

Keeping kids away from R-rated movies may prevent early drinking

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Middle-school children whose parents restrict access to R-rated movies are substantially less likely to start drinking than their peers who are allowed to see such films, a new study suggests.

In a study of nearly 3,600 New England middle school students, researchers found that among kids who said their [parents](#) never allowed them to watch R movies, few took up drinking over the next couple years.

Of that group, 3 percent said they had started drinking when questioned 13 to 26 months after the initial survey. That compared with 19 percent of their peers who'd said their parents "sometimes" let them see R-rated films, and one-quarter of students who'd said their parents allowed such movies "all the time."

The researchers say the findings, reported in the May issue of the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, underscore the importance of parents paying close attention to their children's media exposure.

"We think this is a very important aspect of parenting, and one that is often overlooked," said Dr. James D. Sargent, a professor of pediatrics at Dartmouth Medical School in Hanover, New Hampshire.

The current findings build on evidence linking children's exposure to R-rated movies and onscreen "adult" content in general not only to early drinking but also to early smoking and kids' likelihood of having sex or

behaving violently.

"The research to date suggests that keeping kids from R-rated movies can help keep them from drinking, smoking and doing a lot of other things that parents don't want them to do," Sargent said.

He pointed out that it could be argued that parents who restrict access to R movies are simply more careful in general -- keeping tabs on their children's friends or making sure their kids have no access to alcohol at home, for instance. However, Sargent and his colleagues accounted for this in the current study by asking students questions that gauge "authoritative parenting" -- which gauges the adolescent's perception of parental responsiveness (ability to respond to the adolescent's point of view) and demandingness (ability to set and enforce limits).

The researchers found that, even with such factors considered, exposure to R-rated movies was still linked to the likelihood of early drinking.

Ninety percent of R-rated films have depictions of drinking, and that may be one reason that middle-schoolers who see the films are more vulnerable to early drinking. But Sargent said that the R-rated movie effect goes beyond that. Other research suggests that children who see R-rated movies become more prone to "sensation seeking" and risk taking. "We think seeing the adult content actually changes their personality," Sargent said.

The bottom line, according to the researcher, is that parents should restrict their [kids](#) from seeing R-rated films. But he also pointed out that PG-13 movies, as well as many TV shows, often portray drinking and other adult situations -- and that supports limiting children's media time in general.

The American Academy of Pediatrics currently recommends that

children watch no more than one to two hours of "quality" media, including movies, TV and videos, each day.

Provided by Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs

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