

Learning how to say 'no' to alcohol advertising and peer pressure works for inner-city adolescents

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Teens who can recognize and resist the persuasive tactics used in alcohol ads are less likely to succumb to alcohol advertising and peer pressure to drink.

The results of a three-year study of inner-city middle school students by Weill Cornell Medical College researchers appears online in the journal *Addictive Behaviors* (April print edition). Previous research has shown the connection between advertising and adolescent alcohol, use as well as the influence of peers in promoting adolescent alcohol use.

"There are many pressures on teens to drink. One very powerful influence is advertising -- from television to billboards, it's everywhere. Our study found their ability to be critically aware of advertising as well as their ability to resist peer pressure are both key skills for avoiding alcohol," says Dr. Jennifer A. Epstein, lead author and assistant professor of public health in the Division of Prevention and Health Behavior at Weill Cornell Medical College.

Results were taken from surveys of over 2,000 predominantly African-American adolescents from 13 inner-city junior high schools in New York City over three years. The study found that seventh graders better able to be critically aware of advertising -- something the study terms "media resistance skills" -- were significantly less likely to drink alcohol as ninth graders.

These same seventh graders were more likely to have developed better skills for resisting peer pressure by the eighth grade, further reducing their likelihood of drinking. Armed with media resistance and peer refusal skills (saying "no"), these students were less likely to succumb to advertising and peer pressure to drink alcohol subsequently in the ninth grade.

Alcohol is the number one drug of choice in this country and among our nation's youth. A recent report by the Surgeon General found that despite laws against it, underage drinking is deeply embedded in American culture, viewed as a rite of passage and facilitated by adults.

"Our findings point to the need for prevention programs that teach adolescents media resistance skills and peer refusal skills to reduce the likelihood that they will succumb to the powerful dual influences of alcohol advertising and peer pressure," says Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin, the senior author; professor of psychology in public health and professor of psychology in psychiatry; and chief of the Public Health Department's Division of Prevention and Health Behavior.

Dr. Botvin, who developed the award-winning Life Skills Training (LST) substance-abuse prevention program for junior high and middle school students more than 25 years ago, continuously works with his colleagues to refine and disseminate the program through research and teaching. (Dr. Botvin has a financial interest in LST, and his consulting company provides training and technical assistance for the program.)

Source: New York- Presbyterian Hospital

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