



Whose Kids?...Our Kids!

Teens and Tobacco

While smoking among adults is declining, teen smoking remains steady and has even increased for some groups, such as white females. A person who has not started smoking as a teenager is unlikely ever to smoke.

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death in America, causing more deaths than AIDS, alcohol, car accidents, murders, suicides and illegal drugs combined!

Teens who experiment with tobacco may quickly become dependent because the nicotine in tobacco is highly addictive. Young people's addiction to nicotine is not limited to smoking. Many youth also use smokeless tobacco, such as snuff and chewing tobacco, which also has major health risks.

The nicotine addiction from tobacco is the most common form of drug addiction and one of the most difficult to overcome. Teens who use tobacco are also more likely to drink alcohol and use drugs.

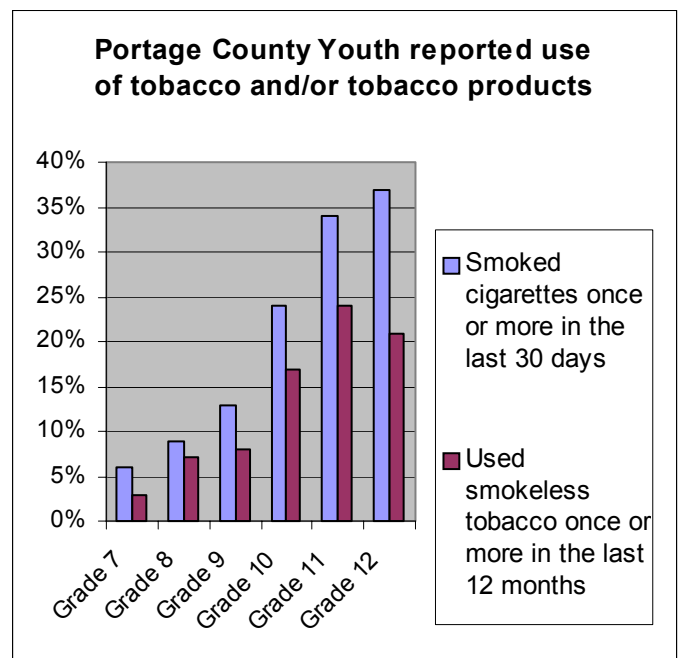
Parents Can Make a Difference!

Tobacco and other drug use by teens are lower if parents talk with their children and convey the clear message that they disapprove of all drug use including tobacco.

When parents engage their children in discussions about the problems of drug use and make it clear that they disapprove, teens are less likely to use drugs of any kind. In other words, parent-teen communication can be very effective in preventing adolescent tobacco and other drug use.

Know the Facts

In January 2001 Portage County surveyed 4,064 7 – 12th graders. Their response to questions regarding tobacco and tobacco products is shown in the following chart.



When talking with your teen about tobacco

► **Do** focus on the immediate physical consequences of tobacco use. For example, using tobacco causes bad breath, yellow teeth, smelly clothes and hair, stained fingers and gross-sounding coughs. Let them know that smokers have triple the cavities of nonsmokers and are more likely to lose their teeth faster, too.

► **Do** focus on the ways tobacco impacts

performance. Teens who smoke often have shortness of breath, weaker hearts and less energy than non-smokers. Their lungs may be permanently damaged, too—this can interfere with athletic performance.

► **Do** talk about the chemicals in cigarettes. Cigarette smoke contains ammonia (used to clean toilets), cyanide (used to kill rats), and formaldehyde (used to preserve dead bodies).

► **Do** mention the addiction nicotine causes. Explain that teens get addicted to nicotine just like adults—sometimes even faster. Each year only about 3 out of every 100 smokers manage to quit and stay off tobacco. Nicotine addiction makes quitting smoking as hard as quitting heroin, cocaine or alcohol.

► **Do** emphasize that more young people don't smoke than do. Smoking is about the least popular thing to do if you want to hang out with other teenagers. And most consider smoking or chewing tobacco a foul, unattractive habit.

► **Do** bring up the role of the tobacco industry. Because two million tobacco

customers die or quit using the substance each year, the industry needs to recruit new customers. Because teens become addicted to nicotine quickly, young people are often targeted with false images that smoking is attractive. That's why tobacco companies market their products at

concerts and sporting events—events that attract youth. It's also why they distribute merchandise like baseball caps and sunglasses that appeal to young people.

Most teens have heard about tobacco's health risks, but are usually unconcerned because the consequences seem so far into the future.

What not to do when talking with your teen about tobacco

► **Don't** overdo talking about the long-term health risks of tobacco use. Most teens have heard about tobacco's health risks, but are usually unconcerned because the consequences seem so far into the future. Younger teens especially may be unable to understand or evaluate the long-term hazards such as lung cancer; they often feel that's something only older people need to be concerned about.

