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Parent and Youth Support Groups

Study Says Teens Can Access Prescription Drugs and Marijuana Easily

According to the 2008 National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIII, teens can easily obtain marijuana and prescription drugs—with many saying these drugs are easier to obtain than beer. The survey was released by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University today in Washington, D.C.

The survey found that 42 percent of 12- to 17-year olds can buy marijuana in a day or less; 23 percent in an hour or less. In addition, half of 16- and 17-year olds say that among their age group smoking marijuana is more common than smoking cigarettes and 23 percent of teens find it easier to buy than beer. “This year’s survey finds marijuana more available than ever, with 23 percent of teens able to get the drug in an hour or less, and 42 percent of teens able to get it in a day or less. The survey reveals a 35 percent increase over last year in teens who can get marijuana in an hour or less, and a 14 percent increase over last year in teens who can get the drug in a day or less,” said Joseph Califano, CASA Chairman and President. CASA’s annual back-to-school survey also asked teens about the availability of prescription drugs. For the first time in the CASA survey’s history, more teens said prescription drugs were easier to buy than beer (19 vs. 15 percent)—that’s a 46 percent increase since 2007. The prescription drug teens say is most commonly abused are painkillers. The majority of teens said that they get prescription drugs from their homes, parents or the medicine cabinet, while 31 percent said from friends or classmates. Califano said parents are mostly to blame. “By leaving abuse-able and addictive medications like OxyContin and Vicodin around the house, thus making these drugs readily available to their children, these problem parents become passive pushers,” said Califano. He said problem parents—those who fail to monitor their children’s school night

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activities, safeguard their prescription drugs, address the problem of drugs in their children's schools, and set good examples—increase the risk that their 12- to 17-year old children will smoke, drink, and use illegal and prescription drugs. A quarter of teens surveyed knew a parent of a classmate or friend who uses marijuana and 10 percent of teens said this parent smokes marijuana with people the teen's age. The survey also found that many parents aren't properly monitoring their teens. For example, almost half of 12- to 17-year olds reported that they leave their house to hang out with friends on school nights, while only 14 percent of parents say their teens usually leave the house to hang out with friends on school nights. "Parents who are not aware of such conduct by their teens, or are not candid about it, are problem parents whose failure to monitor their children's school night activities increases the risk of drug or alcohol use," Califano noted. CASA's survey also identified schools as a place where teens can get drugs and alcohol, with nearly two-thirds of high schoolers and 21 percent of middle schoolers saying that drugs are used, kept or sold on their school grounds. The survey also found that 44 percent of high school students and 16 percent of middle school students know a place near their school, but off school grounds, where kids go to get high. QEV Analytics conducted The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIII: Teens and Parents from April 3 to May 13, 2008 (teens) and April 17 to June 3, 2008 (parents). The firm interviewed at home by telephone a national random sample of 1,002 12- to 17-year-olds (503 boys, 499 girls) and 312 of their parents. For the full study, visit www.casacolumbia.org/.

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