

Teens and alcohol study: After a few drinks, parenting style kicks in

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Parents may be surprised, even disappointed, to find out they don't influence whether their teen tries alcohol.

But now for some good news: Parenting style strongly and directly affects [teens](#) when it comes to heavy drinking - defined as having five or more drinks in a row - according to a new Brigham Young University study.

The researchers surveyed nearly 5,000 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 about their drinking habits and their relationship with their [parents](#). Specifically, they examined parents' levels of [accountability](#) - knowing where they spend their time and with whom - and the warmth they share with their kids. Here's what they found:

- The teens least prone to heavy drinking had parents who scored high on both accountability and warmth.
- So-called "indulgent" parents, those low on accountability and high on warmth, nearly tripled the risk of their teen participating in heavy drinking.
- "Strict" parents - high on accountability and low on warmth - more than doubled their teen's risk of heavy drinking.

Prior research on parenting style and teen drinking was a mixed bag,

showing modest influence at best. Unlike previous research, this study distinguished between any [alcohol consumption](#) and [heavy drinking](#).

"While parents didn't have much of an effect on whether their teens tried alcohol, they can have a significant impact on the more dangerous type of drinking," said Stephen Bahr, a professor in BYU's College of Family, Home and Social Sciences.

Bahr, along with co-author John Hoffmann, will publish the study in the July issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

The [statistical analysis](#) also showed that religious teens were significantly less likely to drink at all. That mirrors findings from this 2008 study Bahr and Hoffmann conducted on teen [religiosity](#) and marijuana use.

Not surprisingly, a teen's peers play an important role on whether a teen consumes any [alcohol](#). The BYU researchers note that teens in this new study were more likely to have non-drinking friends if their parents scored high on warmth and accountability.

"The adolescent period is kind of a transitional period and parents sometimes have a hard time navigating that," Bahr said. "Although peers are very important, it's not true that parents have no influence."

For parents, the takeaway is this:

"Realize you need to have both accountability and support in your relationship with your adolescent," Hoffmann said. "Make sure that it's not just about controlling their behavior - you need to combine knowing how they spend their time away from home with a warm, loving relationship."

Provided by Brigham Young University

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