► **Don't** emphasize that smoking is an adult decision. Teens are looking for ways to appear more adult and sophisticated and if using tobacco fits this image, teens may be more likely to smoke or chew tobacco. Teenagers who are rebellious often believe they should be able to do whatever adults do. The "adult decision" argument is one the tobacco industry uses to its benefit. Remember, the majority of adult smokers became addicted to tobacco as teenagers, so very few adults actually make the decision to start smoking.

► **Don't** leave the decision to smoke or chew tobacco up to your teen if you really don't want him or her to use tobacco. Teens are not allowed to decide if they want to attend school or if they want to drive a vehicle without a license. When tobacco use is presented as something youth can and should decide for themselves, it implies the decision is not important to parents. The tobacco industry also uses this technique as a means to hook young people as customers. When parents fail to establish a clear and firm no-tobacco use policy for their teens, the winner is not your child, but the tobacco industry.

When teens use tobacco

Even when families adopt a clear "no tobacco use" rule, the reality is that teenagers may still decide to smoke or chew tobacco. **How can you deal with the situation if your teen decides to use tobacco?**

Consequences and rewards:

Setting forth clear rules with consequences and rewards is vital to creating a situation that clearly demonstrates your disapproval. Try to involve your teen in determining the consequences and rewards for choosing to use or not use tobacco.

Enforce rules: But remember that rules are worthless if the consequences of obeying or disobeying them are not enforced. So, if the rule is "no tobacco" and your teen chooses to use tobacco in spite of the rule, follow on with the consequences.

Examples of appropriate consequences might include withholding driving privileges or discontinuing an allowance (since it may be supporting a tobacco habit).

You may also want to establish

the rule that smoking is not allowed in your home or in the car, in the presence of other family members, or that no cigarettes or other paraphernalia may be left in the home.

Follow through with rewards: On the other hand, if your teen chooses to abide by the rule of no tobacco use, follow through with rewards you have established. For example, rewards could be a bigger allowance, more privileges or a later curfew.

In addition, you can express your concern about how your teen's tobacco use is affecting him or her, you and others. Comments such as "Your breath really smells of cigarettes," or "Your teeth seem to be turning yellow" or "I've noticed you

When teens can easily obtain tobacco or other drugs, their chances of using the drugs increase.

aren't playing basketball/volleyball as well as you did before you started smoking," can have a powerful influence on the self-conscious teen.

When a parent uses tobacco

Parents who smoke or use smoke-less tobacco often have a strong influence on whether their children use tobacco.

Approximately half of teen smokers have parents who smoke. If you are a parent who smokes or chews tobacco, the odds are greatly increased that your teen will do the same. This modeling effect holds true for other drugs as well. Other family members also influence teens; youth with older brothers or sisters who use tobacco are also more likely to use it.

How can parents who use tobacco set a no-use policy for their teens? One of the most important changes parents can make is to stop using tobacco. While this can be a very difficult task, it makes a powerful statement.

Share your tobacco struggles: It's meaningful to share with your teen the struggles you encounter when trying to quit using tobacco. Sharing this personal experience can make the addictive and dependent effects of tobacco much more real to your teen.

What if you are unable to quit using tobacco? What can you do to help your teen make the choice to not use?

Parents who find themselves in this situation can use their experience with

tobacco to convey the difficulty and problems they encounter from their habit. Communicating the message, "This is a problem I hope you never have to face," offers a first-hand account of why you don't want your teen using tobacco. For example, you could say:

▶ "I wish I didn't smoke and here's why—it makes me feel heavy and tired, I can't breathe easily, and it's made my teeth yellow and stained."

▶ "I'd like to quit, but I'm addicted. It makes me feel like the tobacco has control over me and that I've lost control—that's a scary feeling."

▶ "When I started to smoke, I didn't know how dangerous tobacco was—that it is such an addictive drug;

how a chemical in cigarette smoke causes lung cancer; how regular smoking can take 12 to 15 years off my life. I didn't know then what I know now—that tobacco is deadly."

Studies show that when teens can easily obtain tobacco (or other drugs), their chances of using the drugs increase. Therefore, if you as a parent use tobacco, keep the lighter, ashtrays and other paraphernalia out of sight.

Try not to smoke when your children are present; in addition to the negative role modeling, second-hand smoke can have damaging health effects on young people. If you must smoke – take it outside.

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THINKING ABOUT QUITTING?

