

MetLife Foundation



**PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE
AMERICA
AND
METLIFE FOUNDATION**

**2009 Parents and Teens Attitude Tracking Study
Report**

Released March 2, 2010

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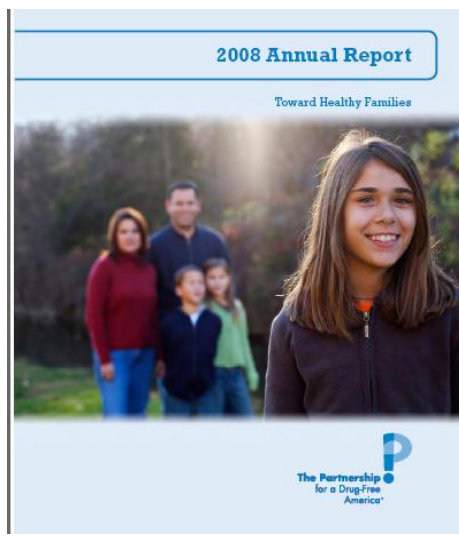
Research made possible by a grant from

MetLife Foundation

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE AMERICA®

The Partnership at drugfree.org is a nonprofit organization that exists to help parents prevent, intervene in and treat drug and alcohol use by their children.

Bringing together renowned scientists, parent experts, and communications professionals, the Partnership translates current research on teen behavior, addiction, and treatment into easy to understand resources at drugfree.org.



The Partnership exists to help parents prevent, intervene in and treat drug and alcohol use by their children

For parents who need help talking with their kids about drugs, alcohol and other risky behaviors, TimeToTalk.org offers tips and tools promoting parent/child communication. [Time To Act](#) is a step-by-step guide for parents who believe or are sure that their teens are drinking or using drugs and need to know what to do.

Through its “360” suite of community programs, the Partnership educates parents and concerned citizens at the grassroots level on the risks of methamphetamine, non-medical prescription drug use and other emerging drug threats, and promotes parenting and community practices designed to prevent teen substance abuse.

The Partnership depends on donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and government. The Partnership thanks SAG/AFTRA and the advertising and media industries for their ongoing generosity.

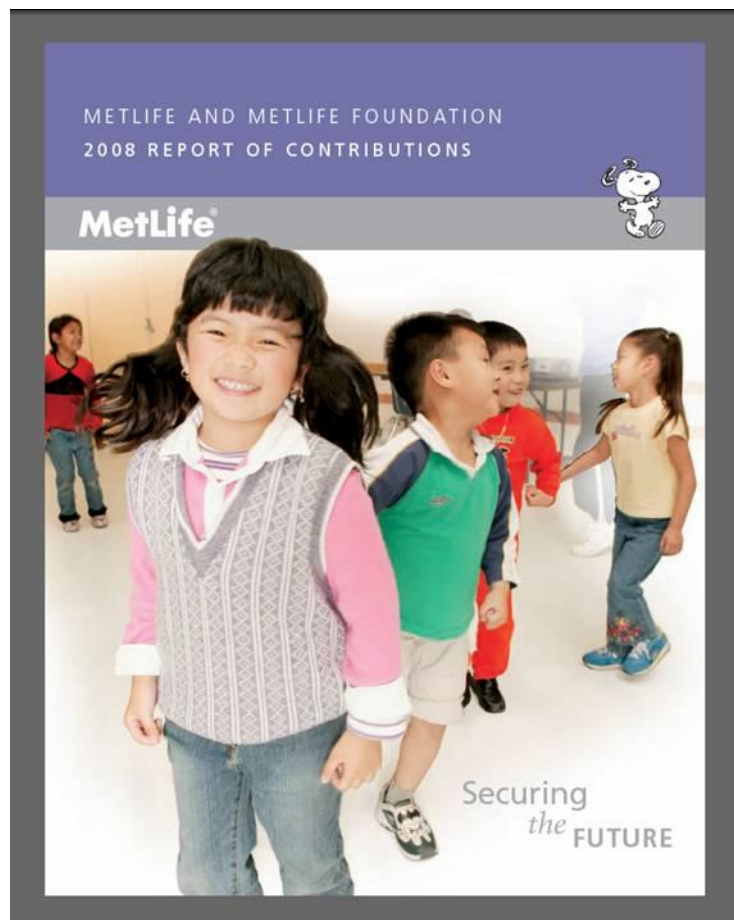
METLIFE FOUNDATION

For over 20 years, MetLife Foundation has provided support for initiatives focusing on substance abuse prevention and education.

Since 1999, the Foundation has collaborated with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America on a national public awareness campaign to help parents and caregivers communicate with children about the risks of drug use.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its long-standing tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement.

For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.



PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE AMERICA/ METLIFE FOUNDATION ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDIES

The 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Studies consist of two nationally projectable samples: a survey that measures attitudes and behaviors of parents with children ages 10 to 19 that relate to substance abuse and a teen sample for students in grades nine through 12. The 2009 survey is the 21st wave of research conducted since 1987. Beginning in 1993 the teen study has been conducted in schools and since 1995 the parents sample has been conducted in homes. Respondent confidentiality was maintained for both studies. Prior to those years the studies were conducted by interviews in central location malls.

