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The Importance of Family Dinners III

September 2006

Sponsored by TV Land and Nick at Nite's
Family Table



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Accompanying Statement by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Chairman and President

For 11 years, CASA has been conducting a back to school survey of the attitudes of teens and those, like parents, who most influence them. While other surveys seek to measure the extent of substance abuse in the population, the CASA back to school survey probes substance abuse risk and identifies factors that increase or diminish the likelihood that teens will smoke, drink or use illegal drugs. We believe that parents, armed with this knowledge, can help their teens grow up drug free.

This nation's drug problem is all about kids. *A child who gets through age 21 without smoking, abusing alcohol or using illegal drugs is virtually certain never to do so.* And no one has more power to prevent kids from using substances than parents. There are no silver bullets; unfortunately, the tragedy of a child's substance abuse can strike any family. But one factor that does more to reduce teens' substance abuse risk than almost any other is parental engagement, and one of the simplest and most effective ways for parents to be engaged in teens' lives is by having frequent family dinners.

This year's survey findings underscore the significance of family dinners as a surrogate for parental engagement. Parents who sit down to dinner five or more times a week with their children are parents who are very involved in their kids' lives. In this day and age, with the high incidence of two-income families and single-parent households, and the increasing demands on kids' time from school and other activities, it is not an easy task to get the whole family together at the dinner table. Those families that make family togetherness a priority are achieving a level of involvement in their children's lives that has a healthy impact on their kids. The parents who make dinners a priority are also, as this year's survey findings demonstrate, likelier to say they take responsibility for preventing their kids from abusing substances.

Family Dinners and Parental Involvement in Kids' Lives

Compared to parents who report having frequent family dinners (five or more per week), parents who say they have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are:

- five times likelier to say they have a fair or poor relationship with their teen;
- one and a half times likelier to say they know the parents of their teen's friends not very well or not at all;
- more than twice as likely to say they do not know the names of their teen's teachers; and
- twice as likely to say that parents deserve not very much blame or no blame at all when a teenager uses illegal drugs.

More than a decade of surveying teens has taught us that parents can significantly reduce their children's risk of using substances by knowing their teen's friends and the parents of their friends, being engaged at their kid's school, and chaperoning their teen's parties, among other things. The remarkable thing about family dinners is that those parents who make it a habit to have frequent dinners with their children are also the parents who are taking these actions that have a major impact on teen substance abuse risk.

Family Dinners and Teen Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use

CASA research has consistently shown that the more often teens have dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. This report, *The Importance of Family Dinners III*, which draws from the results of CASA's 11th annual back to school survey, finds that, compared to teens who have five or more family dinners per week, teens who have two or less are:

- more than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes;
- one and a half times likelier to have tried alcohol; and
- twice as likely to have tried marijuana.

This year we also examined the relationship between family dinners and rates of current smoking and drinking among teens. Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are:

- twice as likely to say they smoke at least one cigarette a day; and
- more than twice as likely to say they get drunk at least once a month.

Frequency of Family Dinners

This year, 58 percent of teens report having dinner with their family at least five times a week, the same proportion as we have observed over the past several years.

Among families that have infrequent family dinners, parents and teens do not always agree on the reasons why dinners are not more frequent:

- The reason most commonly given by teens for why family dinners are not more frequent is because parents work late.
- The reason most commonly given by parents is “conflicting schedules.”

More than one in five parents and teens say they are “too busy” to have dinner together more often. Given the importance of frequent family dinners and the powerful impact parental engagement has in preventing teen substance abuse, families should identify and work to overcome the barriers to frequent family dining. Late work hours, after-school activities and long commutes all come at the expense of valuable family time.

This survey and our prior studies on the subject show a number of important benefits of frequent family dining. For instance, kids who have frequent family dinners are half as likely to smoke cigarettes and marijuana, and one-third less likely to drink alcohol. Teens who dine frequently with their parents are likelier to have parents who take responsibility for teen drug use, and they are 40 percent likelier to say future drug use will never happen.

If I could wave a magic wand to make a dent in the substance abuse problem, I would make sure that every child in America had dinner with his or her parents at least five times a week. There is no more important thing a parent can do. Parental engagement in children's lives is key to ridding our nation of the scourge of substance abuse.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank CASA's *Family Day* media partner, TV Land and Nick at Nite, for sponsoring this report. In 2003, TV Land and Nick at Nite launched *The Family Table: Share More than Meals*, to remind their viewers about the emotional and social benefits that come from taking the time to sit down as a family and talk. TV Land and Nick at Nite's President, Larry W. Jones, understands that a revival of the family dinner in America will do more to curb kids from smoking, drinking and using drugs than any law or public health campaign, and I appreciate his commitment to stimulating this revival.

