

# A drug-using mother's words have merit in the eyes of her child

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Open communication with teens about drugs is more effective than nagging.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Moms who have used drugs may be doing their teens a favour by admitting to it, a University of Alberta research shows.

A survey of 3,530 Alberta youth in Grades 7 to 12 revealed that teens were more likely to use drugs if they knew that their mothers had used drugs but did not pressure their kids to avoid the practice.

"The findings suggest that adolescents might benefit from parental talks about the dangers of [drug](#) use, especially when their mothers have experience with drugs," said researcher Lori Harach, a professor in the Department of Human Ecology. "That factor may give extra credibility to the messaging in the eyes of the teen," she said.

Harach explains the important thing for the drug-using mom is to

contextualize her drug use.

"It seems to me that the kids need some discussion around the reasons for use and the way in which drugs are impacting the mom's life-perhaps there are addiction issues," she said. "Kids are smart and they are extremely observant.

"This is generally not something that can be hidden."

And while the "do as I say, not as I do" strategy of parenting seems to work for drug-using mothers as long as it is accompanied with an open dialogue, for moms who do not use drugs, Harach says constant pressure about the evils of drug use may backfire.

"In this case, it seems that nagging and preaching about saying no to drugs would essentially result in rebellion," she said.

Other related findings in Harach's study suggest adolescents whose [mothers](#) support their autonomy are less likely to use drugs.

"When an autonomy-supportive relationship exists, there has likely been some ongoing talk about right and wrong and making wise decisions," she said. "The [adolescent](#) has been raised in an environment that has nurtured decision-making. So when the adolescent is faced with the option to use drugs, he or she had had practice making appropriate decisions."

Harach presented her findings recently at a conference organized by the Society for Research in Child Development. She, along with Cam Wild, acting director for the Centre for Health Promotion Studies in the School of Public Health, will be looking at the survey to determine whether the mother-adolescent relationship can buffer children from the influence of peer pressure.

Provided by University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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