Since 2007 deKadt Marketing and Research, Inc. has conducted the in-home parent survey and since 1993 The Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America has conducted the teen study. In 2009 the parents/caregivers sample was 804 and surveying was conducted in September and October, 2009. The margin of error for the parent sample is +/- 3.5 percent. In 2009 the teen sample was 3,287 and surveying was conducted from March to June, 2009. The margin of error for the teens sample is +/- 2.3 percent.

Significant differences on tables, charts, or graphs in this report are indicated only for 2009 results versus 2008, unless otherwise noted. Significant differences at the .05 level are noted with an asterisk.

*** = Significant at .05 level**

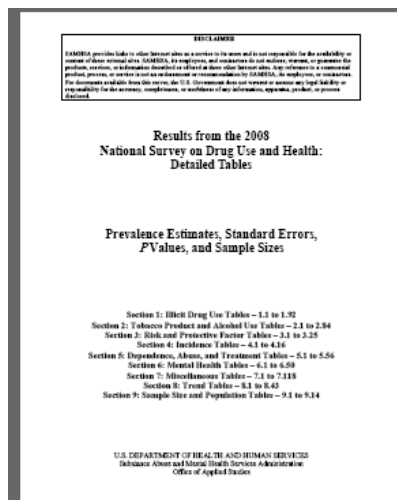
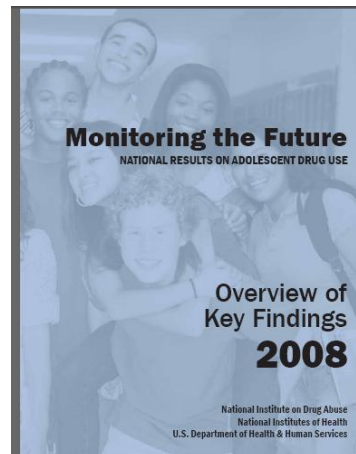
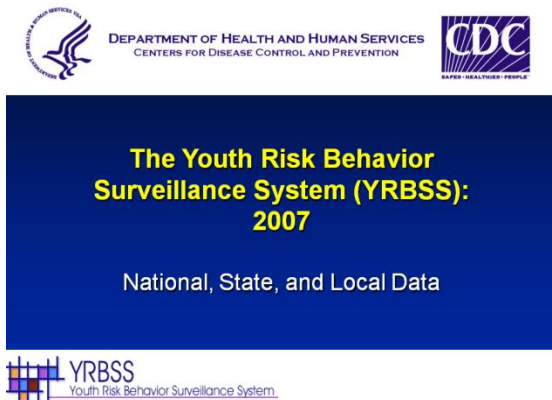
Data points from the 2006 teen survey are omitted, because the investigators believe them to be inaccurate due to sampling error.

QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

deKadt Marketing and Research and the Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America developed the questionnaires in cooperation with the Partnership for a Drug-Free America® and MetLife Foundation.

SELF-REPORTED DATA

These studies are based on self-reported data which represent the dominant methodology used in survey research. Many academic and government institutions use self-reporting data when researching sensitive issues, for example, Centers for Disease Control (*Youth-At-Risk Surveys*), University of Michigan (*Monitoring the Future Study*), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (*National Survey on Drug Use and Health*).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: CAUSE FOR CONCERN

After a decade of declines in teen use of drugs and alcohol, the 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking study of teens points to upswings in substances that teens are most likely to encounter in social situations: alcohol, marijuana, and ecstasy.

- In 2009 teens in grades nine through 12 were significantly more likely than in 2008 to have drunk alcohol in the past month.



- During the same time period all measures (ever tried in lifetime, past year, past month) of marijuana use also significantly increased.



- Ecstasy measures of past year and past month also increased among teens in grades nine through 12 from 2008 to 2009.



Underlying these increases is a dramatic softening in teen attitudes and beliefs that have correlated over time with drug use and drinking: perceptions of the risks of use and perceived peer approval of the behavior.

- From 2008 to 2009 there was a significant increase in teens' perceptions of peer approval of *getting high*. Teens greatly exaggerate the number of their peers that drink or use drugs so “friends who usually get high at parties” is more of a measure of acceptance than it is of actual prevalence.
- There were erosions in teens' perceptions of social disapproval and risk in marijuana use.
- Erosion in the attitudes that help protect adolescents also occurred in terms of ecstasy: a significant increase in the acceptability of use and a decrease in perception of risk from 2005 to 2009.

Teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter cough medicine (OTC) has remained stable from 2008 to 2009.



Teen abuse of other substances monitored in the study cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, inhalants, LSD, steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs remained stable from 2008 to 2009.

During this time of softening of attitudes that help protect teens from alcohol and drug use, teens report a decrease in learning about the risks of alcohol and drugs from “traditional” sources (parents, school, and media) and an increase in using the Internet as a source.

Teens report less exposure to anti-drug television commercials from 2004 to 2009 corresponding to erosion in federal support for key drug prevention program, notably the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. Although not measured in this study, there are reports of the proliferation of “drug-normalizing” messages in popular culture: film, television, music, and online social media during this time period.

The parents’ part of the research study provides an insight into parents’ attitudes and beliefs that may help explain a reluctance to intervene.

