

# **Maine Office of Substance Abuse 2009 Parent Survey Report Executive Summary**

In an effort to reduce underage alcohol use, the OSA Parent Media Campaign focuses on helping parents learn monitoring skills. The Parent Media Campaign also addresses appropriate modeling skills. The 2009 Parent Survey is an effort to quantify the impact of this campaign. The results of this survey have been compared to and analyzed with the 2008 Parent Survey results to gain understanding of the influence of the campaign.

The survey results for 2008 and 2009 suggest that the campaign has had a positive impact and that parental understanding of the risks involved and behavior modifications are heading in the right direction.

## **Monitoring Attitudes & Behaviors**

Positive results have been recorded in the following areas:

- Awareness of and attitudes regarding the occurrence of underage drinking
- Understanding of the positive impact that parental behaviors (modeling) can have on the behavior of teenagers
- Parental behaviors regarding prevention and monitoring for teenage alcohol use

Specific positive results include:

- There has been a significant increase in the degree of parental worry pertaining to each of the risks associated with teenage drinking, as tested in this research. An increased degree of worry indicates that parents are more aware of and more concerned about the risks associated with alcohol use.
- Parents appear to understand the importance of talking to kids early about the risks associated with drinking. The average age given for both 2008 and 2009 was approximately 10 years old.

There are two relevant indicators that the messages of the media campaign appear to be reaching parents. First, the three highest means of behaviors that parents state they use are:

- Know the parents of your child's friends
- Check to see if an adult will be present at parties and social gatherings
- Talk to your child when they come in about his/her night

These are all behaviors that have been prominently featured in OSA parent campaign materials and media.

Additionally, the behaviors that increased the most include the following:

- Make an effort to know the rules of your child's friends' families
- Call to verify that a parent or responsible adult will actually be present at a party or social gathering
- Observe your child for signs of alcohol use when they come home at night

The increase in the adoption of these effective parental monitoring skills is a positive trend for the OSA Parent Media Campaign. The campaign's messages appear to be resonating with parents, and they report that they are using the skills promoted by the campaign.

### **Modeling Attitudes & Behaviors**

The perceived influence of specific parental behaviors on teen drinking decisions has increased slightly for the behaviors tested, indicating a heightened awareness by parents that their behaviors have an influence on their teenager's drinking decisions.

- "Drinking more than 4 drinks in front of your child" and "pressuring other adults to drink" rank as the most influential things that parents can do, which are both key messages of the campaign.

Additionally, there has been a significant improvement in parent's awareness of two negative modeling behaviors that have been core messages of the campaign:

- "Use alcohol to relieve stress or anxiety, saying things such as 'I've had a tough week; I need a beer'"
- "Occasionally joke or tell a funny story about their past drinking behavior in front of their teen"

Results also indicate that parents are gaining a more realistic sense of the likelihood that their child may drink alcohol before he / she graduates high school. This seems to indicate that denial of teenage drinking is decreasing.

The positive results of this research suggest that the OSA Parent Media Campaign has been successful. In order to achieve continued success and movement in parental awareness, attitudes, and behaviors, the campaign should be maintained. It should be noted that changing behaviors is a long-term process, and thus, the campaign needs more time to fully effect the desired behavior changes.

To further support the positive results of this research and validate the suggested movement in parental awareness, attitudes, and behaviors with regards to underage drinking, follow up research should be conducted within 18 months. Future research would allow for the analysis of parental change over time and verification of the positive results that have been recorded to date.