Chapter I

Introduction

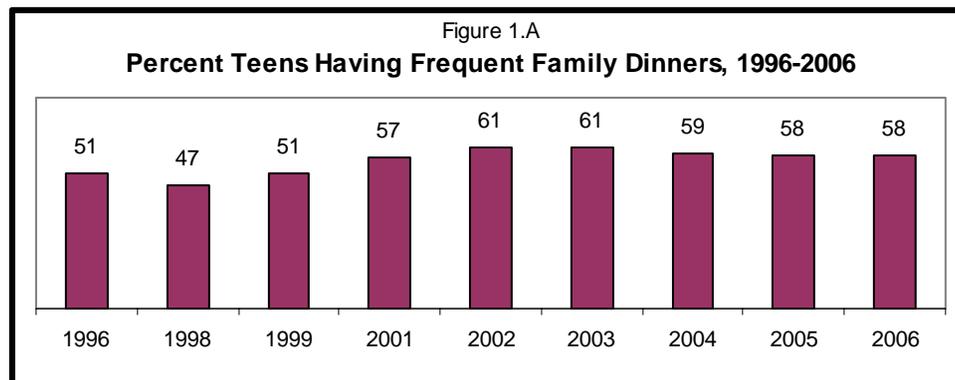
For 11 years, CASA has been surveying the attitudes of teens and those, like parents, who most influence them. On August 17, 2006, CASA released the *National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XI: Teens and Parents*. While other surveys seek to measure the extent of substance abuse in the population, the CASA back to school survey probes substance abuse risk and identifies factors that increase or diminish the likelihood that teens will abuse tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs. The methodology for CASA's 2006 survey is described in Appendix A.

CASA's annual teen survey has consistently shown a tight relationship between the frequency of family dinners and teen substance abuse risk. In 2003, CASA released the first *The Importance of Family Dinners* report, which found that the more often children have dinner with their parents, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. This year we sought to delve deeper into the American family dinner to look at the reasons why some families have dinner together less often, to further examine the relationship between family dinners and other family dynamics, and to probe the impact of family dinners on other risk factors.

We surveyed 1,297 teens, age 12 to 17 (591 boys, 706 girls) and 562 parents of teens, 84 percent of whom (470) are parents of teens who completed the survey.

Frequency of Family Dinners

This year, 58 percent of teens report having dinner with their family at least five times a week, the same proportion we have observed in the past several years, and an increase in family dining from the 1996 CASA survey, when the relationship of frequent family dinners to substance abuse risk was first measured (Figure 1.A).



Fifty-nine percent of parents say they have dinner with their families at least five times a week, which is almost the same proportion as in 2005 (62 percent) and 2004 (61 percent). These figures are consistent with what teens report.

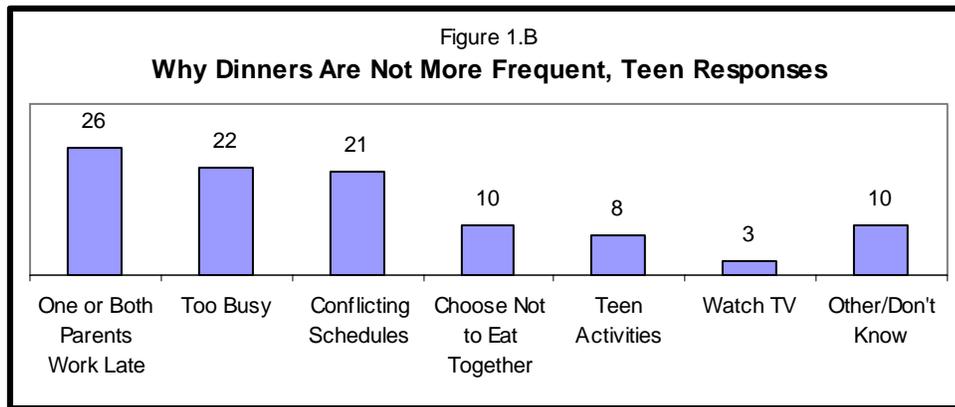
Family dinners mostly take place at home: 91 percent of teens and 94 percent of parents say they have fewer than three family dinners per week at a restaurant or some place other than their home.

Family dinners are also more common than family breakfasts: 17 percent of teens and 13 percent of parents say they eat breakfast with a family member five or more times per week.

Why Dinners Are Not More Frequent

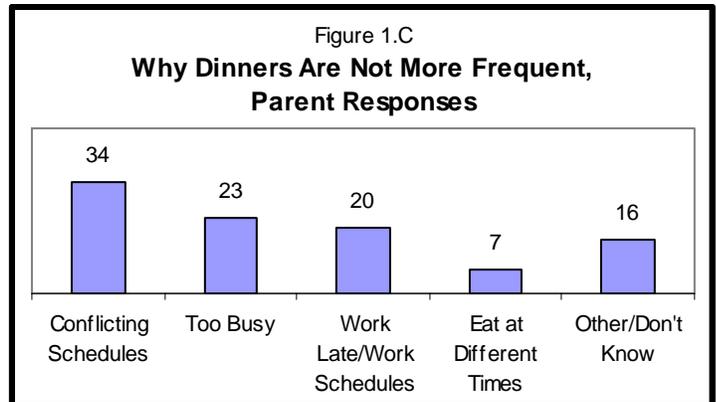
This year for the first time we asked the 24 percent of teens who say they have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three family dinners per week) to tell us the main reason their family does not dine together more often.