- Parents who believe their teen has gone beyond no use or experimentation (trying once or twice) are less likely than other parents to feel they are capable of having an influence on their child’s decisions. They also report lacking confidence in their ability to enforce rules related to substance abuse.
- In addition to a lack of personal confidence, parents who believe their teen has gone beyond no use or using once or twice are less likely than other parents to believe that any parent can make a difference in preventing his or her teen from substance abuse.
- Parents whose teen has gone beyond no use or using once or twice are more likely than other parents to ascribe to cultural myths: *all teens will experiment, as long as he doesn’t become a regular user some use can be tolerated, I’d rather have my child drink beer at home where I can supervise him or her.*



The earlier parents take action to address a child's drug or alcohol use, the greater the chance they'll be effective in preventing a serious problem. And yet, according to findings from the 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking study of parents, many parents who believe that their teens are using drugs or drinking (at more than just "once or twice" level) are not nearly as proactive as they should be.

- It is often difficult for parents to accept that it is their child that has a problem.
- Often parents will attribute warning signs of trouble to ordinary teenage phases.
- Some parents want to avoid conflict with their teen and so wait until they have collected overwhelming evidence.

TIME TO ACT!

The Partnership provides resources to help parents who either suspect or know their child has an alcohol or drug problem

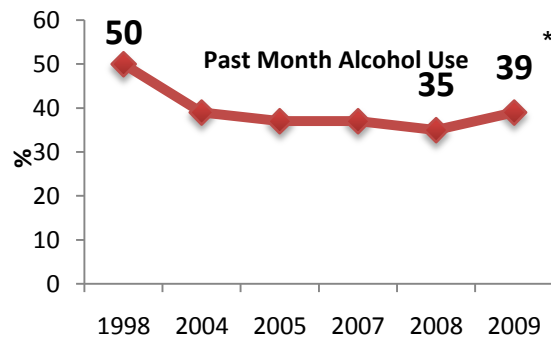
TRENDS IN ADOLESCENT SUBSTANCE ABUSE

From 1998 to 2008 teen abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs significantly decreased. Among 9th through 12th graders past year alcohol and marijuana use significantly decreased by 30 percent, and past year methamphetamine abuse was down by 60 percent.

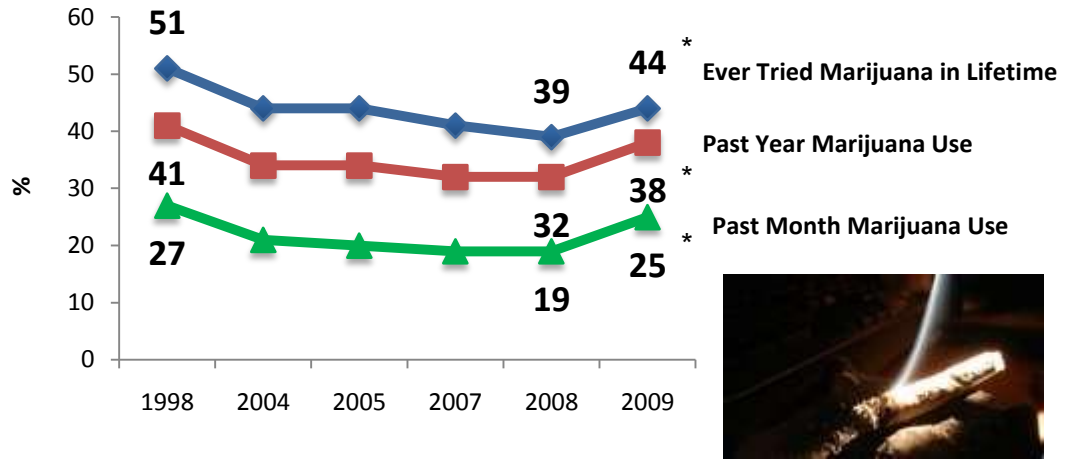
After a decade of declines in teen use of drugs and alcohol, the 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking study of teens points to upswings in substances that teens are most likely to encounter in social situations: alcohol, marijuana, and ecstasy.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN: DECADE-LONG DECLINE IN TEEN ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE MAY BE REVERSING.

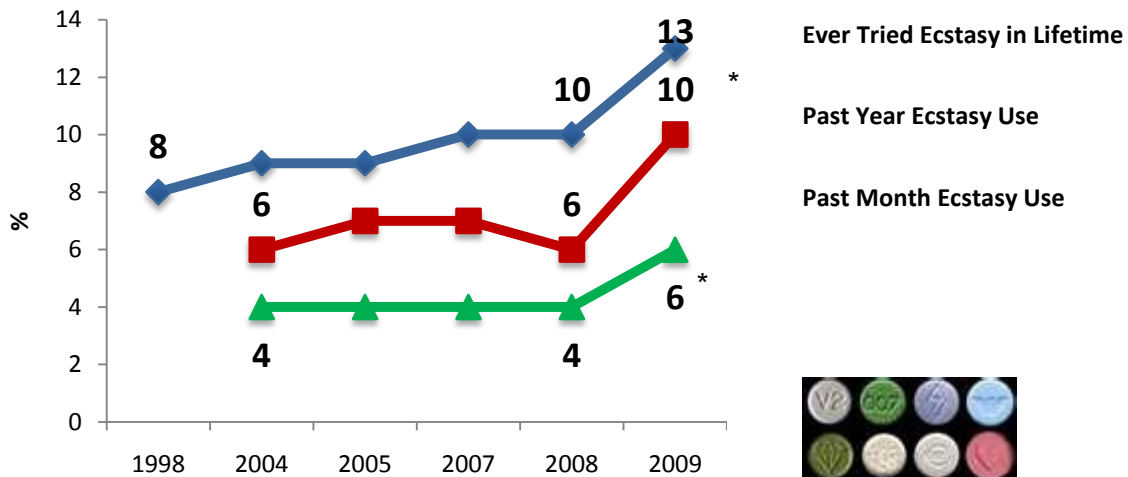
In 2009 teens in grades nine through 12 were significantly more likely than in 2008 to have drunk alcohol in the past month.



