

# Teens Welcome Parents' Increasing Openness about Their Past Experiences with Alcohol or Drugs

*Study Suggests Parents' Honesty Inspires Teens to Act More Responsibly*



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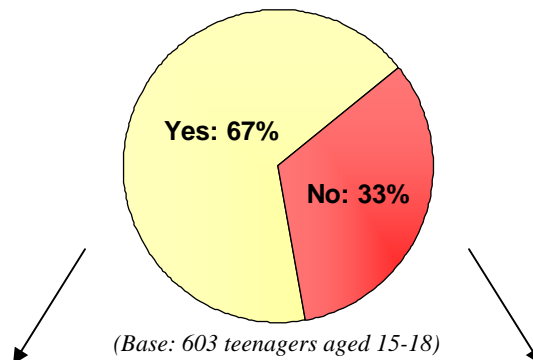
## Teens Welcome Parents' Increasing Openness about Their Past Experiences with Alcohol or Drugs

### *Study Suggests Parents' Honesty Inspires Teens to Act More Responsibly*

**New York, NY** – Two thirds of boys and girls aged 15 to 18 (67%) say that their parents have told them about their own experiences with alcohol and drugs when they were young, and these teens nearly unanimously (95%) look at it as a good thing, according to a new study conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of Hazelden.

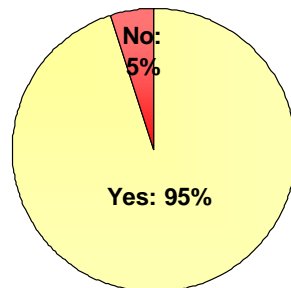
Furthermore, among the third of teenagers (33%) who report that their parents have *not* talked with them about their own use of alcohol or drugs as teenagers, two in three (68%) say that they would want their parents to share these experiences.

**Q. Have your parents or guardian(s) ever told you whether they used alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high when they were teenagers?**



**IF PARENTS DID TELL:**

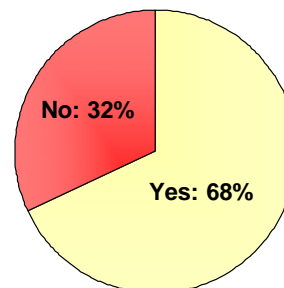
**Q. Would you say that it is a good thing that your parents told you about their use of alcohol or drugs when they were teenagers?**



(Base: 406 teenagers aged 15-18 whose parents told them whether they used alcohol or drugs when they were teenagers)

**IF PARENTS DID NOT TELL:**

**Q. Would you want your parents to tell you if they used alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high when they were teenagers?**

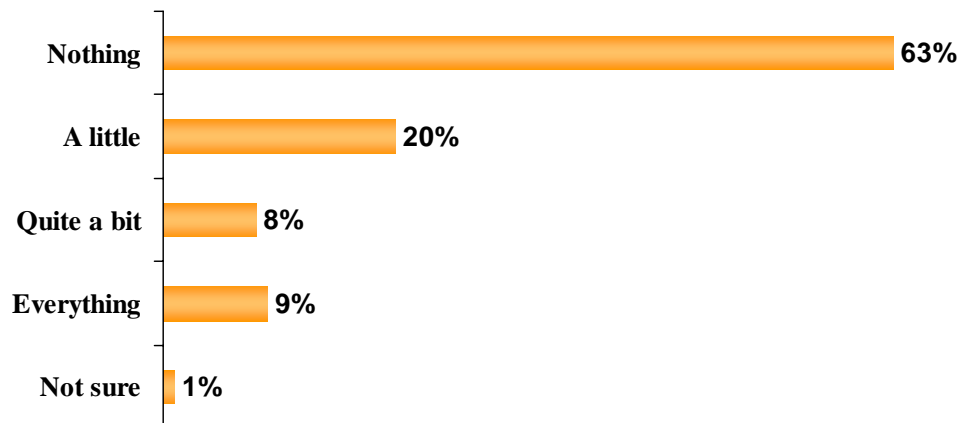


(Base: 197 teenagers aged 15-18 whose parents did not tell them whether they used alcohol or drugs when they were teenagers)

- Teenage girls are more likely than are teenage boys to wish their parents would share this information (74% vs. 61%).

The study suggests that a major shift occurred in the course of one generation, as parents of today's teenagers are much more open with their children about their early use of alcohol and drug than were their own parents at the time. Among the 47% of parents surveyed who say they used alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high as a teenager, over three quarters (77%) say they have spoken with their own teenage children about it; just 23% have not shared their experiences. In contrast, 63% of these parents say that *their* parents did not tell them anything about their use of alcohol or drugs when they were young.

**Q. When you were a teenager, how much did your parents tell you about their use of alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high when they were teenagers?**



(Base: 620 parents of a child aged 15-18)

- Mothers and fathers whose own parents spoke with them about their experiences with alcohol or drugs as teens are more likely than those whose parents were close-lipped on the topic to be open with their own teenage children in this regard (85% vs. 72%).