One in four (26 percent) say family dinners are not more frequent because one or both parents work late. Twenty-two percent say the family is too busy to get together more often, and 21 percent say that conflicting schedules are to blame for the lack of family dinners. Other responses include: the family chooses not to eat together (10 percent); teen activities interfere (eight percent); and television watching (three percent) (Figure 1.B).

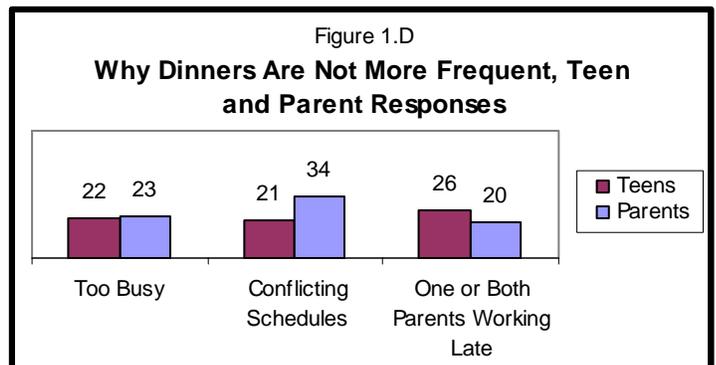


We also asked the 13 percent of parents who say they have infrequent family dinners to tell us the main reason their family does not have dinner together more often.

Thirty-four percent blame conflicting schedules. Twenty-three percent (same as teens, above) say the family is too busy to get together more often, and 20 percent (same as teens, above) say that work schedules are to blame for the lack of family dinners. Seven percent of parents surveyed say that family members prefer to eat at different times (Figure 1.C).



More than one in five parents and teens (22 percent and 23 percent, respectively) say they are too busy to have dinner together more often (Figure 1.D). More parents say the main reason why family dinners are not more frequent is because of conflicting schedules (34 percent) than any other issue. The reason most commonly offered by teens for why dinners are not more frequent is that one or both parents work late (26 percent) (Figure 1.D).



These findings point to some of the barriers to gathering around the dinner table. Given the importance of frequent family dinners and the powerful impact family togetherness has in preventing teen substance abuse, it is imperative that we help families identify and overcome the barriers to frequent family dining-- late work hours, after-school activities, long commutes or other factors.

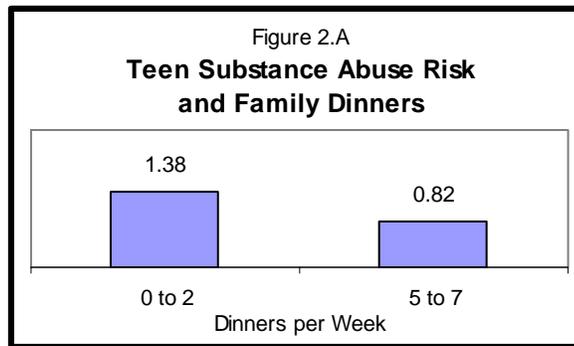
Chapter II

Family Dinners and Teen Substance Use

The CASA strategy for assessing the substance abuse risk of a teenager is described in Appendix B. The average substance abuse risk score for all teens is 1.00, the risk score for a teen who has not tried alcohol, tobacco or marijuana is 0.41, the risk score for a teen who admits to trying alcohol, tobacco or marijuana is 1.09, and the risk score for a teen who admits to trying all three is 3.22.

Family Dinners and Teen Substance Abuse Risk

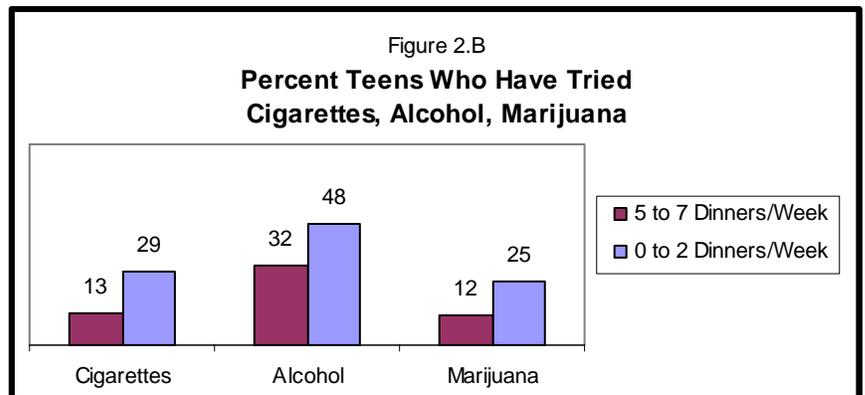
The number of family dinners a teen has in a typical week is a powerful indicator of substance abuse risk. The average risk score of teens having dinner with their families less than three nights in a typical week is one and a half times that of teens having dinner as a family five or more nights per week (1.38 vs. 0.82) (Figure 2.A).