During the same time period all measures (ever tried in lifetime, past year, past month) of marijuana use also significantly increased.



Ecstasy measures of past year and past month also increased among teens in grades nine through 12 from 2008 to 2009. MDMA or Ecstasy (3-4-methylenedioxymethampheta-mine) is a synthetic drug with amphetamine-like and hallucinogenic properties. It is classified as a stimulant.



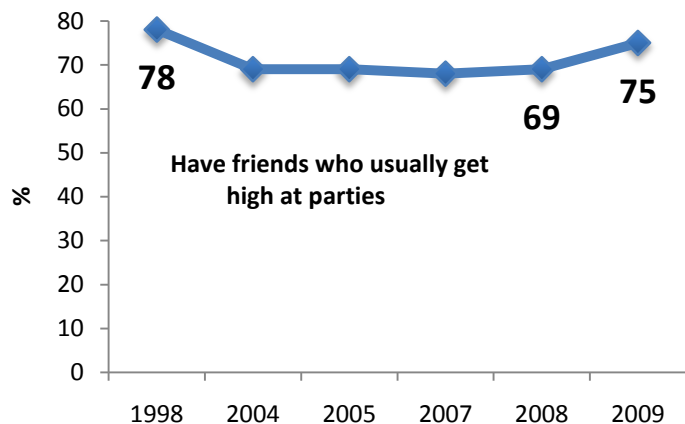
* = Significant at the .05 level vs. 2008

TEEN ATTITUDES THAT CORRESPOND TO INCREASE IN ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Underlying these increases is a dramatic softening in teen attitudes and beliefs that have correlated over time with drug use and drinking: perceptions of the risks of use and perceived peer approval of the behavior. In addition there is a increase in the perceived benefit of drug use and drinking – the percentage of teens agreeing that “being high feels good” rose from a minority 45 percent in 2008 to a majority 51 percent in 2009.

From 2008 to 2009 there was a significant increase in teens’ perceptions of peer approval of *getting high*.

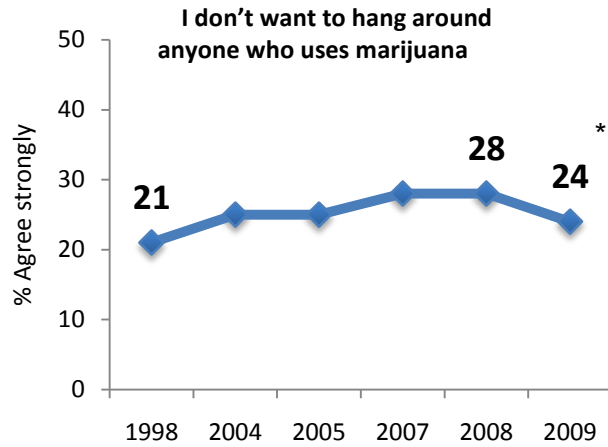
Teens greatly exaggerate the number of their peers that drink or use drugs so “friends who usually get high at parties” is more of a measure of acceptance than it is of actual prevalence.



* = Significant at the .05 level vs. 2008

There were erosions in teens' perceptions of social disapproval and risk in marijuana use.

Teens in 2009 were significantly less likely than in 2008 to disapprove of marijuana use by their peers. In addition teens were also significantly less likely to agree strongly that they “don’t want to hang around drug users” from 35 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2009.

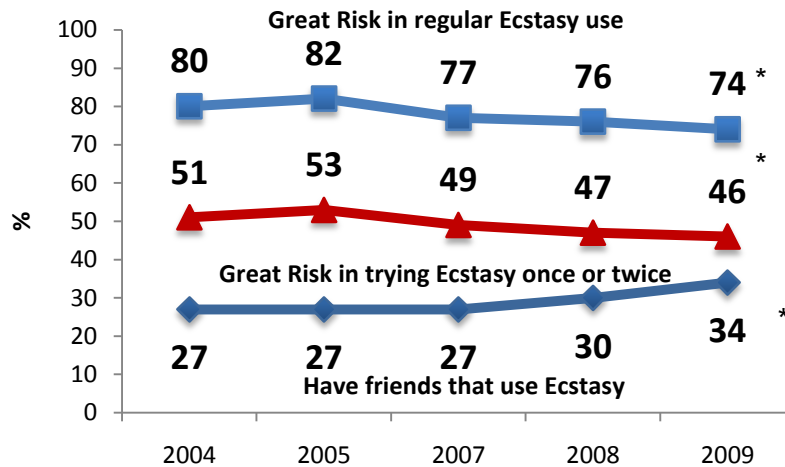


There were also significant decreases in a wide variety of risk perceptions in using marijuana: harming relationships, and creating emotional and physical risks.

