

Alcohol warnings from parents matter

January 8 2015, by Bert Gambini



When it comes to adolescents and drinking, the message that parents send matters, says UB psychologist Craig Colder. Credit: Douglas Levere

Parenting practices and restrictions when it comes to alcohol use can make a difference with adolescent drinking, and there is considerable value to consistent and sustained parental attitudes about drinking, according to new research by a University at Buffalo psychologist.

This study, however, shows that those same parents who communicate the risks of [alcohol](#) use with their [young children](#) are often less likely to

continue those discussions as their [kids](#) get older, a result suggesting that parents shouldn't underestimate the impact of maintaining that messaging as their children move through adolescence, according to Craig Colder.

His study, "A latent growth curve analysis of alcohol-use specific parenting and adolescent alcohol use," was published in the December issue of *Addictive Behaviors*.

Colder says a parent's attitude affects a kid's attitude, and subsequently [drinking](#) in general.

"What our data are suggesting is that you can't control all of your kids' decisions, but you can help them to make good choices in situations where alcohol is available," said Colder. "You want kids to think about and reflect upon the pros and cons of drinking based on your previous discussions."

Most of the literature on adolescent alcohol use has been driven by the kinds of attitudes that predict drinking, but little work has been done on how these attitudes form. That was the genesis for this project, according to Colder. "We wanted to understand how kids' attitudes develop."

Though evidence shows that restrictive household rules against alcohol use discourage children from drinking, parents tend to shift those rules over time, along with the attitudes they project to their kids about drinking. The rules slacken as children get older; the consequences of breaking those rules become less severe; and parents spend less time with their kids discussing alcohol use and its associated dangers.

"We found a correlation between the shifting of those three aspects of parenting and increases in alcohol use," said Colder. "The more rapid

those declines, the more rapid the increase in the onset of alcohol use."

The study used three annual assessments of [parents](#) and the target adolescent. For the first assessment, subjects were 10- or 11-years-old, an age before most kids initiate drinking. Researchers asked questions about drinking and the family environment. One year later, the subjects were interviewed again, and then interviewed a third time after another year had passed.

"The research is correlational in nature, which has implications for how we can interpret causality. We're not manipulating parenting in an experimental way. We're looking at what's happening in the naturalistic environment. It's called a passive correlation design," said Colder. "We're just observing two things that happen over time and determining if they're related to each other And these two things are related."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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