Teenage Girls
Increasingly vulnerable to alcohol and drug use

Girls’ Unique Vulnerabilities

Scientific research has found that teenage girls are vulnerable to a number of unique physical, psychological, and social risk factors for drug and alcohol abuse. More than three times as many young females as males reported depression in 2008 (2009 NSDUH). Stress has been identified as a leading reason for drinking, smoking, and using drugs among girls (The Commonwealth Fund, 1997). Boys are more likely to report drinking to have fun (The Commonwealth Fund, 1997).

Girls were more likely in 2009 than in 2008 to perceive “self-medicating” benefits of using drugs (forgetting your troubles, helping kids with problems) and perceptions of fun and relaxation significantly increased among boys. (See Table below)

Risk and Social Disapproval

Research shows that when young people perceive a drug as more dangerous or more disapproved of by their peers, they are less likely to use it.

From 2008 to 2009 social disapproval of illegal drug use by peers significantly decreased among girls. The change among boys for the same time frame was not significant. (See Chart 1)
From 2008 to 2009 the perception of risk in using marijuana significantly decreased among both boys and girls. However, from 2008 to 2009 girls were significantly less likely to believe that ecstasy use could be addictive; the change among boys was not significant. (See Table below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Great Risk of getting hooked on ecstasy</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Among girls there was a significant increase in past year alcohol use (up 11%) from 2008 to 2009; however, there was no significant increase among boys during this time frame. (See Chart 2)

Among girls and boys there was a significant increase in past year ecstasy use from 2008 to 2009. The increase was similar for boys (up 57%) and girls (up 60%). (See Chart 3)

Among girls there was a significant increase of 29% in past year marijuana use from 2008 to 2009. While there was also a significant increase among boys’ use during the same time frame it was not as dramatic, up 15%. (See Chart 4)

**Implication for Parents**

The research indicates that parents of teen girls should be especially attentive to the moods and mental health of their daughters. Parents can help prevent alcohol and drug abuse by addressing their daughters’ worries and stresses and by supporting their positive actions.
The Partnership is evolving to become the primary resource and cause leader for parents facing issues about alcohol and drugs and their teens. As in everything the Partnership does, research informs this evolution process. This includes research with experts in child development, substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment. Our major partner in this area is Treatment Research Institute (TRI).

The combination of scientific learning and insights into teens’ perceptions, attitudes, and behavior gives us a unique understanding of teens. The Partnership/Met Life Foundation Teens Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) is a quantitative in-school, national probability sample with 3,287 students in grades 9 through 12.

Given the learning from research, the Partnership has mobilized its resources to provide parents with the most comprehensive science-based information and tools to effectively prevent, intervene, and seek treatment for their children. For more information, please visit www.drugfree.org.

References
The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) 2009. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The Partnership thanks MetLife Foundation for its support of the 2009 Teens Attitude Tracking Study.