



[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Research News](#) > [Press Releases](#)

PDFFA: Teens Using Drugs to Cope with Stress, Parents Underestimating Pressures

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Research Press Release

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NEW YORK, NY – A new study released by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America reveals a troubling new insight into the reasons why teens use drugs. According to the 2007 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study of 6,511 teens (PATS Teens), the number one reason teens see for using drugs is to deal with the pressures and stress of school. In this nationally projectable study (margin of error +/- 1.6 percent), 73 percent of teens reported that school stress is the primary reason for drug use, indicating that teens' perceptions of motivating factors for using drugs are dramatically different than past research has indicated.

Deep Disconnect Between Teen Behavior and Parental Awareness

An accompanying 2007 Partnership study of parents' attitudes about teen drug use, released in June, showed that parents severely underestimate the impact of stress on their teens' decision to use drugs. Only 7 percent of parents believe that teens might use drugs to cope with stress.

"A wide disconnect exists between what teens are thinking and feeling and what parents believe about their teens when it comes to attitudes about drug use," said Steve Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership. "This is a pivotal opportunity for parents to understand what motivates today's teens to engage in this type of risky behavior, and to communicate the very real dangers and risks, while offering their kids support and guidance on dealing with pressure in a healthy way."

In previous PATS Teens studies, when teen respondents were asked to select from a number of reasons for using drugs, the number one reason (65 percent) selected was to "feel cool." The 2007 study was the first to offer the option of selecting school stress as a motivator, one which nearly 3 out of 4 teens (73 percent) strongly agreed with. This was followed closely by "feeling cool" (65 percent) and "feeling better about themselves" (65 percent).

Over the past decade, studies have indicated a steady changing trend in what teens perceive as the motivations for using drugs. The

"to have fun" rationales are declining, while motivations to use drugs to solve problems are increasing.

Overall Teen Drug Use Declining; Prescription Drug Abuse Disturbingly High Among Nation's Youth

The 2007 PATS Teens study confirms that overall substance abuse remains in steady decline among teens. Marijuana use is in its tenth consecutive year of decline, down 30 percent since 1998 alone. Teen use of Ecstasy, inhalants and methamphetamine has continued a multi-year, significant decline, and use of both alcohol and cigarettes continue to decrease.

Teens' ongoing intentional abuse of prescription and over-the-counter medications remains a serious concern, as many teens mistakenly believe the abuse of medicines is less dangerous than abuse of illegal drugs.

According to the survey:

- | 1 in 5 teens (4.4 million) has abused a prescription medication,
- | Nearly 1 in 5 teens (4.2 million) has already abused a prescription painkiller,
- | 41 percent of teens think it's safer to abuse a prescription drug than it is to use illegal drugs.

"Teens continue to take their lives into their own hands when they intentionally abuse prescribed medications, said Pasierb. "Whether it's to get high or deal with stress, or if they mistakenly believe it will help them perform better in school or sports, teens don't realize that when used without a prescription, these medicines can be every bit as harmful as illegal street drugs."

Time To Talk Encourages Parents To Connect With Teens Via Text Messaging At Back-To-School

The study's release coincides with the Partnership's second annual "Time To Talk" Month, a family-focused parents' movement throughout August designed to help parents start and maintain open, honest dialogue with their kids about the risks of drugs and alcohol. Time To Talk supports and empowers parents and caregivers to have frequent and positive conversations with their teens to keep them healthy and drug free.

This year's Time To Talk effort prompts parents to adapt the technology teens use and reaching out to them with an encouraging text message at back to school time. Parents can join the Partnership's first-ever "Time To Text" initiative, an effort to motivate parents to open new lines of communication by learning to text message, starting with a back-to-school message as a reminder of support.

Parent visitors to TimeToTalk.org can learn to [talk to their kids about drugs and alcohol](#) in their own language by downloading a "Time To Text" guide offering tips on sending a message to their kid's mobile phone. Those who can't quite find the words can choose from several pre-written messages. Parents can also download a wallet card with shortcuts teens use when text messaging. The "Time To Text" guide is available at TimeToTalk.org.

PATS research consistently shows that kids who learn a lot about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use than those who do not. Yet, only 32 percent of teens report that they are getting this vital message from their parents.

Parents are encouraged to visit TimeToTalk.org in August for tips on talking to teens about school stress and helping them manage pressure.

Among the recommendations for parents are regular reminders to kids that they are loved and admired for who they are, not for their grades and achievements, making family time a priority, and having frequent discussions about the risks of drug and alcohol.

Time To Talk reaches parents and caregivers through the support of 2008 sponsors A&E Television Network, Comcast, King Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Major League Baseball Charities, Wyeth Consumer Healthcare and Yahoo!

For more information and the full PATS Teens Report visit www.drugfree.org

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