Family Dinners and Teen Smoking, Drinking, Drug Use

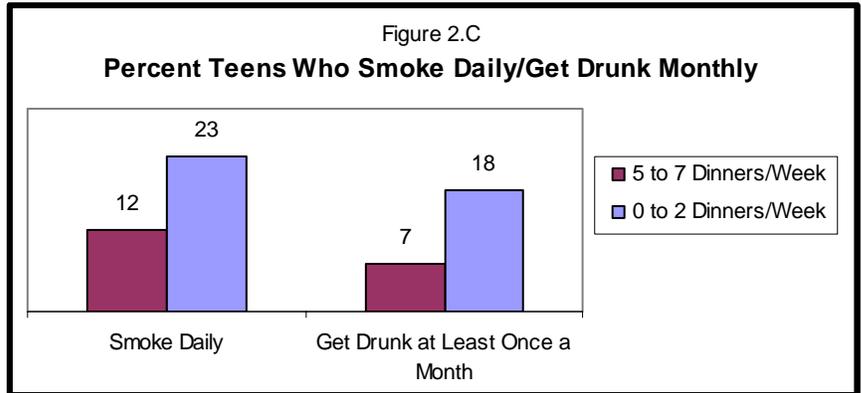
As we have observed in past surveys, frequent family dining is again this year associated with lower rates of trying cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana among teens. Compared to teens who eat dinner frequently with their families (five or more family dinners per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are:

- More than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes (29 percent vs. 13 percent),
- One and a half times likelier to have tried alcohol (48 percent vs. 32 percent), and
- Twice as likely to have tried marijuana (25 percent vs. 12 percent) (Figure 2.B).

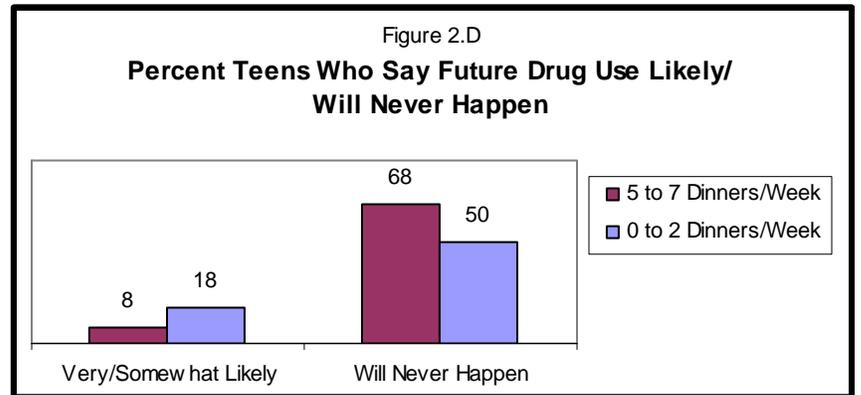


Frequent family dining is also associated with lower rates of current smoking and drinking among teens. Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are:

- Twice as likely to say they smoke at least one cigarette a day (23 percent vs. 12 percent), and
- More than twice as likely to say they get drunk at least once a month (18 percent vs. seven percent) (Figure 2.C).



Teens who have frequent family dinners are 36 percent likelier to say that future drug use will never happen, compared to teens who have infrequent family dinners (68 percent vs. 50 percent) (Figure 2.D).

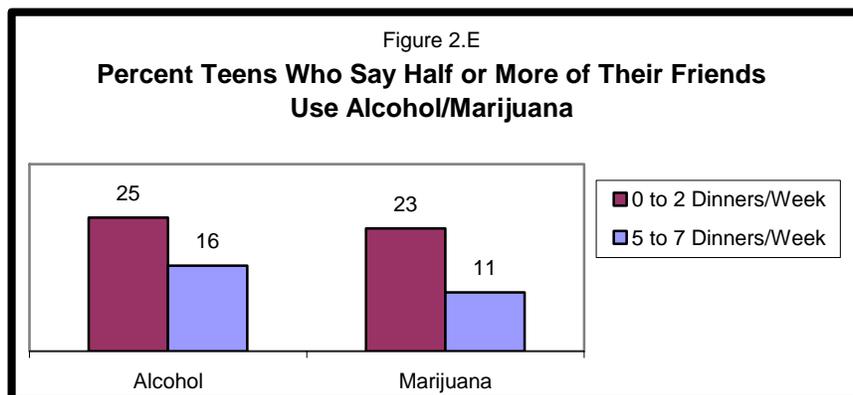


Teens who have infrequent family dinners are more than twice as likely to say that future drug use is very or somewhat likely, compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (18 percent vs. eight percent) (Figure 2.D).