% Great Risk if use marijuana in...	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009
Upsetting parents	68	69	64	67	62*
Letting other people down	48	53	53	54	48*
Making their problems worse	58	62	61	62	54*
Acting stupidly and foolishly	58	59	55	59	54*
Becoming lazy	51	50	51	53	48*
Getting depressed	50	50	48	50	44*
Putting themselves or others in danger	62	63	65	68	60*
Losing control of themselves	60	61	63	65	58*
Impairing their judgment	62	64	63	65	57*

* = Significant at the .05 level vs. 2008

Erosion in the attitudes that help protect adolescents also occurred in terms of ecstasy: a significant increase in the acceptability of use and a decrease in perception of risk from 2005 to 2009. Perception of risk in regular use significantly decreased 10 percent and in trial there was a 13 percent decrease. During the same time period there was a 26 percent increase in social approval of ecstasy use (as measured by perceived peer use).



According to the survey, teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter cough medicine (OTC) has remained stable with about 1 in 5 teens in grades nine through 12 (20 percent) or 3.2 million reporting abuse of a prescription medication at least once in their lives, and 1 in 7 teens (15 percent) or 2.4 million teens reporting abuse of a prescription pain reliever in the past year. About 8 percent or 1.3 million teens have reported OTC cough medicine abuse in the past year.

* = Significant at the .05 level vs. 2005

Unlike most illegal drugs, perceived availability, or how easy a teen believes it is to get prescription drugs, can be a risk factor in adolescent abuse of Rx medications.

PATS shows more than half or 56 percent of teens in grades nine through 12 believe Rx drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs.

Also, 62 percent believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family's medicine cabinets and 63 percent believe Rx drugs are easy to get from their parent's medicine cabinet, up significantly from 56 percent just last year.



Six out of ten teens believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family's medicine cabinets

Teens smoking rates have remained stable with 25 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month.



Teen inhalant use remains steady at 10 percent for past year use; only 66 percent of teens report that "sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you," significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who agreed last year.

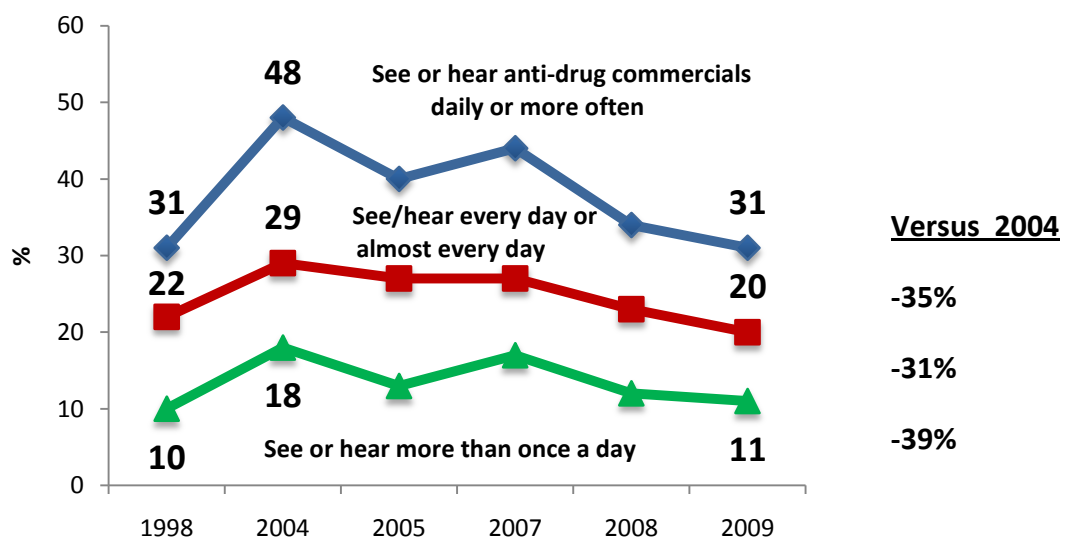
Steroid and heroin use among teens remain low at 5 percent for lifetime use.

SOURCES WHERE TEENS LEARN ABOUT THE RISKS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

During this time of softening of attitudes that help protect teens from alcohol and drug use, teens report a decrease in learning about the risks of alcohol and drugs from “traditional” sources (parents, school, and media) and an increase in using the Internet as a source.

<i>% Learned a lot about risks of drugs from...</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>05</i>	<i>07</i>	<i>08</i>	<i>09</i>
<i>School</i>	41	42	38	37	44	39*
<i>Parents</i>	26	28	28	29	35	31
<i>TV commercials</i>	17	36	26	31	31	26*
<i>The Internet</i>	11	23	22	25	29	29
<i>Websites like YouTube</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	14	17*

Teens report less exposure to anti-drug television commercials from 2004 to 2009 corresponding to erosion in federal support for key drug prevention program, notably the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign.



* = Significant at the .05 level vs. 2008

Although not measured in this study, there are reports of the proliferation of “drug-normalizing” messages in popular culture: film, television, music, and online social media during this time period.

