

Family Structure, Father Closeness, and Drug Abuse

A Report from National Fatherhood Initiative

This report examines the relationships between adolescent drug use and the types of family structures in which adolescents live. It addresses *why* certain family structures tend to produce lower levels of risk for adolescent drug use, with an emphasis on the role that father involvement plays in helping adolescents avoid risky behavior. Drug use is broken down into four categories: smoking, drinking, hard drugs, and inhalants.

Major Findings

- The closer adolescents feel to their fathers, regardless of the type of family structure in which they live, the less likely it is that they will engage in the use of drugs.
- The highest levels of closeness between adolescents and both their fathers and their mothers are found in intact families. Father closeness decreases in blended (step) families, is even lower in single-parent families, and is lowest in no-parent families.
- Given that father closeness reduces adolescent drug use, and that father closeness is highest in intact families, adolescents in intact families are at the lowest level of risk for engaging in drug use. The level of risk of adolescent drug use increases in blended families, is still higher in single-parent families, and is highest in no-parent families.
- Negative peer influence, an important factor in assessing the risk for adolescent drug use, is lowest in intact families, where both mother and father closeness are at their highest levels. In other words, adolescents who are close to their moms and dads have less of a need to seek out affirming relationships outside of the home, which can lead to risky behavior.
- On measures of smoking, drinking, and the use of inhalants, father closeness has independent, positive, and powerful effects on adolescents. On the other hand, there is no direct correlation between mother closeness and any of the measures of adolescent drug use. In other words, efforts to reduce adolescent drug use must emphasize the strengthening of father-adolescent relationships, regardless of the type of family structure in which the adolescent lives. The strengthening of father-adolescent relationships is especially important for the millions of adolescents living in father-absent homes, where limited contact with nonresident fathers is inadequate.

For full studies, visit: www.fatherhood.org/research.htm



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