Family Dinners and Teens With Friends Who Use Substances

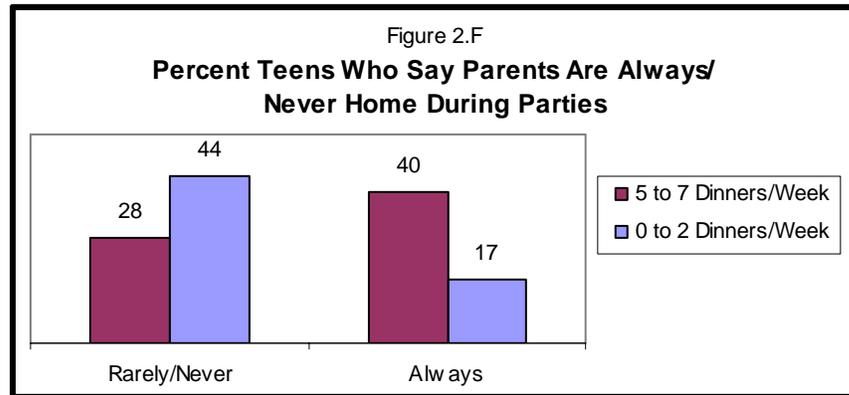
Teens who have infrequent family dinners are twice as likely to report that half or more of their friends use marijuana, compared to teens who have frequent family dinners: 23 percent of teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week say that half or more of their friends use marijuana, compared to 11 percent of teens who have at least five family dinners in a typical week (Figure 2.E).

Teens who have dinner with their families less than three times a week are one and a half times likelier to say half or more of their friends drink alcohol, compared to teens who have dinner with their families at least five times a week (25 percent vs. 16 percent) (Figure 2.E).



Family Dinners and Teen Parties

Teens who report having family dinners five or more times a week are more than twice as likely to say that parents are always home during the house parties they attend (40 percent vs. 17 percent of teens who have infrequent family dinners). Teens who have dinner with their families fewer than three times a week are one and a half times likelier to say that parents are rarely or never present at the house parties they attend (44 percent vs. 28 percent). (Figure 2.F).



These findings are significant because the presence of parents at parties decreases the likelihood that substances will be available: alcohol is 16 times likelier to be available at parties where parents are not present, and drugs (including marijuana, cocaine, Ecstasy, prescription drugs) are 15 times likelier to be available at parties where parents are not present.

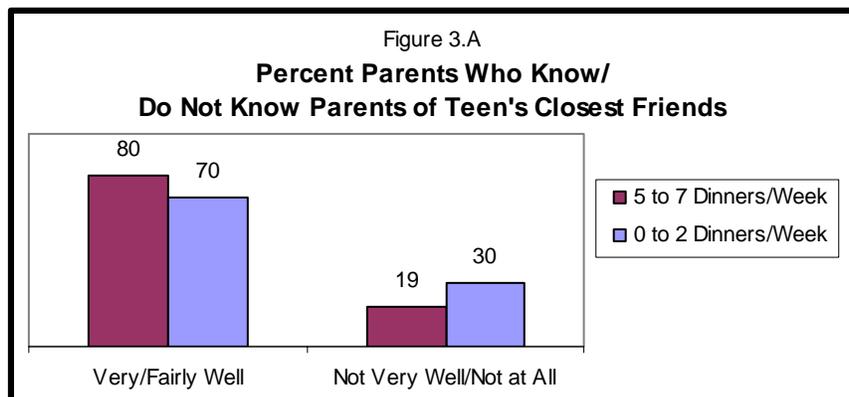
Chapter III

Family Dinners and Family Relationships

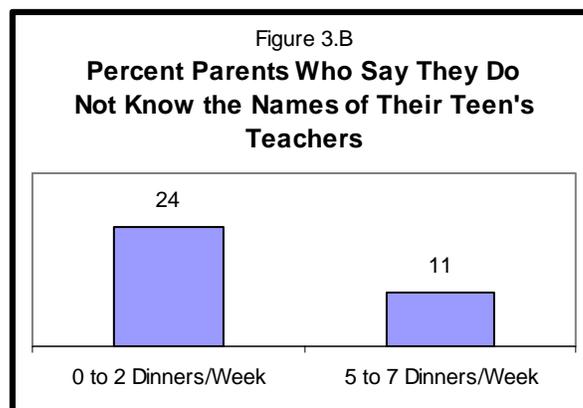
Parental Involvement

Overall, the majority of parents say they know their teens' friends very or fairly well. However, whether or not they know the parents of their teens' friends varies by frequency of dinners. Among families that have frequent family dinners (five or more per week), 80 percent of parents say they know the parents of their teen's closest friends very or fairly well, compared to 70 percent of parents who report having infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) (Figure 3.A).