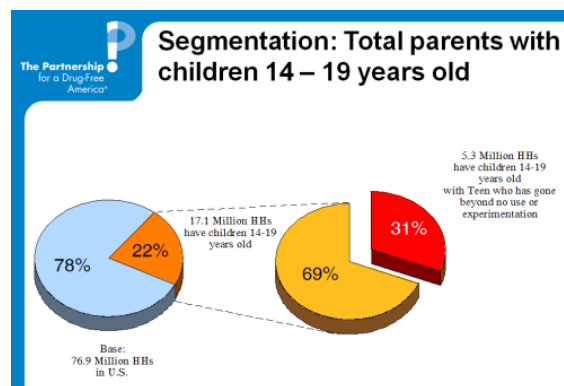
IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS

The increases in teen drug use and drinking, coupled with the decline in prevention messaging and a more permissive media environment, make it all the more important for parents to play a more active role in keeping their kids away from drugs and alcohol.



Among kids in grades 7-12, those who learn a lot about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50% less likely to use

Among the parents surveyed for the PATS study, 20 percent say their child (ages 10-19) has already used drugs or alcohol beyond an “experimental” level. Among parents of teens ages 14-19, that percentage jumps to 31 percent, nearly one third.



The research provides an insight into parents’ attitudes and beliefs that may help explain a reluctance to intervene.

PARENTAL ATTITUDES

Parents who believe their teen has gone beyond no use or experimentation (trying once or twice) are less likely than other parents to feel they are capable of having an influence on their child's decisions. They also report lacking confidence in their ability to enforce rules related to substance abuse.

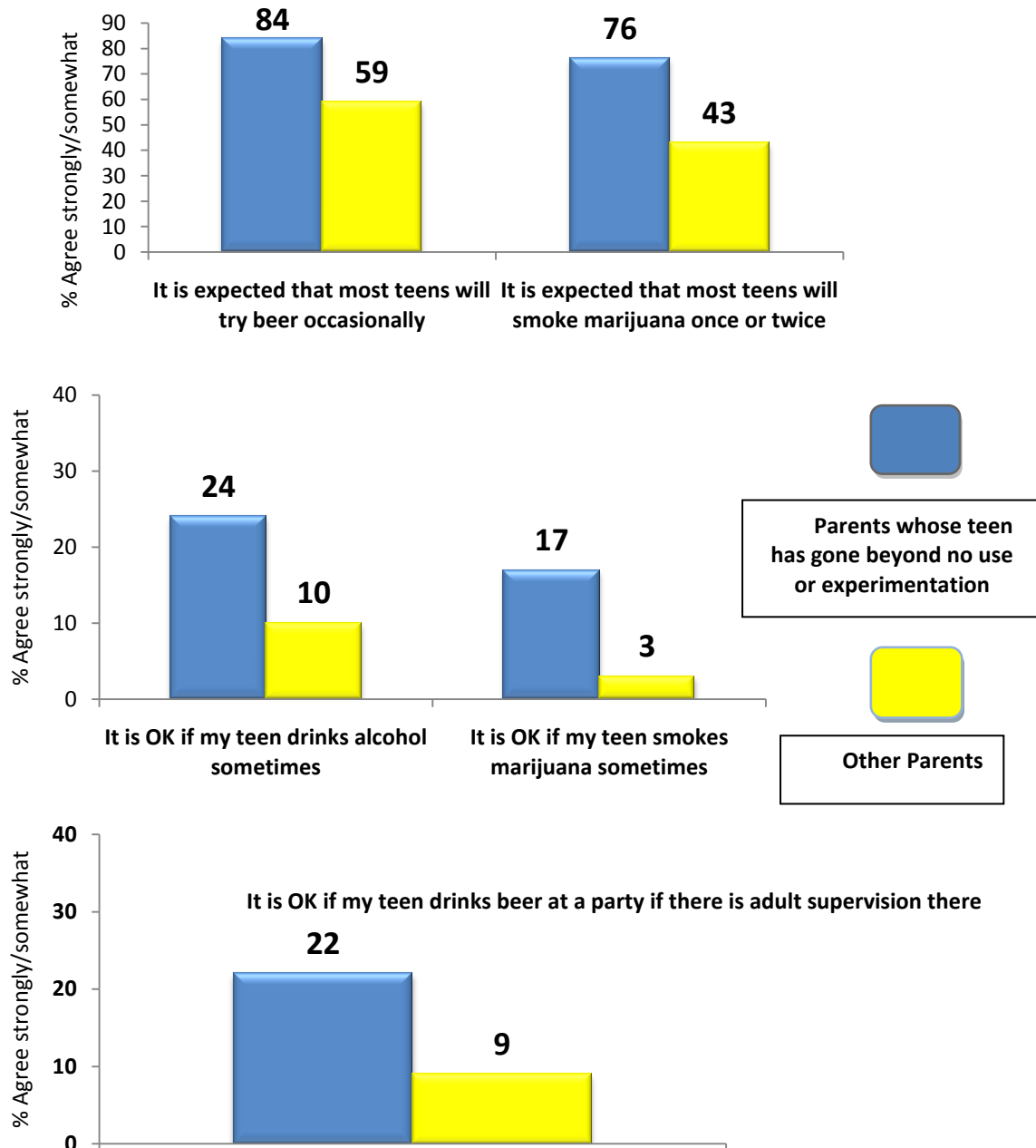


% Agree strongly/somewhat	Parent's teen gone beyond no use or using once or twice	Other parents
What I say will have little influence over whether my child/teen tries marijuana	42	23
I have difficulty enforcing rules for not smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or using marijuana	25	11

In addition to a lack of personal confidence, parents who believe their teen has gone beyond no use or using once or twice are less likely than other parents to believe that any parent can make a difference in preventing his or her teen from substance abuse.

