

NEW STUDY: PARENTAL CONSEQUENCES SIGNIFICANTLY DETER DANGEROUS DRIVING BEHAVIORS IN TEENS

Study finds that parents can profoundly impact a teen's decision to drink, drug and drive or engage in other risky driving behaviors, particularly among boys

BOSTON (September 19, 2006) – One in five teens is still drinking and driving, and one in nearly eight teens is still using marijuana and driving. That's according to the seventh annual *Teens Today* driving study just released by Liberty Mutual and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions). But parents who set clear consequences – and follow through on them – significantly reduce the likelihood that their teen will engage in these and other unsafe behaviors behind the wheel.

These driving results are part of *Teens Today*, an annual multi-part research study that reports on teens' behaviors, attitudes, and decision-making about issues such as driving, drinking, drug use, sexual activity, and family/peer relationships.

Overall, 19 percent of teens report driving under the influence of alcohol, 15 percent report driving under the influence of marijuana, and 7 percent report driving under the influence of "other drugs." But teens say parents who set expectations with clear consequences for them about breaking the law while driving are less likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol (16 percent vs. 29 percent), marijuana (14 percent vs. 18 percent), or other drugs (6 percent vs. 11 percent) than are teens whose parents do not set any consequences.

And, further, teens who have never driven under the influence of any illegal substance are a third more likely to say their parents will follow through with those consequences than are teens who have driven under the influence of either alcohol or marijuana (78 percent vs. 59 percent).

"It's quite encouraging to see that parental involvement can significantly improve teen driving statistics, a mission we've been committed to for some time now," said Paul Condrin, Liberty Mutual president, Personal Market. "And through this study, the type of parental involvement that works is clear – parents need to know the laws and teen-driving rules of their state, set clear expectations with their teens about what safe driving is, and establish and enforce those consequences should those laws be broken or expectations not be met."

The study finds that setting expectations and following through on consequences may help prevent teens from getting into car crashes, which are the leading cause of death for American teens – more than drugs, guns, or any disease combined. Establishing consequences also cuts down on the number of teens who engage in other unsafe driving behaviors:

- Teens whose parents establish clear consequences for breaking family driving rules are less likely to drive more than 5 mph over the speed limit (44 percent) than are teens whose parents do not set consequences (56 percent).
- Teens whose parents establish clear consequences for breaking family driving rules are less likely to drive with three or more passengers in a car (36 percent vs. 42 percent) or eat or drink while driving (31 percent vs. 40 percent) than are their counterparts who do not have any clear consequences set.
- Interestingly, simply establishing consequences about talking on the cell phone while driving does not significantly influence behavior. However, teens who say their parents are likely to enforce any established consequences for breaking their family driving rule about cell phones are significantly less likely to talk on the cell phone while driving (37

percent) than are teens who say their parents are unlikely to actually follow through on any consequence (65 percent).

Parental Power: Study Shows Parents Holding Back on Guidance

In many instances, parents are actually present while teens engage in risky driving habits. Even when adults are in the car with teens, the Liberty Mutual/SADD study shows that teens engage in bad driving choices, such as speeding (almost 50 percent of the time), talking on their cell phones (about 20 percent of the time), and eating or drinking while driving (almost 20 percent of the time).

"Parents can play an incredibly influential role in the driving behavior of their teens," said Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of the national SADD organization. "Perhaps most important is to set a good example for young drivers and to reinforce their good driving habits by praising what they are doing right behind the wheel."

Paying Special Attention to Our Teenage Boys

The Liberty Mutual/SADD driving study also found that boys are more likely than girls to have driven under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs (32 percent vs. 25 percent), yet boys say their parents are less likely to speak to them about driving safely. In addition, parents are establishing the fewest consequences for their teenage boys when it comes to this behavior.

"Older teen boys are more likely than girls to engage in bad driving choices while adults are present," said Condrin. "While it's important to talk to both teenage girls and boys about safe driving, parents should remember that boys are more at risk these days for destructive driving."

What Parents Can Do

"While young people across the country have done a remarkable job of helping to reduce alcohol-related crash deaths among their peers by almost 60 percent since 1981, this new data makes clear that their work is not done," said Wallace. "Too many teens continue to drink and drug and drive, and parents must be relentless in talking to their teens about this important issue."

The seventh annual *Teens Today* driving study builds upon six years of previous research. Experts on teen driving behaviors, Liberty Mutual and SADD offer these additional tips to help parents talk to their teens.

- Know your state's Graduated Driver License law, including restrictions on supervised driving, time of day, and passengers in the car and enforce them.
- Set family rules about driving, outline clear consequences for breaking the rules, and follow through. Liberty Mutual and SADD suggest some rules, if they are not covered by your state laws:
 - No friends in the car without an adult;
 - No driving after 10 p.m.;
 - No use of alcohol or other drugs;
 - No distractions while driving including eating, changing CDs, handling iPods and putting on makeup; and
 - No cell phone use, including text messaging.
- Start talking with children as young as 13 or 14 about driving and driving safety. From focus groups, Liberty Mutual and SADD have learned from parents of teen drivers that the best times to talk with teens about driving safety are during the 1-2 years before they get their license.

- Continue supervised driving once your child has received his or her license and reinforce the rules and safe driving habits.
- Don't relent. Parents should continue the dialogue with their teens and frequently reinforce the acute dangers of drinking and driving or using drugs and driving.

Liberty Mutual also provides a practical tool for families to safely manage the formative teen driving process: "**The Road Ahead: Stay Safe at the Wheel.**" This kit, developed in cooperation with SADD and RADD – "The Entertainment Industry's Voice for Road Safety" – and free to all families, includes a powerful video of teens discussing their driving attitudes and behaviors before and after viewing the HBO Family documentary "*Smashed: Toxic Tales of Teens and Alcohol.*" The kit also includes a guide with tips for how to foster a discussion with teens about staying safe at the wheel and a family safe driving pledge.

A free copy of "The Road Ahead" is available by calling 1-800-4-LIBERTY or any local Liberty Mutual office.

Methodology

Liberty Mutual and SADD commissioned Guideline to conduct a quantitative survey with high school students on a wide range of attitudes and behaviors relevant to teens. An entire section of the survey was dedicated to teen driving. The driving report focuses exclusively on the responses of 903 teens with a driver's license from a national sample of 26 high schools in April and May 2006. The relevant, driving-specific findings can be interpreted at a 95% confidence interval with a +/- 3.3% error margin. Analysis of survey subgroups is subject to wider error margins. Percentages in the report may add to more or less than 100% due to rounding error or occasions when multiple response answers were accepted.

Research Partners

Liberty Mutual Group (www.libertymutual.com) is a leading multi-line insurer in the U.S. whose largest line of business is personal auto based on 2005 direct written premium. A top ten provider of auto and home insurance to individuals, Liberty Mutual is an industry leader in affinity partnerships, offering its personal lines products to employees and members of more than 9,000 companies, credit unions, and alumni and professional associations. Liberty Mutual Group ranks 102 on the Fortune 500 list of largest corporations in the United States. The company, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, employs over 39,000 people in more than 900 offices throughout the world.

SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions) is the nation's premier peer-to-peer youth education organization, with thousands of chapters in middle schools, high schools, and colleges. With a mission of preventing destructive behaviors and addressing attitudes that are harmful to young people, SADD sponsors programs that address issues such as underage drinking, substance abuse, impaired driving, and teen violence, depression, and suicide.

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