

Family Meals: A Proven Way to Help Prevent Underage Substance Use

Pass the turkey, the dressing, the potatoes and the cranberry sauce were requests echoed around town as Burrillville families gathered around the table at Thanksgiving. You probably didn't hear "Pass the prevention" — but there was plenty of that at the table as well!

The magic of eating together.

CASAColumbia surveyed thousands of American teens and their parents to identify situations and circumstances that influence the risk of teen substance abuse. It consistently found a relationship between children having frequent dinners with their parents and a decreased risk of their smoking, drinking or using other drugs, and that parental engagement fostered around the dinner table is one of the most potent tools to help parents raise healthy, drug-free children.

"We have long known that the more often children have dinner with their parents the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA Founder and Chairman and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. "In today's busy and over-scheduled world, taking the time to come together for dinner really makes a difference in a child's life."

And then there's dessert! The value of family meals goes beyond reduc-



ing the risk of teen substance use. The FamilyDinnerProject.org points out, "The 'magic' of family dinners is grounded in research on the physical, mental and emotional benefits of regular family meals. Some of the specific benefits of family dinners are better academic performance, higher self-esteem, a greater sense of resilience, a lower risk of teen pregnancy, depression, developing eating disorders, and lower rates of obesity.

The message is clear. Make gathering around the table for a family meal at least five times a week a year-round tradition in your home. In addition to bonding with your kids, you'll be serving a healthy dose of prevention.

THE STATS

On behalf of CASAColumbia, QEV Analytics, a national public opinion research firm, conducted a nationally representative telephone-based survey of 1,003 teens, ages 12 to 17 (493 boys, 510 girls). Compared to teens that have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are:

- Twice as likely to say they expect to try drugs in the future.
- Three times likelier to say it's okay for teens my age to use marijuana.
- Three and a half times likelier to say it's okay for teens my age to get drunk.
- One and a half times likelier to have friends who drink regularly and use marijuana.
- One and a half times likelier to have friends who abuse prescription drugs (to get high).
- One and a quarter more likely to have friends who use illegal drugs like acid, ecstasy, cocaine, methamphetamines and heroin.