% Agree strongly/somewhat	Parent's teen gone beyond no use or using once or twice	Other parents
There is very little parents can do to prevent their kids from trying alcohol	50	21

Parents whose teen has gone beyond no use or using once or twice are more likely than other parents to ascribe to cultural myths: *all teens will experiment, as long as he doesn't become a regular user some use can be tolerated, I'd rather have my child drink beer at home where I can supervise her.*¹



¹ It is not possible to definitely report that teens' use beyond experimentation was the direct result of these parental attitudes; once the teen began using alcohol or drugs, the parent may have formed these attitudes to conform to the teen behavior.

**Find out the truth behind
common drug and alcohol myths and misperceptions**



The Partnership's [Time To Act](#) addresses these myths



The earlier parents take action to address a child's drug or alcohol use, the greater the chance they'll be effective in preventing a serious problem.

Ken C. Winters, Ph.D. is an expert on adolescent substance abuse.

And yet, according to findings from the 2009 Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking study of parents, many parents who believe that their teens are using drugs or drinking (at more than just “once or twice” level) are not nearly as proactive as they should be.

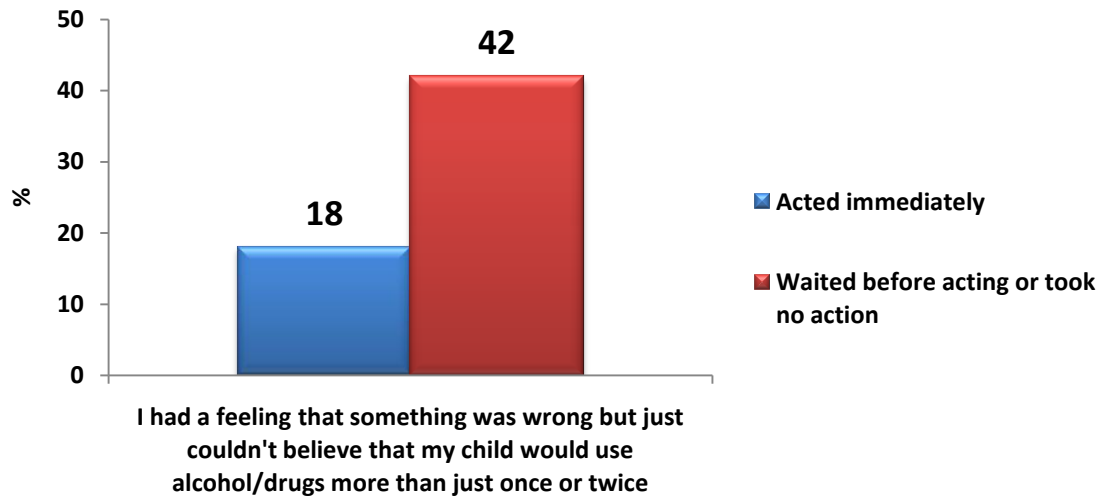
Among parents whose teen has gone beyond no use or experimentation, the study determined how long it took them to act (if at all) on their suspicions their teen might be using alcohol/drugs. There were two main groups:

- Acted immediately after first thought there was a problem (53 percent)
- Waited some time (about 1 month to more than 1 year) after first thought there was a problem (22 percent) or did not take any action (25 percent).

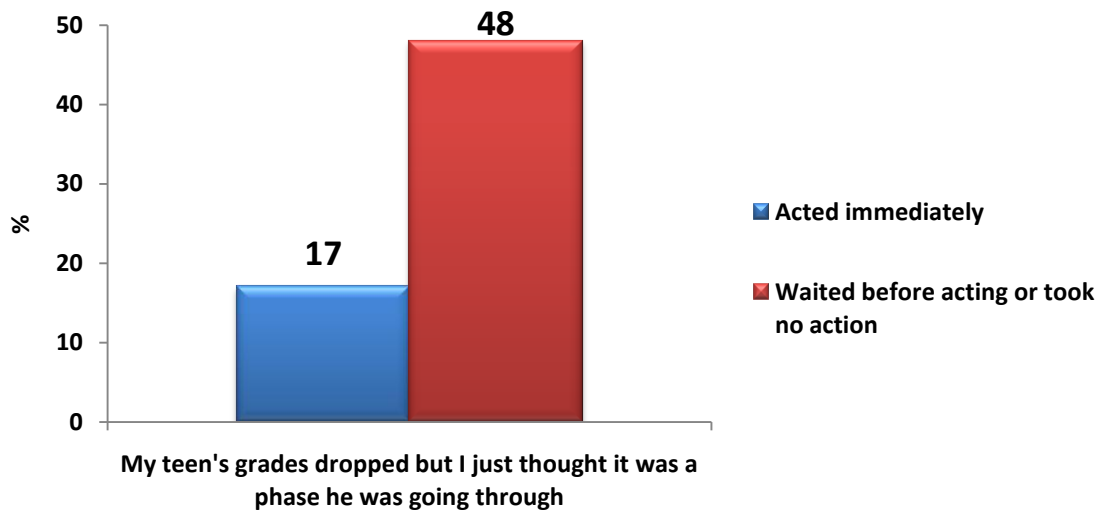


The research provides an insight into parents' attitudes and beliefs that may help explain why nearly half (47 percent) of these parents either waited to take action or took no action at all.