As a further indication that the trend towards increasing parental openness is likely to continue, more than eight in ten teens (83%) say that they expect to someday tell their own teenage children about their use of alcohol or drugs, while only 17% intend to withhold this information.

- Parents' openness appears to be linked with teens' intentions to share their experiences with alcohol or drugs with their children down the road. Nine in ten teens whose parents told them about their own experiences with alcohol or drugs as teens (90%) say that they will be open with their own children, compared with 67% of teens who have not had a discussion on this topic with their parents.

*These are some of the findings of an Ipsos polls conducted August 14 – September 1, 2009. For the survey, national samples of 603 boys and girls aged 15 to 18 and 620 parents of a teen aged 15 to 18 were interviewed.*

- *Teens were interviewed online from August 14-19, 2009 using Ipsos' U.S. online panel. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the U.S. population of teens aged 15 to 18 according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated*

*margin of error of +/- 4.0 percentage points 19 times out of 20 of what the results would have been had the entire adult population of adults aged 18 and older in the United States had been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.*

- *Parents were interviewed August 17-September 1, 2009 via telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate within  $\pm 3.9$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire population of adults in the U.S. been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/gender composition reflects that of the actual U.S. population according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.*

### Initiating the Conversation

Most commonly, parents who have spoken with their teen about their past alcohol or drug use say that they initiated a conversation on their own without their children first asking them about it (76%). However, four in ten say they addressed a question that their teenager raised about their own use of alcohol or drugs as teenagers (41%). A similar proportion of parents who had a discussion with their teenage children say it was motivated by a friend or family member having experienced problems with alcohol or drugs (43%). Fewer than one in five (18%) say that they shared their experiences with their teenager because they suspected their child was already drinking or using drugs.

- Dads are more likely than are moms to have spoken with their teenage child on their own initiative without prompting (82% vs. 70%) while moms are more likely than are dads to say that they were motivated to have a conversation on this topic because a friend or family member had experienced problems with alcohol or drugs (51% vs. 34%).
- Parents of a teenage daughter are more likely than those of a teenage son to say that they had this discussion because their child asked them about their past alcohol or drug use (48% vs. 31%). In contrast, parents of a teenage son are more likely than those of a teenage daughter to say that they just brought it up on their own without any prompting by their child (82% vs. 71%).

Parents who have not told their teenage children about their own use of alcohol or drugs as teens say they have chosen not to do so for a variety of reasons, most commonly because they would rather have their children do as they say, not as they did when they were their children's age (74%). Many also say that they have withheld this information because they feel that their own past use of alcohol or drugs is none of their children's business (63%) or because they are worried that it would make their children think that it would be okay for them to use alcohol or drugs (62%).

Fewer parents say that they have not had this conversation with their teenage children because their children are too young (26%) or because it just never came up (21%). Just 6% of parents say that they have not spoken with their teenage children about their own alcohol or drug use because they do not feel knowledgeable enough to have an educated conversation about it with their kids.

*Parents More Comfortable Speaking with Their Teenage Children than with Their Own Parents about Use of Alcohol or Drugs*

Most parents of teenage children claim that they would know what to say to their own parents as well as to their kids about their respective use of alcohol or drugs. While 87% of parents agree (61% strongly, 26% somewhat) that they would know what to say if they had to talk with their own parents about their parents' use of alcohol or drugs, including prescription drugs, 97% agree (83% strongly, 14% somewhat) that they would know what to say to their own children about their children's use of alcohol or drugs.

However, when asked to choose, parents are much more likely to say that it would be more difficult to speak with their own parents about their use of alcohol or drugs than it would be to speak with their teenage children (68% vs. 19%), reflecting a disparity in comfort level. One in eight (13%) were unsure.

Similarly, 95% of parents say that they are or would be comfortable speaking with their teenage children about their teens' use of alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high, including 82% who say they would be *very* comfortable. Just 5% would be uncomfortable broaching this topic.

This high level of comfort is perceived by teens, as nine in ten teens (89%) say that they think their parents are (or would be) comfortable talking with them about their own use of alcohol or drugs to get drunk or high. One in ten (11%) feels that their parents are (or would be) uncomfortable discussing their use of alcohol or drugs.

- Understandably, those who have already spoken with their parents about alcohol or drug use are more likely to regard their parents as being comfortable having this discussion than are teens who have not had such a conversation with their parents (91% vs. 84%).

Teens are not only open to talking with their parents about using alcohol and drugs, but most say that they would know what to say if their parents appeared to be abusing alcohol or drugs today. Three quarters (75%) say that if they noticed that their parents appeared to be abusing alcohol or using drugs, including abuse of prescription drugs, they would know what to say if they wanted to talk with their parents about their behavior. In contrast, a quarter (25%) feels that they would not know how to approach their parents under these circumstances.

