens say they are too busy to have dinner together more often. The reason most commonly given by parents for why family dinners are not more frequent is because of conflicting schedules, while the most common reason given by teens is because one or both parents work late.

Another important finding was the correlation between family dinners and academic performance. CASA found that teens who have frequent family dinners are more likely to get better grades in school—higher academic performance is associated with lower substance abuse risk. Teens who have dinner with their families five or more times a week are likelier to say that they receive either all A's or mostly A's and B's in school compared to teens who have dinner with their families fewer than three times a week (63 percent vs. 49 percent).

For more information, visit
www.CASAFamilyDay.org

Did you know that eating dinner frequently with your children reduces their risk of substance abuse?

What can you do.....

- Start the pattern of family dinners when children are young.
- Encourage your children to create menu ideas and participate in meal preparation.
- Turn off the TV and let your answering machine answer calls during dinnertime.
- Talk about what happened in everyone's day: school, work, extracurricular activities or current events.
- Establish a routine to start and end each meal. Light candles, say grace or tell a story.
- Keep conversation positive and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.

Parental influence is powerful

When their kids hit the "tween" years (ages 8 to 12), parents begin to feel they have less and less control over their children's decisions - that their kids' friends are now the greatest influence in their children's lives. But tweens and teens report just the opposite.

As much as your tween or teen seems to be pulling away, or more interested in what their friends think, know that your child still cares more

"What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink."

Charles Curie
SAMHSA Administrator
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

about your opinions, as a parent, than anyone else's.

Parenting isn't easy, but it works

Parents are busier today than ever before. Work, managing a home, keeping in touch with extended family and friends - it's all physically and emotionally draining, leaving little time to stop and think, much less to stay closely involved in their children's lives. However, numerous research studies all reach the same conclusion: Children who feel close to their parents, and whose parents stay involved in their lives, are much less likely to use alcohol. The opposite is also true. Family conflict and lack of bonding are associated with an increased risk of drinking.

Proven skills to reduce underage drinking:

1. Set clear rules and expectations about no underage drinking.

It may seem obvious, but kids need to know exactly where their parents stand on the issue of underage drinking. Discuss your family values and boundaries (i.e., no alcohol, tobacco inhalants, or other drugs). Don't assume they know how you feel about drinking. Explain the risks and harms. Be clear. Are you prohibiting experimentation, or just excessive drinking? Is "just once" okay? Be specific.

Enforce the rules with consistent and appropriate consequences every time. Explain family rules and the behavior you expect. For example, "Underage drinking can damage your brain and cause early addiction. It's also against the law. Do not drink any alcohol before age 21. If alcohol is at a party, call me, and I'll come get you."

Write out your most important family rules and post them clearly where everyone in the family can see them often. Review rules regularly. Avoid unrealistic threats.

Always let your children know how pleased you are when they respect the rules of the home. Be specific as you praise, and mention how keeping the rules actually benefits them.

2. Have daily, positive communication, and have fun doing it.

Kids' interests change quickly, so be sure to stay current with what they are doing. Talk to them daily about school, friends, their weekend, and what's new in their lives. Be kind and respectful to each other. Eat dinner together; have pleasant conversation. Have fun with your kids. Stay involved in their academic careers. Notice and compliment the good in your child. When correcting your child, be sure positive comments far outweigh the negative.

3. Know your children's friends.

Good friends make a parents' job a lot easier. The more you can keep your kids away from alcohol and the pressure to drink, the more likely they will remain alcohol-free. Seek out opportunities to become better acquainted with your kids' friends. Even offering friends a ride to the mall gives you a chance to get to know them.

Meet your children's friends' parents, too. Be sure they are in agreement with your rules about underage drinking.

4. Monitor your children's activities.

Always know where your children are, especially when they are unsupervised. Research shows that between the hours of 3-6 pm, kids are at the highest risk for a host of illicit behaviors, such as drinking, smoking and promiscuity. Be sure your child is not unsupervised. If you cannot do that, call them or have a friend check on them during this time. Let your children know they must be accountable for their time away from you, and that you are carefully observing their behavior and activities. When kids know their parents are "watching," they are far less likely to get into trouble.

Know who your kids are with, and try to ensure an alcohol-free environment. Impulse control is still developing during the teenage years, so adolescents need a risk-free social environment. Help provide safe, "no-alcohol" fun. When they go out to a friend's house, call and be sure the parents will be home and no alcohol will be available. Or, surprise them and "stop by" to say hello. Though they may roll their eyes and seem embarrassed at your presence, the occasional surprise visit lets them know you could stop by anytime unannounced. Be sure to explain that you do trust your children, but that you want to be certain they're safe.

5. Ensure that alcohol is not available to your child at home.

If you, as an adult, choose to drink, always drink in moderation (one drink a day for females, or two drinks a day for males). Don't use alcohol as an escape from problems. Don't portray alcohol use as fun or glamorous. Keep alcohol locked up and away from kids, and make sure the parents of your children's friends do the same.

Tiverton Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force creates a new identity.

We are now called:

Tiverton Prevention Coalition

The Tiverton Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force was Established in 1987 by the Tiverton Town Council to initiate programs and policies relating to the prevention of substance abuse for all residents of the Town.

Newly renamed, the Tiverton Prevention Coalition is developing strategies to increase public engagement in issues involving the health, safety and well-being of youth in our community. Successful substance abuse prevention is a community effort. The African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" has recently entered our cultural vocabulary. This is the concept upon which the coalition is built.

Membership and participation is open to all members of our community. A Coalition is most effective when the broadest range of the community is represented. Members of the coalition are not necessarily experts in the area of substance use or prevention; instead they are concerned and dedicated individuals who are committed to fostering the positive development our town's youth.

Please join us. Your participation is welcome at any time

Prevention Connection

In an attempt to reach out to parents to offer support and information the Tiverton Prevention Coalition will publish ongoing newsletters that focus on prevention of underage drinking and substance use.

For more information about coalition activities or meetings please contact Rebecca Elwell a

Newport County website provides information, network of resources and local links for both parents and teens

www.ncyouthconnect.org,

