



The National Center on
Addiction and Substance Abuse
at Columbia University

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:
Wednesday, September 23, 2009, 12:01 A.M. EDT**

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**CASA* REPORT FINDS TEENS WHO HAVE INFREQUENT
FAMILY DINNERS LIKELIER TO DRINK, SMOKE,
USE MARIJUANA**

**TEENS LIKELIER TO BE ABLE TO GET PRESCRIPTION DRUGS,
MARIJUANA, WITHIN AN HOUR WHEN
FAMILY DINNERS INFREQUENT**

New York, NY, September 23, 2009 – Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five or more per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are twice as likely to use tobacco or marijuana; more than one and a half times likelier to use alcohol; and twice as likely to expect to try drugs in the future, according to *The Importance of Family Dinners V*, a new report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

The CASA report also found that compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are more than twice as likely to be able to get marijuana in an hour and one and a half times likelier to be able to get prescription drugs to get high within an hour.

The report reveals that compared to teens who have frequent family dinners without distractions at the table (talking or texting on a cell phone, using a Blackberry, laptop or Game Boy), those who have infrequent family dinners and say there are distractions at the table are three times likelier to use marijuana and tobacco, and two and a half times likelier to use alcohol.

The report also found that compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are:

- Twice as likely to have friends who use marijuana and Ecstasy;
- More than one and a half times likelier to have friends who drink, abuse prescription drugs, and use Meth; and
- Almost one and a half times likelier to have friends who use illegal drugs like cocaine, acid and heroin.

“The magic of the family dinner comes not from the food on the plate but from who’s at the table and what’s happening there. The emotional and social benefits that come from family dinners are priceless,” said Elizabeth Planet, CASA’s Vice President and Director of Special Projects. “We know that teens who have frequent

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family dinners are likelier to get A's and B's in school and have excellent relationships with their parents. Having dinner as a family is one of the easiest ways to create routine opportunities for parental engagement and communication, two keys to raising drug-free children.”

This year 59 percent of teens report having dinner with their families at least five times a week, the same proportion CASA has observed over the past several years. Consistent with what teens report, 62 percent of parents say they have frequent family dinners. Findings in *The Importance of Family Dinners V* come from CASA's 14th annual back to school survey, *National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIV: Teens and Parents*, released in August 2009.

Family Dinners and Parental Attitudes and Behaviors on Alcohol

The report found that compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more than one and a half times likelier to have seen their parent(s) drunk and to think their father is okay with them drinking.

Teens who think their fathers are okay with their drinking are likelier to drink and get drunk than teens who believe their fathers are against their drinking. Teens who have seen their parent(s) drunk are likelier to drink, get drunk, and try cigarettes and marijuana, compared to teens who have not seen their parent(s) drunk.

The Family Dinner

The average family dinner lasts about 35 minutes. Twenty-eight percent of teens say their family dinners usually last less than half an hour, 34 percent say they last half an hour, and 35 percent of teens say their family dinners usually last more than half an hour.

“The bad news in this year's survey is that work and other activities keep many families from getting to the table for frequent family dinners. But the good news is that most of these teens and parents would be willing to give up a weeknight activity to have dinner with their family,” said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's founder and chairman and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. “Over the past decade and a half of surveying thousands of American teens and their parents, we've learned that the more often children have dinner with their parents, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. I urge parents to arrange their schedules and the outside activities so that they can have frequent family dinners. If they do so, they'll discover what a difference dinner makes.”

Other Notable Findings

- Compared to 12- and 13-year olds who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are six times likelier to use marijuana, four times likelier to use tobacco, and three times likelier to use alcohol.
- Compared to teens who attend religious services at least weekly, those who never attend services are more than twice as likely to try cigarettes, and twice as likely to try marijuana and alcohol.
- Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are one and a half times likelier to report getting grades of C or lower in school.

Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™

More than a decade of CASA research has consistently found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. *Family Day* is a national movement launched by CASA in 2001 to remind parents that frequent family dinners make a difference. Celebrated on the fourth Monday in September—the 28th in 2009—*Family Day* promotes parental engagement as a simple and effective way to reduce children's risk of smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs. What began as a small grassroots initiative has grown to become a nationwide celebration, which is expected to once again be proclaimed and supported by the President and all 50 U.S. Governors.



More than 289 local non-profit groups including schools, community based groups and substance abuse prevention programs and 22 national non-profit organizations are celebrating and promoting *Family Day* 2009. This year CASA expects more than 1000 cities and counties to proclaim and support *Family Day*—more than double the amount in 2005. 2008 marked the first time six Major League Baseball teams celebrated *Family Day* by promoting the day at their stadiums and the first time two state First Ladies served in the role of Honorary Chair. In 2009 the initiative has increased significantly with 12 state First Ladies agreeing to serve as Honorary Chairs and 10 Major League Baseball teams promoting *Family Day* in their stadiums.

“Of course there are no silver bullets; teen substance abuse can strike any family. But with everyone living such busy lives these days, the family dinner becomes an important tool to raising drug-free children because gathering around the table as a family shows kids just how much their parents care about them and sends a message that their parents are there for them,” noted Califano whose new book *How to Raise a Drug Free Kid: The Straight Dope for Parents* was published in August by Simon & Schuster’s Touchstone/Fireside Division and includes a chapter on how family dinners make a difference in children’s lives.

QEV Analytics conducted *The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIV: Teens and Parents* from March 2 to April 5, 2009 (teens) and March 21 to April 10, 2009 (parents). The firm interviewed at home by telephone a national random sample of 1,000 12- to 17-year olds (509 boys, 491 girls) and 452 of their parents. Sampling error is +/- 3.1 percent for teens and +/- 4.6 percent for parents.

CASA is the only national organization that brings together under one roof all the professional disciplines needed to study and combat all types of substance abuse as they affect all aspects of society. CASA and its staff of more than 50 professionals has issued 70 reports and white papers, published one book, conducted demonstration programs focused on children, families and schools at 238 sites in 91 cities and counties in 35 states, Washington, DC and two Native American reservations, held 18 conferences attended by professionals and others from 49 states, and has been evaluating the effectiveness of drug and alcohol treatment in a variety of programs and drug courts. For more information on CASA visit www.casacolumbia.org. For more information on *Family Day* visit www.CASAFamilyDay.org.

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