- Teens whose parents already confided their use of alcohol or drugs as teens are more likely than those who do not know about their parents' past experiences to agree that they would know how to handle this topic (79% vs. 68%).
- This may be a necessary conversation for some teens, as a quarter (26%) say that they have seen their parents drunk or high.

*Openness with Teens Generates Increased Responsibility with Alcohol or Drugs*

Teens are not only eager to hear their parents tell them whether they used alcohol or drugs as teenagers, but they also indicate that it would make them more responsible in their own use of alcohol or drugs. Nearly two thirds of teens (63%) say that their parents' sharing their stories would make them more responsible in this regard, while just 2% say

that it would make them less responsible. A third (34%) report that learning about their parents' use of alcohol or drugs as teenagers would not have an impact on them.

Similarly, the findings suggest that parents need not worry that disclosing their early experiences with alcohol and drugs will encourage their teenage children to use alcohol and drugs themselves. Over half of teens (51%) say they would actually be *less* likely to use alcohol or drugs, while 45% say that this information would not have an impact on their likelihood to use alcohol or drugs themselves. Just 4% report that their parents' telling them about their experience with alcohol or drugs as teens would make them *more* likely to do so themselves.

- In fact, most teens whose parents told them about their past use of alcohol or drugs say that they are *less* likely to use alcohol or drugs (61%), compared with only 30% of those whose parents have not spoken with them about it.
- Additionally, teens who have discussed the topic with their parents are more likely than those who have not to say that they would be *more* responsible in their own use of alcohol or drugs (74% vs. 41%).

#### Parents as Role Models

Parents nearly unanimously agree (97%) that they should be role models for their teenagers in regard to using alcohol and drugs. In fact, 91% of parents *strongly* agree with this sentiment.

- At least nine in ten parents across demographic groups feel that parents should be role models in this way.

Similarly, nine in ten teenagers (91%) agree that that they consider their parents to be role models when it comes to their own use of alcohol and drugs, including over half whom *strongly* agree (54%). Fewer than one in ten (9%) do not see their parents as role models when it comes to alcohol and drugs.

- Whether parents have told their teens about their own use of alcohol seems to have little impact on teens' perceptions of their parents as role models. Teens who are aware of their parents' experiences with alcohol or drugs as teenagers are nearly as likely as those who are not to consider their parents to be role models (90% vs. 93%).
- However, teens who have seen their parents drunk or high are twice as likely as those who have not to say that they do *not* regard their parents as role models when it comes to alcohol and drugs (14% vs. 7%).

#### Family is the Top Source for Advice among Both Parents and Teens

If parents suspect that their teenage children are using alcohol or drugs, they are most likely to first turn to their spouse (or the child's other parent) for advice (41%). Many also mention that they would turn toward their church or religion, with nearly a quarter (23%) saying that they would look to their minister, rabbi or other clergy and an additional 2% volunteering that they would turn to the Bible or to God.



However, parents also report that they would look to a number of professional sources for advice, including their family physician or other doctor (16%), a drug treatment center or addiction counselor (15%), or a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker (10%).

Other resources include a close relative (14%), a family friend (13%) or a teacher or school counselor (4%).

One in ten (9%) volunteer that they would just speak with their child immediately if they suspected they were using alcohol or drugs. Another 7% say that they would go online for advice. Fewer say that they would turn to some other source (6%), that they wouldn't turn to anyone for advice (2%), or are unsure (4%).

Like their parents, teens are also by far most likely to first look to their immediate family if they have questions about the use of alcohol or drugs. Three quarters of teens (74%) say that they would first turn to their parents for answers or advice. After their parents, teens are most likely to turn to friends or loved ones, such as a peer (45%), a sibling (30%), a close relative (20%) or a family friend (17%).

Smaller proportions would turn to other adults in their life, such as a teacher or coach (12%); their minister, rabbi or other clergy (8%); or their family doctor (5%). Just 3% would ask a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker for advice, while 2% would seek the help of a drug treatment center or addiction counselor. One in six (16%) would first turn to the internet.

<b>Parents:</b> If you suspected your teenage using alcohol or drugs, where would you turn first for advice? <b>Teens:</b> If you had questions about the use of alcohol and drugs by yourself or someone you know, where would you turn first for answers or advice?		
	Parents	Teens
Your spouse/child's other parent	41%	-
Your parent(s)	-	74%
A friend/peer	-	45%
Your sister or brother	-	30%
Your minister/rabbi/other clergy	23%	8%
A family physician/other doctor	16%	5%
A drug treatment center/addiction counselor	15%	2%
A close relative	14%	20%
A family friend	13%	17%
A teacher or coach	-	12%
A psychiatrist/psychologist/social worker	10%	3%
(You would just speak with your child about it immediately)*	9%	-
The Internet	7%	16%
(School - school counselor, teacher)*	4%	-
(Religion - God/Bible)*	2%	-
Other	6%	0%
The news media	0%	1%
(Not sure)*	4%	-

*\*Responses in parentheses were volunteered without prompting.*

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