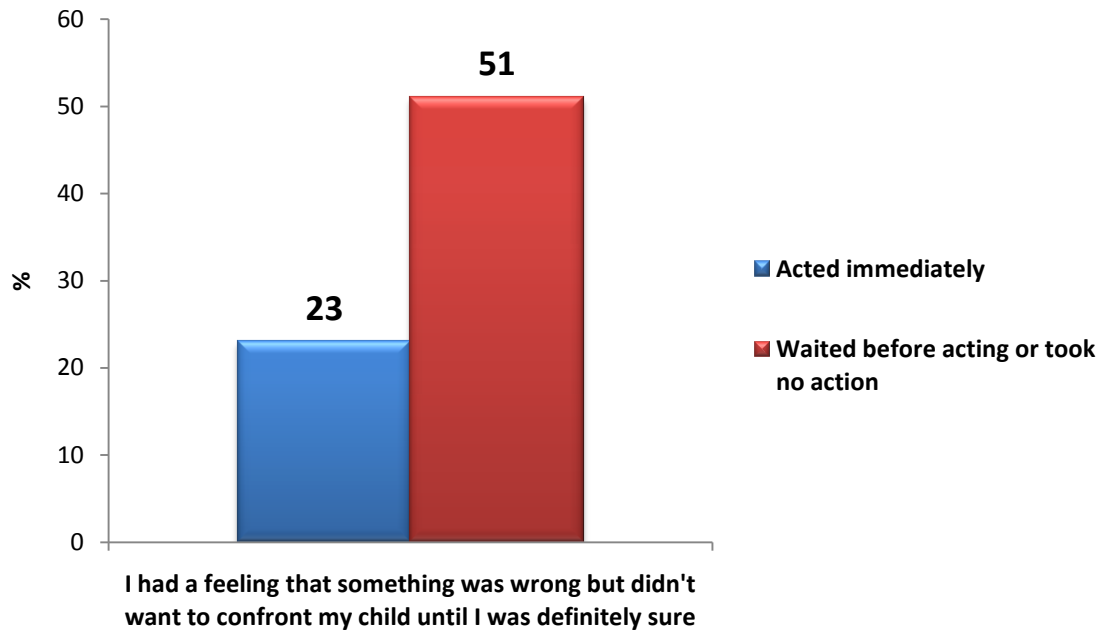
It is often difficult for parents to accept that it is their child that has a problem.



Often parents will attribute warning signs of trouble to ordinary teenage behavior.



Some parents want to avoid conflict with their teen and so wait until they have collected overwhelming evidence.



IMPLICATIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The findings from the teen study are of critical importance for parents and other caregivers. The “softening” of anti-drug attitudes and an increase in substances – alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy – that are used in teen social situations are a bellwether for a serious health problem for American families.

Parents and other caregivers have a tremendous influence on their child’s life. Their constant and caring involvement can help inspire their child to make healthy, drug-free choices. The Partnership and MetLife Foundation provide guidance for helping parents at drugfree.org.

Teachable Moments

Talking with your child about drugs isn't a formal, one-time-only conversation. You can steer conversational topics to why drugs are harmful or use every day events to start a conversation about them. Take advantage of blocks of time, such as before school, on the way to practice or after dinner to discuss drugs and to voice your "no-use" expectation.

Show Kids You Care

It may seem simple, but one of the best ways to keep your kids drug-free is to show them you care. Simple gestures such as an unexpected hug, saying I love you every day and being supported of your child can help them to become a confident person.

Tips for Talking: Approach Your Teen About Their Possible Alcohol or Drug Use

Mood swings and unpredictable behavior are sometimes evidence of teenage "growing pains," but can also point to use of drugs or alcohol. Be aware of any unexplained changes and know the potential warning signs. Try talking to your teen -- the earlier you intervene, the better chance your child has to regain his health and return to a drug-free life.

Know What Drugs Kids Face Today

While you may be aware of the types of drugs that were around when you were a teenager, there is a new array of substances that kids today may misuse to get high. *The more informed you are, the more your kids will listen to you.*

Discovering that a teen is using drugs or drinking is often a frightening experience for parents – many feel alone, ashamed, and confused about what to do next.

The Partnership encourages and motivates parents of children who are using drugs or alcohol to take action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using. It ensures that every parent has free, anonymous access, to the most current, research-based information on how to help their child and family take the next steps.

Developed in collaboration with scientists from the Treatment Research Institute, [Time To Act](#) offers step-by-step advice and compassionate guidance from substance abuse experts, family therapists, scientists and fellow parents to help guide families through the process of understanding drug and alcohol use, confronting a child, setting boundaries, and seeking outside help.



The Parents section of the Partnership’s website is made possible by a generous grant from MetLife Foundation.