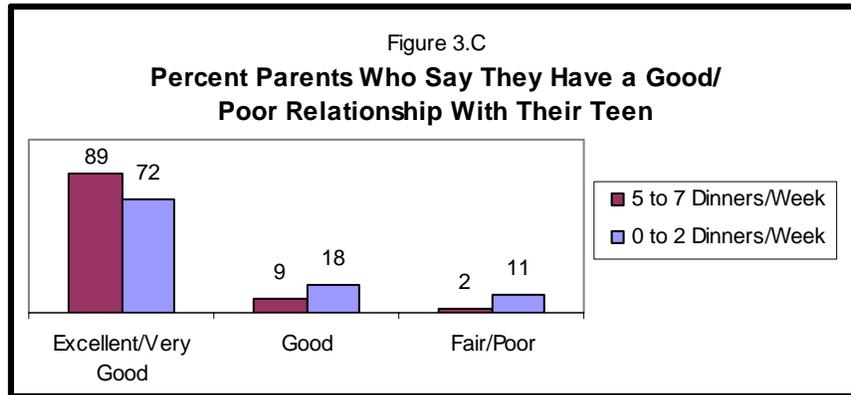
Parents who say they have infrequent family dinners are more than one and a half times likelier to say they know the parents of their teen's closest friends not very well or not at all, compared to parents who say they have frequent family dinners (30 percent vs. 19 percent) (Figure 3.A).



Overall, 14 percent of parents say they do not know the names of their teen's teachers. Parents who report having infrequent family dinners are more than twice as likely to say they do not know the names of their teen's teachers, compared to parents who report having frequent family dinners (11 percent vs. 24 percent) (Figure 3.B).

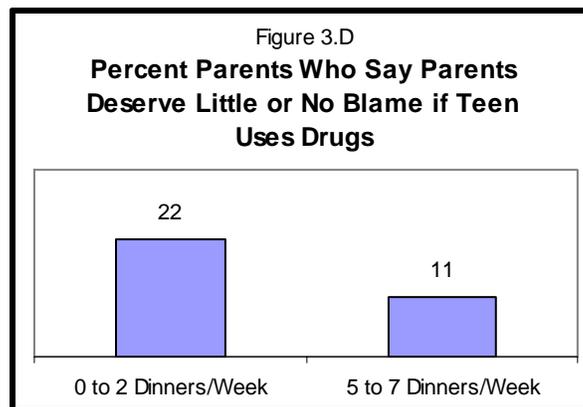


Parents were asked to describe their relationship with their teen. Among parents who say they have infrequent family dinners, 11 percent say they have either a fair or poor relationship with their teen, whereas only two percent of parents who have frequent family dinners say they have a fair or poor relationship with their teen. A vast majority (89 percent) of the parents who have frequent family dinners say they have an excellent or very good relationship with their teen, compared to 72 percent of parents who have infrequent family dinners (Figure 3.C).



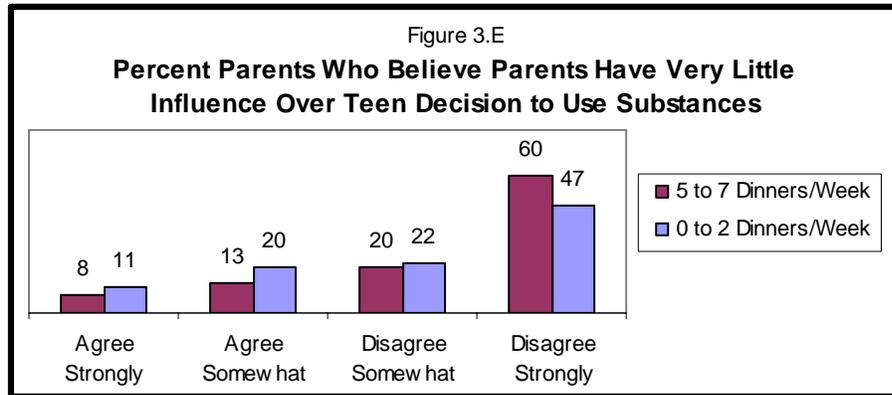
Parents were asked how much responsibility they believe a parent has when a teenager uses illegal drugs: do parents deserve a great deal of blame, a fair amount, not very much, or no blame at all. Overall, 14 percent of parents say parents deserve not very much or no blame at all.

Among parents who say they have frequent family dinners, 11 percent say that parents deserve not very much or no blame at all when a teenager uses illegal drugs, compared to 22 percent of parents that have infrequent family dinners (Figure 3.D).



Parents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the notion that once a child becomes a teenager, parents have very little influence over their decision of whether they will smoke, drink, or try illegal drugs. Twenty-four percent of parents say they agree; 76 percent disagree.

Among parents who have infrequent family dinners, 31 percent agree strongly or somewhat that parents have very little influence over a teen's decision to smoke, drink or try illegal drugs, compared to 21 percent of parents who have frequent family dinners. More than half (60 percent) of parents who have frequent family dinners strongly disagree with the statement that parents have very little influence over whether or not their teen will smoke, drink, or try illegal drugs. Of the parents who have infrequent family dinners, 47 percent strongly disagree with that statement (Figure 3.E).



