

Parental supervision during high school may curb college drinking problems

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Parental monitoring can reduce high-school drinking and, as a result, have a protective effect on students' drinking at college, says research published this week in the online open access journal *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*.

The findings strengthen the idea that certain parental practices throughout high school and perhaps college could be used to curb high-risk drinking in older adolescents. Underage drinking is linked to a number of negative outcomes in this group, including suicide, high-risk sexual activity and an increased chance of alcohol dependence.

Researchers from the Center for Substance Abuse Research at the University of Maryland College Park, Maryland, USA interviewed over 1,200 students for the research, which forms part of the College Life Study. This is an ongoing, longitudinal, prospective investigation of health-risk behaviors in college students, including alcohol and other drug use.

The team assessed parental monitoring and student alcohol consumption (in drinks per day) in high school using surveys in the summer before the students attended a large public university in the mid-Atlantic. Students were followed up with a personal interview in their first college year to assess their alcohol consumption over the past year.

Higher levels of parental supervision were associated with lower levels of high-school drinking, independent of sex, race and religiosity.

Although parental monitoring did not directly influence alcohol consumption in college, there was evidence that high school drinking mediates the relationship between the two factors. Thus, the higher the drinking in high school, the higher the drinking in college. The authors point out that these results call into question the opinion of many parents who think “responsible drinking” should begin in high school. Further research is needed to explore the extent and type of parental supervision that may reduce students’ drinking in college.

The authors write: “In summary, the transition to college marks a high-risk period for escalation of alcohol consumption. Parents and prevention practitioners can benefit from evidence that points to specific parenting practices that might help reduce the risk for heavy drinking, while at the same time allow for appropriate levels of autonomy that are critical for young adult development”

Source: BioMed Central

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