

Parental guidelines, consequences may be why fewer black teens smoke than whites

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It's a curious paradox. Black adults are more likely to smoke than white adults and most smokers start as teenagers. But statistics show that fewer black youths than whites begin smoking as adolescents.

A new University of Washington study indicates that lower rates of smoking among black teens may be the result of black parents setting concrete guidelines about substance use and establishing clearly defined consequences for not following those guidelines.

The research also found that teens who associated with deviant peers - those who were in trouble at school, or who engaged in delinquent behavior or used alcohol or marijuana - were more likely to smoke, according to Martie Skinner, a research scientist with the Social Development Research Group, part of the UW's School of Social Work and the study's lead author.

"This study is important because we looked at how parental guidelines affected peer influences and smoking over a three-year period from the eighth to 10th grades," she said. "Parents can have a strong influence on smoking behavior.

"In general, good parenting such as setting clear guidelines about drug use and forming strong relationships with your child reduces the likelihood of teens associating with deviant peers and has a significant impact on whether kids smoke or don't smoke. Our findings are consistent with other research done here which shows parents are

important influences on their teenagers including who they should hang out with.

"Associating with other teens using substances increases a teen's chances of using those substances. This applied to both black and white teens. The majority of eighth graders don't use substances, so it is easy to find other peers who don't use them," she said.

The study found that 15 percent of the black teens reported smoking in the 10th grade compared to 22 percent of the white teens. Black parents were significantly more likely to report guidelines and consequences for substance use. Not surprisingly, black and white teens whose parents smoked reported higher levels of smoking than teens whose parents were non-smokers.

Skinner and her Social Development Research Group colleagues Kevin Haggerty and Richard Catalano collected data from a larger Seattle study designed to prevent substance abuse. The smoking study looked at 331 families - 163 black and 168 white - with slightly more boys than girls.

Skinner thinks rates of smoking among blacks accelerate after leaving high school, a time when many black adolescents are not going to college and move away from their parents' home. She is following the same pool of teenagers in this study to assess their levels of smoking in a follow-up project.

So what can parents do to discourage teen smoking and other substance use? Skinner suggests:

- talking about smoking and substance use directly and not ignoring the topic.

- establishing family guidelines about [smoking](#) and moderate consequences for breaking those guidelines.
- keeping communication open so you know what your teen is doing and to maintain a strong relationship.

"These things can be hard to do in the real heat of life," Skinner said.

"Getting support from other adults in the child's life, such as teachers, is key. Parenting is the most important thing we do, so we shouldn't hesitate to get help.

"We know family-based interventions can be effective and specific skills to promote healthy development in [teens](#) are pretty easily acquired if [parents](#) are given good instruction."

Source: University of Washington ([news](#) : [web](#))

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