If you smoke and would like to quit, here are some opportunities to consider:

- Contact the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line at 1-877-270-STOP. This is a toll free call. You will receive a packet of information and the support of a cessation specialist, if you would like.
- Join the “You Can Quit” Tobacco Cessation Program at Saint Michael’s Hospital. This support group is provided at no cost. It meets every Monday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. Contact HEALTHLINE at 346-LINE (5463) for more information.
- Search the following web sites for on line tobacco cessation assistance:
www.lungusa.org/partner/quit
www.quitnet.org
www.quitsmoking.com
- If your child is using tobacco products and would like some support in quitting, contact your school nurse to determine what options are available through the school. Teens may also access the quit line. Remember: 90% of adults who smoke started before the age of 18. Helping your child to quit now could save his/her life!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Find out all you can about tobacco and related issues. Visit www.tobwis.org for current information on tobacco use prevention.
- Join The Tobacco-Free Coalition of Portage County. Call 345-5350 for more information or visit www.co.portage.wi.us/tobacco
- Write your government officials and express your thoughts on smoke-free restaurants and worksites, youth access to tobacco, cigarette taxes, or other issues.
- Have your teen visit any of these youth oriented websites:
www.fightwithfact.com
www.be-free.org
www.tobaccofreekids.com
www.tmvoice.com
www.wholetruth.com
www.okswat.com
www.tobaccoscam.ucsf.edu
www.njrebel.com
www.hadenough.com
www.thetruth.com

***We Asked What Portage County Youth Thought...
And This Is What They Told Us.***

Assets Related to Tobacco Use

The Power of Assets to Protect Against Risk-Taking

Search Institute research, including the Portage County survey, has shown that youth with higher levels of these assets are less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviors. In this case, the specific risk would be tobacco usage.

Percent of Youth Reporting Each Internal Asset, by Grade

| Internal Asset | Grade | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----|----|----|----|----|
| | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Restraint | 75 | 67 | 54 | 34 | 25 | 21 |
| Resistance Skills | 51 | 45 | 40 | 32 | 30 | 33 |
| Responsibility | 63 | 62 | 63 | 55 | 56 | 65 |

Note that the responsibility asset has stayed fairly consistent across the grade levels and has not decreased in relation to tobacco usage. This is one of the first times we've seen this! If you remember in the past, the "power of assets" normally has decreased, as our youth have gotten older. This would look to be a positive point that could be used and built upon for prevention.

Percent of Youth Reporting Tobacco Substance Use, by Asset Level

| Risk-Taking Behavior | | Number of Assets | | | |
|----------------------|---|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Category | Definition | 0 - 10 | 11 - 20 | 21 - 30 | 31 - 40 |
| Tobacco | Smoked cigarettes once or more in the last 30 days | 45 | 19 | 7 | 1 |
| | Used smokeless tobacco once or more in the last 12 months | 27 | 13 | 4 | 0 |

The correlation between the number of assets and usage again shows that the more assets youth have, the less usage! Between zero and one percent of those with 31 to 40 assets indicate using tobacco compared to 45 % with 0-10 assets who smoked once or more in the last 30 days, and 27% who has used smokeless tobacco in the last 12 months with 0-10 assets. It's the "power of assets at work"!

What Next? Moving from Awareness to Action

The Search Institute report provides insights about Portage County youth and can be a powerful tool for community-wide discussions. The good news is that everyone – parents, grandparents, educators, children, teens, youth workers, employers, health care providers, coaches, and others – can build assets. Ideally, the whole community gets involved to ensure that young people have the solid foundation they need to become tomorrow’s competent, caring adults. Some suggestions follow on how to strengthen assets among Portage County youth.

- Establish a clear and firm no-tobacco use policy with your teen with consequences and awards.
- If you must smoke, do not smoke in front of your teen.
- Take time to check in with your teen each day and share how the day went.
- Give your teen opportunities and responsibilities to think and act like an adult.
- When your teen talks to you, really listen. Resist the urge to jump right in with advice. Sometimes, your teen just needs to sort things out by talking out loud to someone. Repeat what you hear that your teen is saying and ask questions to help clarify.
- Talk with your teen about different ways to resist offers to use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. Make sure that your teen knows that he/she can call you anytime and you will come and get him/her.
- Get to know your teen’s friends and their parents. Monitor where your teen goes and whom he/she is with.

Resources: Whose Kids, Our Kids bulletin – UW-Extension, 2001.
Deb Knippel, M.S. Prevention Specialist, Ministry Behavioral Health
“What Kids Need to Succeed; Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids”
by Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., Judy Galbraith, M.A., and Pamela Espeland

The Parenting Newsletter:

The "Whose Kids?...Our Kids" newsletters, are a product of the UWEX Teen Assessment Project. The local data of Portage County youth comes from the 2001 Search Institute Assets Survey.

The Search Institute survey was a joint effort between the Portage County AODA Committee consisting of: Ministry Behavior Health, Portage County Intervention For Youth, Almond-Bancroft Public Schools, Rosholt Public Schools, Stevens Point Area Catholic Schools, Stevens Point Area Public Schools, Tomorrow River Public Schools, Portage County Health and Human Services, Portage County Sheriff's Department, Stevens Point Police Department, UWSP AODA Education Coordinator, Stevens Point Housing Authority, Children's Service Society, Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, Portage County Business Council, United Way, and University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.

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Primary Source:

Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth for Portage County School Districts © 2001 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN. Data collection with the survey *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*, copyright © 1996, Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN. Search Institute is an independent, non-profit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well being of adolescents and children. Search Institute conducts research and evaluation, develops publications and practical tools, and provides training and technical assistance by collaborating with others. They are based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota.