

## Parenting for prevention? What *not* to do

By Emily Moser

So, on a recent weeknight, when you may have been checking email at home, reading a good book or catching the late-night news, did you know where your teenager was?

If you did, you appear to be in a select group. Apparently, lots of parents don't know – or don't want to admit - where their kids are on school nights, according to a national survey.

Nearly half of teenagers typically leave the house to hang out with their friends on school nights, and the later they stay out with friends, the more likely it is that alcohol and other drugs are being used. At the same time, only 14 percent of parents say their teens usually leave the house to hang out with friends on a typical day during the week.

Those were among the findings of a survey of American attitudes on substance abuse by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University. The 2008 survey, involving well over 1,000 teenagers and parents, shows that while nearly every mom and dad is concerned about the challenges of raising kids today, many don't take key actions to prevent their children from drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

Where are parents falling down on the job? Based on the survey, parents increase the likelihood their 12- to 17-year-old will drink, smoke and use illegal and prescription drugs because they fail to:

- *Monitor their children's leaving the house and hanging out on school nights.* I don't know about you, but when I was a teenager, I didn't even *ask* my parents if I could go out on school nights because I knew the answer would be a big, fat no. I've followed suit and don't let my two kids out on school nights. But, given the findings, CASA went so far as to suggest that it may be time to revive the old TV public service announcement that asked, "It's 10 p.m., do you know where your child is?" Half of teens who come home after 10 p.m. say there's alcohol, marijuana or other drug use among the kids they're with. And, what about hanging out at a friend's house? Well, there's not much good news there, either. The percentage of teens who say there's alcohol or drug use going on when they're out with friends past 10 o'clock is only slightly less when those teens are at a friend's.
- *Safeguard their prescription drugs from their kids.* One in three teens who know a prescription drug abuser say that kids who abuse those drugs – such as the painkillers OxyContin and Vicodin – get them from home, the medicine cabinet or from parents, the survey found. Another one-third say prescription drugs can be acquired from friends or classmates. The availability of prescription drugs at home may be a contributor, CASA said, to the whopping 46 percent increase over last year in the percentage of teens who say prescription drugs are the substance

- they can most easily obtain. For the first time, the survey revealed that prescription drugs are easier for more teens to get than beer.
- *Address the problem of drugs at their child's school.* Too many parents appear to have their head in the sand on this one. One-third of them in the survey said the presence of drugs in their child's school does not increase the risk that their child will use. This flies in the face of research, which consistently has found that drugs in school is detrimental to an entire student body and increases the risk kids will use. Apparently, some parents aren't too optimistic about drug-free schools, either. CASA found that although nearly all say it's important that their teen's school is drug free, only 39 percent who say there are drugs in their teens' schools believe the goal of a drug-free school is realistic.
  - *Set a good example.* Hang on to your hat: According to the survey, one in four teens knows a parent of a classmate or friend who uses marijuana, and *10 percent* of teens say this parent smokes marijuana with people the teen's age.

OK, the survey revealed some deeply troubling problems. But here's the thing (research bears this out and CASA is clear): Teens whose parents are involved – engaged in their teens' everyday lives by relaxing with them, eating dinner together frequently, supervising them, establishing standards of and modeling healthy behavior – are much less likely to drink alcohol or use other drugs.

So, keep spending time with your kids. And by all means, continue to poke your head in their room at night. They might think it's annoying now, but they'll thank you later.

*Emily Moser is the director of parenting programs at Oregon Partnership, a statewide nonprofit that promotes healthy kids and communities through drug and alcohol awareness, drug prevention programs, and 24-hour crisis lines for treatment referrals and suicide prevention and intervention. To learn more about Oregon Partnership, and for parenting resources, please call 503-244-5211, or visit [www.faceitparents.com](http://www.faceitparents.com) or [www.orpartnership.org](http://www.orpartnership.org).*