

Research shows early dialogue between parents and children most effective in deterring teen tobacco, alcohol use

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Early, substantive dialogue between parents and their grade-school age children about the ills of tobacco and alcohol use can be more powerful in shaping teen behavior than advertising, marketing or peer pressure, a University of Texas at Arlington marketing researcher has shown.

The findings of Zhiyong Yang, an associate professor of marketing in the UT Arlington College of Business, are published in a recent edition of the *Journal of Business Research*. Similar findings were part of a 2010 study he published in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* of the American Marketing Association.

Yang's current work, "Demarketing teen tobacco and alcohol use: Negative peer influence and longitudinal roles of parenting and self-esteem," argues that [parental influence](#) is a powerful tool in dissuading children from smoking and drinking in their later teen years.

His 2010 article, "The Impact of Parenting Strategies on Child Smoking Behavior: The Role of Child Self-Esteem Trajectory," shows that dialogue between [parents](#) and teens is effective in combating risky behavior, such as tobacco and alcohol use, and that parental influences buffer the impact of other external factors such as social media and peer pressure.

"First, our conclusion is that parenting styles can be changed, and that's

good news for the parents and the teens," said Yang, who joined the UT Arlington in 2007 and specializes in "consumer misbehavior," a branch of marketing that attempts to change undesirable or risky behavior.

Yang further elaborated, "Second, our study shows that parental influence is not only profound in its magnitude, but also persistent and long-lasting over the course of a child's entire life. Effective parenting plays the critical role as a transition belt to pass normative values of society from one generation to another."

Rachel Croson, Dean of the UT Arlington College of Business, said Yang's research sheds important light on what drives behaviors and misbehaviors.

"Marketers often study how to sell more products," Croson said. "Dr. Yang's work answers some important and thorny questions about how to sell less, and what parents may be able to do to help improve their children's health and well-being."

Each day about 3,900 people under the age of 18 begin smoking in the [United States](#), according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control. An estimated 1,000 youth will become daily cigarette smokers. About 30 percent of youth smokers will continue to use tobacco and will die early from a smoking-related disease, the agency says.

Yang earned his doctorate from Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, and has based his research on national Canadian surveys of residents from childhood to 25 years old. Because the sampling was so large, comparable results would occur in the United States, Yang said. Canadian teen smoking statistics practically mirror those of the United States, he noted.

Yang said his findings are counter to common perceptions that parents

have little influence on children's behavior after they enter adolescence. Conventional wisdom suggests that [peer pressure](#) and targeted marketing and advertising are of paramount influence on teen decisions to use tobacco and alcohol or engage in other risky behaviors.

"What our research determined is that parental influence is a far greater factor than those," Yang said. "Parenting starts from birth. What could have a greater impact than that?"

Less effective, Yang said, are parenting strategies that employ negative reinforcement, such as belittling a teenager, threats, physical discipline or using negative consequences if the teenager's behavior does not meet parental expectations.

"In fact, our research shows those negative strategies, like withholding affection, drive a teen toward smoking," Yang said.

The research also shows that parents could have a positive impact on discouraging their teen from using tobacco by sharing their own experiences.

"There's something to be said in telling a teen how you've suffered if you've smoked or engaged in a bad behavior when you were a teen," Yang said.

He said the ideal next step in the research would be to partner with local school districts to teach parents a battery of parenting strategies that can be used to curtail [teen](#) misbehaviors.

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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