Chapter IV

Family Dinners and Other Factors Affecting Teen Substance Abuse Risk

Family Dinners and Teen Academic Performance

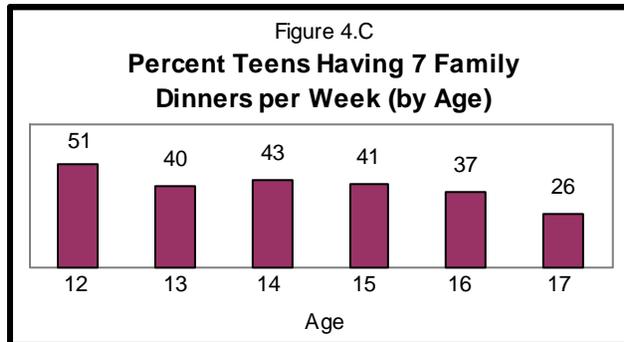
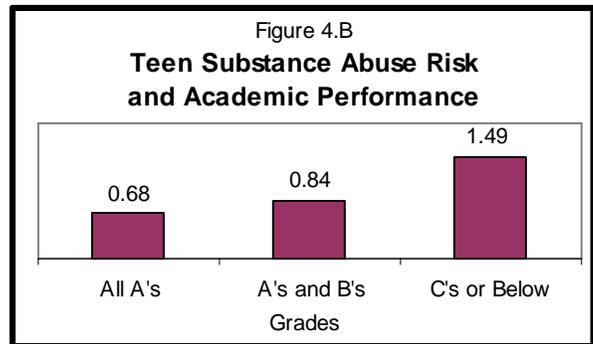
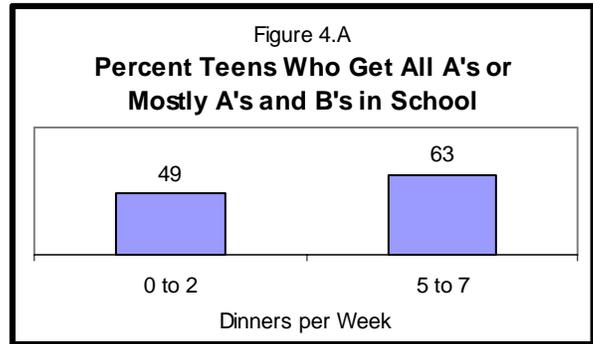
Teens who have frequent family dinners are likelier to report getting better grades in school.

Teens who have dinner with their families five or more times a week are likelier to say they receive either all A's or mostly A's and B's in school compared to teens who have dinner with their families fewer than three times a week (63 percent vs. 49 percent) (Figure 4.A).

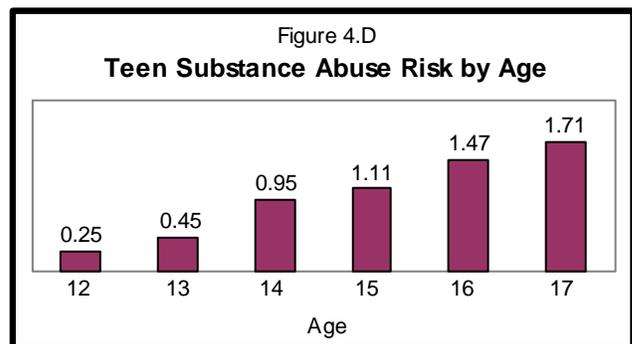
Academic performance is associated with substance abuse risk. Teens who say they typically receive grades of C or lower are at twice the risk of substance abuse as those receiving all A's or A's and B's (1.49 vs. 0.68 and 0.84, respectively) (Figure 4.B).

Family Dinners and Age

The older teens are, the less likely they are to have dinner with their families: Twice as many 12-year olds as 17-year olds report having dinner with their families seven nights in a typical week (51 percent of 12-year olds vs. 26 percent of 17-year olds). (Figure 4.C)



This decline in frequent family dinners from age 12 to 17 is of concern because, as the CASA survey shows, that period is one of sharply increasing risk of substance abuse. Among the youngest age cohort in the CASA survey (12-year olds), the average risk score is 0.25. By the time a teen reaches age 17, the average risk score jumps to 1.71, almost a sevenfold increase. (Figure 4.D).



Appendix A

CASA 2006 Back to School Survey Methodology

The questionnaire for this survey was designed by the staffs of QEV Analytics and CASA. Questions and themes were pre-tested by conducting two focus groups in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with 16- and 17-year old participants who were predominantly Hispanic and African-American (roughly one-third each of Hispanic, African-American and non-Hispanic white teens). The two sessions were segregated by sex and conducted by moderators of the same sex as the participants.

This survey was conducted by telephone, utilizing a random household selection procedure called random digit dialing (RDD), in which a pool of telephone numbers was assembled by a commercial survey sample vendor utilizing extensive information concerning telephone number assignments across the country. Numbers in this initial pool represented all 48 continental states in proportion to their population.

Households were qualified for participation in the survey by determining that a teen between the ages of 12 and 17 lived in the household (see Appendix C for screening questions). At least four call back attempts were made to each telephone number before the telephone number was rejected.

