



Parent Networking Lowered Marijuana Use



Parent Networking Lowered Alcohol Use



The Effects of Parent Networking

The lowest rates of use of alcohol and marijuana in America by 12th graders occurred when the parent-networking movement against ATOD use was most active.

Federal rules and policies inadvertently destroyed that movement, and rates of youth ATOD use increased despite the implementation of evidence-based curriculum for substance abuse prevention.

The strategy of telling and sharing the information of Families United re-ignites the power of parent-networking communication along the lines of adolescent-peer relations, and this helps every parent monitor their child's behavior better. The graph above show the impact of the parent-networking movement on marijuana and alcohol, well before introduction of educational programs in schools.



Families United:

A population-level approach to reduce teen alcohol or drug use, delinquency and other problems quickly using evidence-based kernels

The Problem: Binge-drinking, drug use, delinquency and other mental, emotional and behavioral problems have become more serious in the past decade. Rapidly reducing these problems would substantially improve the economic, public health and public safety conditions of every state in the Union.

The Possibility: Recent research and understandings now make it possible to reduce these problems quickly using low-cost strategies that can be spread across communities. Now, more than ever, this possibility could significantly help every state. First Spouses can lead this transformation, improving all our futures.

Families United recreates the parent-networking strategy, by combining tested and proven strategies to reduce the risk of alcohol, tobacco, drug use and related problems with modern networking technologies and mass media. Families United makes use of existing infrastructure of communities (e.g., coalitions, Drug Free Communities, Weed & Seed, CADCA, United Ways) and state governments (e.g., National Guard, Extension, Land Grant Colleges) to maximize reach and low-cost proven evidence-based kernels to address major risk and protective factors quickly.

The Cost Efficiency & Savings: Each state can use a special designed spreadsheet to compute the cost efficiency and savings across multiple problems. For example, the largest state (California) could save \$336 million, and the smallest state (Wyoming) would save \$5.1 million. Prior studies suggest the cost savings and lives saved happen in two years.

Deploying Five Evidence-Based Kernels to Every Parent for Large Effects

Evidence-based kernels are the smallest unit of behavioral influence, scientifically proven in one or more high-quality published studies (See Embry and Biglan, 2008). Families United deploys five types of kernels to alter the context of risk and protective factors predicting youth alcohol, tobacco, and drug use along with related related problems of delinquency, violence, poor academics, early sexual behavior, and some mental illnesses. The five kernels or “Simple Gifts” to be promoted for all children between the ages of 5 and 18 (adapted to age and developmental stage) involve:

- ✓ **Increasing Family Monitoring.** Parental & family clarity and commitment to their child about not using alcohol, tobacco and drugs (ATOD) and about that child’s friends’ not using of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. This includes a commitment to speak to the child’s friends’ parents. This clarity and commitment can significantly reduce ATOD use and related delinquency.
- ✓ **Rewarding Not Using or Breaking Rules.** Family recognition and reinforcement of children and teens doing the right thing (e.g., not using ATOD or not engaging in deviant behaviors associated with ATOD) has been widely shown to reduce problematic behavior more effectively than punishments, and the same procedure can dramatically reduce ATOD use if the child has already started using based on studies from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Such rewards increased parent-child warmth, key to children’s disclosure to parents.
- ✓ **Reducing Sleep Deprivation.** Ensuring a child has good sleep patterns, by reducing access to electronic media before bedtime, has multiple effects on risk and protective factors associated with ATOD, school success, family relations, mental health, aggression and obesity.
- ✓ **Changing Fatty Acid Ratios in Child’s Diet.** Based on extensive data the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse reported by the Institute of Medicine’s Report on the *Prevention of Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, increasing children’s “brain food” (omega-3 found in fish oil and reducing omega-6 found in processed foods) protects a child’s basic brain function, brain receptors and brain chemistry from the risk of ATOD as well as other problematic behaviors including depression and aggression.
- ✓ **Increasing Parent Networking to Child’s Friends Families.** Sharing and communicating the above with five of the parents of one’s child’s friends, fosters a community norm of enforcing these protective factors by all families to benefit all children in the community, which then provides a population-level public health and safety benefit.

Five Evidence-Based Kernels to Empower Parents to Protect All Our Children

This plan envisions five ways to empower parents, families and communities to protect our children. Each of these strategies is an evidence-based kernel. In the campaign and effort, these kernels are called “Simple Gifts” to denote simplicity and loving benefits for our children, our families, and our communities.

Simple Gift #1:

Parental & family commitment to their child about his or her use of ATOD and about that child’s friends’ use of ATOD

Action

For 6th graders and younger, parents or families might be asked to make this “Standard Statement” to their children:

“I/we don’t want you to use alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs. And we don’t want you to use any prescription or store-bought drugs without our permission. I/we don’t want any of your friends (_____, _____, _____) to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs either. All of us parents and families have agreed to talk to each other about this, especially if we think any of our children are using these things.”

For older youth (7th to 12th graders), parents or families might use the “Standard Statement” or the “Blunt Statement.” The Blunt Statement would be suggested if a parent suspects/knows the child is a regular user or might be hanging with peers who are. The blunt option might read as follows:

“I/we don’t want you to be drunk, stoned or high from any type of alcohol or drug. I/we don’t want you to be with any other youth including your friends _____, _____, or _____, if they are drunk, stoned or high from any kind of alcohol or drugs period. If this happens at any time or at any place, we want you to call us ASAP so that we can pick you up and take you home. Is that understood? I/we are going to talk to all your friends’ parents about our family’s wish to protect you, and our desire that we don’t want you or your friends to be involved with alcohol or drug use at all. What questions do you have?”

Join the Families United web address for using this Simple Gift.



Rationale

A previous scientific study of 7th graders demonstrated that a blunt, clear statement by parents in a broad community context and campaign actually did reduce both serious binge drinking and alcohol use as well as delinquency arrests by about 25%.

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Adolescents undermine their parents' resolve by arguing that other parents are more permissive through a variety of tactics, which cannot be easily refuted in the absence of a robust community norming effort that a vast majority of parents do not want their children using ATOD.

Adolescent ATOD use today is different than 20 years ago in a number of ways:

- a) use is not casual and simply social as one might find an adult party; and
- b) current adolescent culture and use is deliberately focused on getting seriously drunk, stoned, or high. For example, binge drinking is not just a few drinks, as it might have been previously. Youth may drink 10 beers today, for example.

Drinking and drugging today among many adolescents is not "to relax"; "to chill"; or "reduce stress." The emphasis on excess is not just illegal or a violation of parental rules; it is exceedingly dangerous in terms of fatal or serious accidents, rape, exposure to gun violence, suicide, or accidental death from overdoses.

Such behavior also can significantly affect the child's entry into college, professions or military. Such excess behavior is quite common among middle-class and upper-class youth, because such groups have the financial and transportation resources to secure the quantities of alcohol and drugs.



Simple Gift #2:

Family recognition and reinforcement of children and teens doing the right thing (e.g., not using ATOD or not engaging in deviant behaviors associated with ATOD).

Action

When a child comes back from his or her adventures, families notice when the child or teen has done the right thing.

Every so often—every five to ten days—families offer a Mystery Motivator reward to their child for doing the right thing, immediately after being recognized for doing the right thing. The Mystery Motivator⁸²⁻⁸⁴ is a proven way to strengthen the behavior of children, youth and adults alike. A child or teen gets to draw from a jar or box containing slips of paper. The paper slips name Mystery Motivators, which can range from hugs, praise, silly things, to candy, to and extra hour up at night, a pass on chores, a friend over, a special meal, late nights, some money, movie passes, or special fun.

When the child draws their Mystery Motivator, parents praise them this or similar. Here is an example: “When you do good things, you never know exactly when, where, or how it will pay off—but it will. And, the more good you do, the more good you get back. It’s a Law of the Universe. And the reverse is true. When you do bad, you never know when, where or how it will come back to hurt you—but it will. And, and the more bad you do, the more bad you get back. Thank you for creating good in your life.”

A special version of the Mystery Motivator—called the Prize Bowl—can be used with a teen if is already getting drunk, stoned and/or high. The Prize Bowl is one of the most proven ways to reduce addictions quickly and powerfully.

Join Families United web address using this Simple Gift.

Rationale

The more families notice their children doing the right thing, the more right things the children do. Without being noticed for the right things, children tend to seek out being notice for doing the wrong things—often in the wrong places with the wrong people at the wrong times. It is the being noticed that counts, and you have complete control over what you notice in your child—for the good or the bad.

Such simple, positive reinforcement for not using ATOD is clearly proven to reduce ATOD use significantly in multiple studies,³⁶ and is especially potent as a strategy once a child or adult has initiated use³²⁻³⁴ (which is true of 15% to 45% of most American youth, depending on grade and community). Thus, a substantial percentage of current American parents need a practical strategy that works to stop current ATOD use of their children, not just prevent initiation of use.

Parental reinforcement of children doing the right thing increases perceived warmth by child from parent, which in turns increases disclosure of behaviors by the child.³⁵⁻⁴¹ Such child disclosure turns out to be vital for effective parental monitoring during adolescence, more than parental quizzing or threats of punishment.

Simple Gift #3:

Ensuring a child has good sleep patterns, by reducing access to electronic media before bedtime.

Action

Parents or other adults assure that electronic devices that keep children and teens awake are “on curfew.”

Thus, cell phones are collected before bedtime, internet access and computer games may have the parent control and timers turned on to reduce access.

Alternatively, no electronic media are in the child’s bedroom. It is important to note that approximately 80% parents presently believe that TV’s and other media in a child’s bedroom are “good for the child”—and do not know the extent of research to the contrary.

Join Families United web address using this Simple Gift.

Rationale

Sleep deprivation—rapidly increasing in children and teens—by virtue of electronic media (e.g., cellphones, instant messaging, TV’s and electronic games in children’s bedrooms) is now firmly linked to increased risk of ATOD use and other problematic behaviors for multiple biological, media modeling, and adverse norming reasons.

Our children today sleep a lot less than children just 10-20 years ago. The lack of sleep, even as a young child, significantly predicts getting drunk, stoned, or in trouble with the law including for violence as well as doing poorly in school.^{12 42-45}

The reason is not more homework or family stress. The reason is simple: Children’s bedrooms today are like electronic super-stores—often with a TV, a computer, electronic games, and now cell phones.¹²⁻²¹ These electronic things are a lot more exciting and sleep depriving than reading a book under the covers with a flashlight.²¹ When parents significantly reduce use of these things—especially in children’s bedrooms—children and teens are healthier, less irritable, do better in school and less likely to get into all manner of trouble.^{22 23} There are some strategies to slim your child’s media diet if families are unsure what to do.²⁴



Simple Gift #4:

Increasing children’s “brain food,” which protects a child’s basic brain function, brain receptors and brain chemistry from the risk of ATOD.

Action

This Simple Gift emphasizes tested and proven ways to improve a child’s “brain food”—based on research funded by the United States National Institutes of Health and other prestigious entities.

Increase child’s dietary intake of omega-3 fatty acid (e.g., fish oil, oily fish) to improve cognitive ability and reduce impulsive or aggressive behaviors or reduce need for psychotropic medications.⁷³⁻⁸¹

Decrease child’s dietary intake of omega-6 fatty acid (e.g. cottonseed oil, corn oil, soybean oil, canola oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil), using omega-9 mono-saturated oils (e.g., olive oil) instead, in order to reduce impulsivity, cognitive problems and diseases or disorders that affect family functioning or child development.⁶

Make physical activity required to access passive electronic media (e.g. Grandmother’s Law, Premack Principle).⁵⁸⁻⁷²

Join Families United Internet site using this Simple Gift.

Dr. Joe Hibbeln, chief of the Molecular Membrane Laboratory at the National Institute on Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse, showing CNN reporters essential brain nutrient deficiency in America’s diet today compared to years ago.



Rationale

Essential brain chemistry and development is being disrupted or deficient from two major sources in America. These disruptions and deficiencies have greatly accelerated the risk of substance abuse, mental illness and delinquent behavior in America's youth. Two changeable causes exist:

Based on scientific studies conducted under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health, abrupt changes in the dietary ratios of essential fatty acids (omega 3 to omega 6⁷) of Americans (particularly children and youth) compared to other nations has increased the biological, mental health and behavioral risks associated with ATOD use.⁶ Changing the current US dangerous ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 from 25-to-1 to the healthy ratio of 4-to-1 would significantly improve the biological and behavioral risk and protective factors associated with ATOD use and related problems.^{6,8} Remember how parents and grandparents of years back used to tell their children and grandchildren to take cod-liver oil? Yes, it tasted yucky, and that cod-liver oil contained enough omega-3 to keep every child in America smarter, safer, less susceptible to addictions or mental illnesses, and healthier.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁷ Increasing omega-3 and reducing omega-6 (found in cottonseed oil, corn oil, soybean oil, etc.) would also help reduce the obesity and diabetes epidemic among youth.⁹⁻¹¹

Another essential brain deficiency comes from the lack of movement. Without extensive physical activity—running and playing outside, active sports, jogging, etc. every day, humans do not generate enough Brain Derived Neuro-Factor—“brain-fertilizer” for short. BDNF is essential for sleep, positive mood, memory and learning.^{52,53} BDNF helps brains learn to avoid or stay away from harmful things like getting drunk, high, stoned or in trouble with the law as well as learning how to get the good things in life.^{46,47} Scientists believe today that well-proven effects on exercise improving depression (as much as medications) and improving memory in children and adults works by increasing BDNF.⁴⁸⁻⁵¹

Simple Gift #5:

Sharing and communicating the above with five of the parents of one's child's friends, to foster a community norm of enforcing these protective boundaries by all families.

Action

Contact the parents of five of your child's friends, from school, church or social groups.

Tell the parents of your child's friends about each of the evidence-based kernels (Simple Gifts).

Enter the families names in Families United to show growth of unity.

Rationale

The lowest rates of use of alcohol and marijuana in America by 12th graders occurred when the parent-to-parent movement against ATOD use was most active. Federal rules and policies inadvertently destroyed that movement, and rates of youth ATOD use increased despite the implementation of evidence-based curriculum for substance abuse prevention. The strategy of telling and sharing the information of Families United re-ignites the power of parent-to-parent communication along the lines of adolescent-peer relations, and this helps every parent monitor their child's behavior better. The graph below shows the impact of the parent-to-parent movement on marijuana, and a similar effect exists for alcohol.