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## **STUDY OFFERS PARENTS NEW INSIGHTS INTO *WHEN* AND *WHY* TEENS CHOOSE DRINKING, DRUGS AND SEX**

### **SADD/Liberty Mutual Study Details Road Map to Adolescent Decision-Making**

**BOSTON (October 29, 2002)** – Providing a rare glimpse inside the thinking of today’s teens, new research conducted by SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) and Liberty Mutual Group identifies key “decision points” as adolescents mature and the factors most likely to guide their behavior with respect to drinking, drug use and sex. While, predictably, teens report upward trends in drinking, drug use and sexual behavior throughout middle and high school, the research identified:

- ♣ Drinking increases significantly between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade;
- ♣ Drug use increases significantly between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade; and
- ♣ Sexual activity increases significantly between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### **[See Appendix/Chart 1 – Teen Decision Points]**

The national study of more than 1,800 middle and high school students revealed a developmental time line reflecting significant spikes in destructive, or potentially destructive, behaviors of teenagers, amplifying the need for adult intervention that targets the issues most prevalent at different stages of adolescence.

Just as important, the *Teens Today* 2002 study results released today suggest time-targeted strategies that parents can use to help keep their children safe.

“This compelling information takes parents beyond the ‘whats’ to the ‘whens’ and ‘whys’ of teen behavior. It’s a road map that identifies the dangerous intersections and some alternative routes to avoid them,” said Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of the national SADD organization.

“We’ve always known about the decisions many teens make,” added John Conners, executive vice president and manager of Liberty Mutual’s personal insurance operations. “Now we’re able to better understand the factors that drive those decisions, which factors are most relevant at different ages, and how those factors change over time.”

The *Teens Today* research confirms many parents’ fear: young people have easy access to alcohol, drugs and sex. Good decision-making thus becomes the last, best line of defense for teens. Understanding what factors influence those decisions can help parents best prepare young people to avoid trouble.

The factors teens consider when making such decisions change in number and relative importance depending on the age of the child and the decision to be made. The following factors were regularly cited by teens.

- ♣ **Mental states** (e.g., depression, anxiety, stress, boredom, curiosity)
- ♣ **Personal goals** (e.g., to feel grown up, to fit in, to take risks)
- ♣ **Potential outcomes** (e.g., Are others doing it? What are the chances of getting caught? What are the potential consequences?)
- ♣ **Significant people** (e.g., parents, friends, siblings, clergy)

“In the final analysis, it’s a parent’s job to influence as many of those factors as possible,” said Wallace. “Making sense of the often convoluted information about teenage decision-making and behavior is an important step for families trying to keep their kids healthy and safe.”

Despite what many teens might have adults believe, engaging in destructive behaviors is not just about “having fun” or “feeling good.” Indeed, the data indicates other key drivers of decisions, including anger, peer pressure and stress. Charts 2 and 3 (**see appendix – Teen Decision Factors ... Why and Why Not**) illustrate some common responses as to why some teens choose certain destructive behaviors and others do not.

Other key findings from the *Teens Today* 2002 study:

### **Drinking**

- ♣ A second spike in drinking takes place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- ♣ Parents are teens’ biggest influence not to drink, regardless of the age of the teen.
- ♣ As teens mature, influences not to drink become less significant.

### **Drug Use**

- ♣ Younger teens are more likely than older teens to be influenced to use drugs by “external” goals (e.g., to fit in). Older teens are more likely than younger teens to be influenced to use drugs by “internal” goals (e.g., to feel good).
- ♣ Sixth graders say their number-one reason to use drugs is to rebel.

### **Sex**

- ♣ Almost one in four 6<sup>th</sup> graders and one in three 7<sup>th</sup> graders are sexually active.
- ♣ Younger teens are more likely to be influenced to have sex by “external” goals (e.g., to be cool) and older teens more likely to be influenced to have sex by “internal” goals (e.g., to have fun).

### **Drinking, Drugs and Sex**

- ♣ By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, more than three in four teens are drinking and sexually active and almost half report using drugs.
- ♣ Close friends are teens’ number-one influence when making destructive decisions.
- ♣ Parents are teens’ number-one influence to not make destructive decisions.
- ♣ The influence of parents in helping their children to avoid destructive decision-making declines as teens mature.

### **What Does This Mean for Families?**

*Teens Today* research has consistently revealed meaningful correlations between parental involvement and teen decision-making. For example, teens who report regular, open communication with their parents about important issues say they are more likely to try to live up to their parents’ expectations and less likely to drink, use drugs or engage in early sexual activity.

“The message of this third annual *Teens Today* study is clear: parents are the key to helping young people make smart choices,” said Connors. “The evidence is mounting that adults who recognize the choices that children face every day and who are prepared to intervene with age-appropriate guidance are our best weapon against self-destructive behavior among young people.”

**[See Chart 4 – Teen Decision Factors ... What Parents Can Do]**

## **Methodology**

This report presents the results of a study commissioned by Liberty Mutual Group and SADD and conducted by Atlantic Research and Consulting, Inc. Three focus groups were conducted with teens between January 28 and 31, 2002, in three cities around the country. The information gathered in the focus groups was used to formulate a mail survey. Surveys were filled out by teens and returned through the mail between March 18 and May 15, 2002. A total of 1,838 surveys were received from a cross-section of 16 middle and high schools across the country. The data can be interpreted at a 95 percent confidence level with a  $\pm 2.1$  percent margin of error.