Once a household was qualified as the residence of an eligible teenager, between the ages of 12 to 17, permission for survey participation by the teen was sought from the teen's parent or guardian. After permission was obtained, if the potential teen participant was available, the teen interview was attempted. If the potential teen participant was not available at the time of the initial contact with the parent or guardian, then the parent/guardian interview was attempted, and a call back was scheduled for the teen interview.

In total, 1,297 teenagers and 562 parents of teenagers were interviewed between March 9 and April 30, 2006. The margin of sampling error for the teen survey is ± 3 percent at a 95 percent confidence level (meaning, were it possible to interview all teenagers in the country between the ages of 12 and 17, the results would vary by no more than ± 3 percent, 19 times out of 20, from what was found in this survey).

All of the 562 parents interviewed reside in households in which a parent gave consent for their teen to be interviewed (even though the teen interview may not have been completed). 470 parental interviews were conducted in households in which a teen interview was accomplished. In the 92 cases in which a parental interview was completed but not a teen interview, the cause was typically the persistent unavailability of the teen.

The data collection process was supervised by QEV Analytics, Ltd. of Washington, DC. The survey analysis was done by Steven Wagner, President of QEV Analytics, Ltd. and Elizabeth Planet and Amy Shlosberg of CASA.

Complete results of CASA's 2006 survey--the *CASA National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XI: Teens and Parents*--can be found at <http://www.casacolumbia.org>.

Appendix B

How CASA Calculates Teen Substance Abuse Risk

Through 11 surveys conducted over 12 years, CASA has been surveying public opinion on substance abuse, seeking answers to the question: “Why do some teenagers drink, smoke and use illegal substances while others do not?”

This survey continues an analysis aimed at revealing factors that contribute to teens’ risk of smoking, drinking and using drugs. Some of these factors--including their family dynamics, their parents’ involvement in their lives, their friends’ substance use, and their school and neighborhood environments--tend to cluster, such that teens with problems in one area of their life often have problems in others as well. Nevertheless, by identifying individual risk factors, we seek to help parents (and other adults who influence teens) better identify those who are most vulnerable to substance abuse, and develop strategies to diminish their risk.

Although this survey includes some questions on substance use, it is not intended to be an epidemiological study of substance abuse. For measurements of the actual prevalence of drug and other substance usage there are other sources of data, including the *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System* (conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), the *Monitoring the Future Study* (conducted at the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the National Institutes of Health), and the *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

This survey was conducted by telephone in the United States. The 1,297 teens (ages 12 to 17) who responded were among a randomly selected nationally representative frame. Despite assurances of confidentiality, we assume that some teenage respondents will be reluctant to admit illegal activities over the telephone to someone unknown to them. Therefore, this survey--like any telephone survey asking respondents to self-report proscribed behaviors--presents conservative estimates of the extent of the use of illegal drugs, the consumption of tobacco products and alcohol by teenagers, and other negative behaviors, and over-reports positive behaviors. The parental permission requirement may also contribute to under-reporting.*

The CASA strategy for assessing the substance abuse risk of a teenage respondent is to measure the prevalence of tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs in the teen’s daily life. To measure the respondent’s substance abuse risk, we use a statistical procedure called factor analysis to combine a teen’s response to eight survey questions (see Table B.1) yielding a “substance abuse risk score” for each teen respondent. This risk score then becomes our key dependent

Table B.1
The Eight CASA Indicators of Teenage Substance Abuse Risk

1. How often have you smoked cigarettes during the past 30 days? (Questions 48)
2. How many of your friends drink alcoholic beverages? (Question 49)
3. How often do you get drunk? (Questions 52)
4. How many of your friends use marijuana? (Question 66)
5. Do you know a friend or classmate who uses acid, cocaine or heroin? (Question 53)
6. How long would it take you to buy marijuana? (Question 67)
7. Have you ever tried marijuana? (Question 68)
8. How likely is it that you will try illegal drugs in the future? (Question 70)

* See Fendrich, M., & Johnson, T. P. (2001). Examining prevalence differences in three national surveys of youth: Impact of consent procedures, mode, and editing rules. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 31(3), 615-642.

variable, the phenomenon we seek to explain by reference to the other responses and characteristics of the teen and his or her parent.

To put this risk score in context, the average risk score for all teens is 1.00; the risk score for a teen who has not tried alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana is 0.41; the risk score for a teen who admits to having tried alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana is 1.09; and the risk score for a teen who admits to having tried all three is 3.22. This risk variable represents our inference of respondent risk, since risk cannot be measured directly in a survey.

The calculated substance abuse risk score is highly related to the age of the teen respondent. When another risk factor--for example, frequency of dinners with family--is related to both the substance abuse risk score and also to age, it is important to insure that the observed relationship between this second risk factor and the substance abuse risk score is not just a function of age. In such cases, when we describe a relationship between a risk factor and the substance abuse risk score, we test to insure that the relationship is not spurious, using a statistical technique called analysis of variance (ANOVA). Using this technique, we can test to make sure that a relationship between two variables (e.g. frequency of family dinners and the substance abuse risk score) continues to exist even after controlling for age.