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POSITIVE RISK-TAKING CUTS ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE AMONG TEENS

National Study Links Adolescent Risk Profiles to Substance Use,
Academic Performance, and Mental Health
Teens Shatter "Myth of Risk"

BOSTON (November 29, 2004) – Teenagers who challenge themselves by taking positive risks, such as joining an athletic team or volunteering to perform community service, are more likely than those who don't to avoid alcohol and other drug use, according to the *Teens Today* 2004 report released today by SADD and Liberty Mutual Group. Teens' "Risk Profiles" (Risk Seekers and Risk Avoiders) are also linked to their academic performance and overall emotional well-being.

"For years, parents and educators have steered young people toward activities they believe will help prevent poor decision-making. Now we have 'proof positive' it works," said Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of the national SADD organization. "Although teens are hard-wired to take risks, this research makes clear that those risks don't have to be dangerous ones."

The Myth of Risk

While many adults have long linked risk-taking with negative behavior, a majority of young people (52 percent) believe that risk-taking refers to positive activities.

Significantly, the *Teens Today* 2004 report reveals that teens who take positive risks (**Risk Seekers**) in their lives, their schools, and their communities are 20 percent more likely than teens who do not take positive risks (**Risk Avoiders**) to avoid alcohol and other drugs and 42 percent more likely to avoid drinking because of concerns about academic performance.

Risk Seekers are also more likely than Risk Avoiders to:

- Describe themselves as responsible (89 percent vs. 79 percent), confident (82 percent vs. 75 percent), successful (88 percent vs. 73 percent), and optimistic (76 percent vs. 63 percent).
- Report they often feel happy (92 percent vs. 85 percent).
- Consider potential negative outcomes of destructive behaviors.
 - ♣ Be more likely to think they will get hurt (79 percent vs. 65 percent).
 - ♣ Be more likely to think they will get caught (79 percent vs. 70 percent).

- ♣ Be more likely to think they will be held accountable (84 percent vs. 75 percent).

These teens are also less likely to cite mental states such as boredom and depression.

Positive Risk-Taking by Teens

“This important new research suggests that we can help teens to reframe risk-taking as potentially positive and redouble our efforts in encouraging them to test their limits in constructive ways, as opposed to destructive ways,” stated Paul Condrin, Liberty Mutual executive vice president, Personal Market.

The *Teens Today* 2004 research identified three broad categories of positive risk-taking.

1. Life Risks

Social – e.g. joining a club or group

Emotional – e.g. asking someone on a date or sharing feelings with friends

Physical – e.g. rock climbing

2. School Risks

Academic – e.g. taking an advanced placement course

Athletic – e.g. trying out for a sports team

Extracurricular – e.g. running for student council

3. Community Risks

Volunteering – e.g. helping the elderly or homeless

Mentoring – e.g. working with younger children

Leading – e.g. starting a business or charity

What Does This Mean for Families and Friends?

Both middle school (52 percent) and high school (42 percent) teens are most likely to say their parents do the most to positively influence them to challenge themselves, followed closely by their friends (29 percent in middle school and 36 percent in high school). These findings are consistent with past *Teens Today* studies that have shown that parents and peers have tremendous influence on teen behavior. 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 behavior.

Parents and peers can help teens to take positive risks by:

- Modeling inclusive social behavior and coaching peer-to-peer social skills;
- Identifying and discussing emotional reactions to issues or events;
- Encouraging focus on academics and consideration of higher level courses;

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- Supporting club or activity membership and/or athletic participation; and
- Involving family and friends in community-service project(s).

Methodology

Atlantic Research and Consulting, Inc. conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews (IDI's) with teens on March 29 (Phoenix) and March 31 (Charlotte, North Carolina). Additional IDI's were conducted on April 1 and 2 (Tampa, Florida) and April 8 and 26 (Boston). A total of 3,574 teens from 41 schools across the country completed the quantitative study during the months of May and June.

The data was weighted by census region to ensure that it was representative of the US population. The findings in the report are based on the completion of 3,574 interviews and can be interpreted at a 95 percent confidence interval with a +/- 1.3 percent error margin. Analysis of study subgroups is subject to wider error margins. Percentages in the report may add to more or less than 100 percent due to rounding error or occasions when multiple response answers were accepted.

SADD and Liberty Mutual Group

SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions) 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 37,000 people in more than 900 offices throughout the world.

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., 1-877-SADD-INC, www.sadd.org
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