## **The SADD/Liberty Mutual Partnership**

SADD and Liberty Mutual have teamed for more than a decade to examine and address the issues facing young adults in today's world. The signature product of this teen safety partnership is the annual *Teens Today* study of teenage behaviors and attitudes on important safety issues.

SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) sponsors peer-to-peer education and prevention programs in middle schools and high schools nationwide.

Liberty Mutual Group is one of the largest multi-line insurers in the property and casualty industry. Offering a wide range of products and services, including private passenger auto and homeowners insurance, Liberty Mutual Group employs 35,000 people in more than 800 offices throughout the world.

## **Editor's Notes:**

SADD and Liberty Mutual make available a number of important family communication tools:

- SADD's Contract for Life and "Opening Lifesaving Lines" brochure
- SADD's Family Focus speakers program
- Liberty Mutual's "Avoiding Collisions: How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years" video and brochure
- SADD/Liberty Mutual "Guidelines for Good Family Communication" brochure

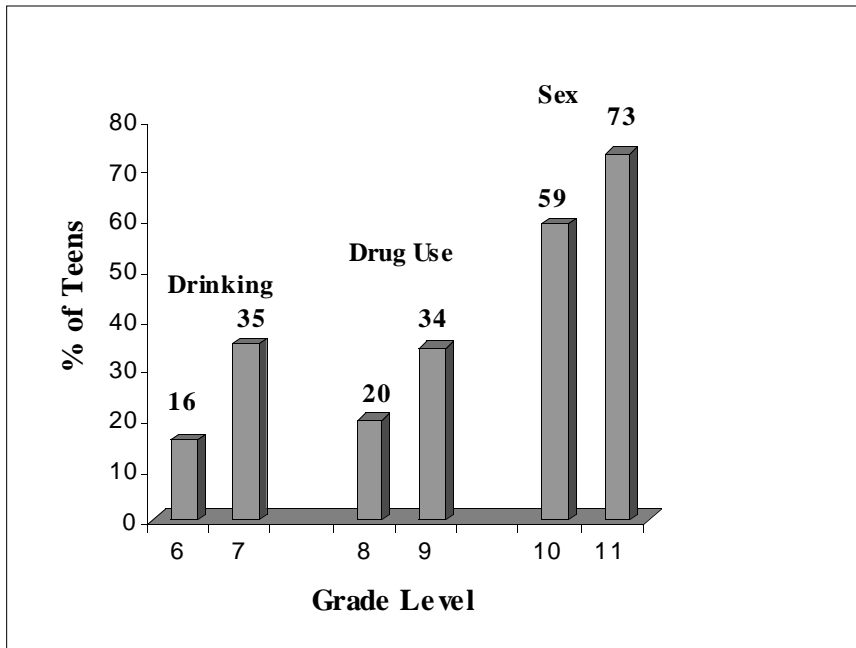
For more information or to receive materials, contact:

**SADD, Inc.**  
**255 Main Street**  
**Marlborough, MA 01752**  
**1-877-SADD-INC**  
**[www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org)**

**Liberty Mutual Group**  
**1-800-4-LIBERTY**  
**[www.libertymutualinsurance.com](http://www.libertymutualinsurance.com)**

*Teens Today 2002 / Appendix -1*

**Chart 1 -- Teen Decision Points:**



12<sup>th</sup> Grade Behaviors: Drinking 82%; Drug Use 46%; Sexual Activity 78%

**Chart 2 -- Teen Decision Factors ... Why:**

Grade	7 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>
Behavior	Drinking	Drug Use	Sex
<b>Notable factors by behavior and grade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking cool</li> <li>• Feeling grown up</li> <li>• Feeling popular or fitting in</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Stress from school</li> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• To rebel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress from school or parents</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• To anger parents</li> <li>• To take a risk</li> <li>• To fit in and belong</li> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• To feel relaxed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Because I've been drinking or using drugs</li> <li>• To please my partner</li> <li>• Caught up in the moment</li> <li>• Everyone else is doing it</li> <li>• Advertising/media images</li> <li>• Status</li> </ul>

**Chart 3 -- Teen Decision Factors ... Why not:**

Grade	7 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>
Behavior	Drinking	Drug Use	Sex
<b>Notable factors by behavior and grade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To please my parents</li> <li>• To set a good example for my siblings</li> <li>• It feels good to say no</li> <li>• It makes me vulnerable</li> <li>• I don't want to get caught</li> <li>• I don't want to lose my parents' trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It interferes with sports</li> <li>• It might affect my performance in school</li> <li>• It is against the law</li> <li>• Afraid of getting addicted</li> <li>• To set a good example for siblings</li> <li>• To please my parents</li> <li>• I don't want to get caught</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm afraid of STDs or pregnancy</li> <li>• I'm not in love or in a relationship</li> <li>• Don't feel I'm old/mature enough</li> <li>• It is against my religion</li> <li>• My partner doesn't want to</li> </ul>

**Chart 4 -- Teen Decision Factors ... What parents can do:**

Grade	6 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
Behavior	Drinking	Drug Use	Sex
<b>Time-targeted strategies for parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide outlets for recreation/ socialization</li> <li>• Demystify use of alcohol through discussions of its use in society</li> <li>• Help child with goal setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor stressors of school/grade change</li> <li>• Promote family dialogue about negative impact of drug use, especially on grades and athletic performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate teens about physical and emotional risks of sexual behavior</li> <li>• Encourage open discussion about mutually caring, respectful relationships</li> </ul>