

# Pre-college talk between parents and teens likely to lessen college drinking

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(Medical Xpress)—Teen-age college students are significantly more likely to abstain from drinking or to drink only minimally when their parents talk to them before they start college, using suggestions in a parent handbook developed by Robert Turrisi, professor of biobehavioral health, Penn State.

"Over 90 percent of teens try alcohol outside the home before they graduate from high school," said Turrisi. "It is well known that fewer problems develop for every year that heavy drinking is delayed. Our research over the past decade shows that parents can play a powerful role in minimizing their teens' drinking during college when they talk to their teens about alcohol before they enter college."

The researchers recruited 1,900 [study participants](#) by randomly selecting incoming freshmen to a large, public northeastern university. Each of the individuals was identified as belonging to one of four groups: nondrinkers, weekend light drinkers, weekend [heavy drinkers](#) and heavy drinkers.

The team mailed Turrisi's handbook to the parents of the student participants. The 22-page handbook contained information that included an overview of college student drinking, strategies and techniques for communicating effectively, ways to help teens develop assertiveness and resist [peer pressure](#) and in-depth information on how alcohol affects the body.

The parents were asked to read the handbook and then talk to their teens about the content of the handbook at one of three times to which they were randomly assigned: (1) during the summer before college, (2) during the summer before college and again during the fall semester of the first year of college and (3) during the [fall semester](#) of the first year of college.

"We were trying to determine the best timing and dosage for delivering the parent intervention," Turrisi said. "For timing, we compared pre-college matriculation to after-college matriculation. For dosage, we compared one [conversation](#) about alcohol to two conversations about alcohol."

The results appeared in a recent issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

"We know that without an intervention there is movement from each drinking level into higher drinking levels," Turrisi said. "For example, non-drinkers tend to become light drinkers, light drinkers will become medium drinkers and medium drinkers will become heavy drinkers. Our results show that if parents follow the recommendations suggested in the handbook and talk to their teens before they enter college, their teens are more likely to remain in the non-drinking or light-drinking groups or to transition out of a heavy-drinking group if they were already heavy drinkers."

According to Turrisi, talking to teens in the fall of the first year of [college](#) may not work as well; for many families it had no effect on students' drinking behaviors. Likewise, adding extra parent materials in the fall seemed to have no additional benefit.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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