



More than one in five parents of teens think what they say has little influence on whether their child uses alcohol, illicit substances or tobacco, according to a report out recently.

The report, from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), says nearly one in 10 parents (9.1%) said they did not talk to their kids ages 12 through 17 about the dangers of using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs in the past year.

The findings are based on SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an annual nationwide survey of 67,500 Americans ages 12 and older.

National surveys show that teens who believe their parents would strongly disapprove of them using substances were less likely to try them than their peers were, says Peter Delany, director of the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality at the SAMHSA.

"Any time is a good time to talk to your kids when you have a chance," Delany says. "But if you haven't started talking to your kids, before school gets out is an especially good time.

"In the summer months, especially around holiday weekends, kids are more likely to get involved with substances," Delany says. Kids may have more access to substances when they are out of school and at holiday parties, he adds.

"Parents need to initiate age-appropriate conversations about these issues with their children at all stages of their development in order to help ensure that their children make the right decisions," SAMHSA administrator Pamela Hyde says.

Conversations about alcohol can change as children get older, says Robert Lindsey, President and CEO of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD.)

In an article that appeared in [USA Today](#), Mr. Lindsey noted: "Early on, it may be very basic information," he says. "As kids get older, we need to talk about the impact on health, academics,

NCADD President/CEO Robert Lindsey Quoted in "Parents Can Prevent Teens' Substance Use"

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relationships, driving and the dangers of alcohol and prescription drugs." It is also important to talk about family history and genetic predisposition to alcoholism, he adds.

Lindsey says parents should listen to their kids and be mindful of their own non-verbal communication as well: "Children learn as much from watching what you do as from what you say."

For more information: SAMHSA has a guide "[Navigating the Teen Years: A Parent's Handbook for Raising Healthy Teens](#)", and the NCADD's website has [general guidelines for talking with kids](#) about alcohol and drugs.