

Talk It Up! Column

The Community Survey Results Are In!

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Orange Partnership for Alcohol and Drug Free Youth, through the assistance of coalition members, conducted a community survey throughout the county over the course of six months between 2018-2019. Responses were gathered through a variety of sources, with help from Orange County Health Department, DSS, OP coalition members, youth ADAPT team members and social media. The survey collected 516 responses from residents of Hillsborough and rural Orange County on youth alcohol, marijuana and prescription (Rx) medication access and misuse. Part of our efforts in working to create a safe and healthy environment for the youth that live in Orange County is not just to collect and use this information for OP's work, but to share it back to partners and *you* - our community.

The key findings from the survey responses indicate that:

- 1) People of all ages in Hillsborough and rural Orange county perceive that use of these substances by youth is harmful.
- 2) Youth access to alcohol, marijuana and Rx medication is easy in our community.
- 3) Parents and youth report differently the frequency with which parents/guardians talk to youth about these substances.

Let's look closer at each of these, starting with alcohol-related questions. The majority of adults and youth reported that it is easy/very easy for youth to get alcohol (69% of adults; 78% of youth). Relatedly, 1 out of every 4 adults, and over a third (37%) of youth, reported knowing people in the community that provide alcohol to minors. Also, almost one third of adults (31%) and more than half of youth (57%) said they know people in the community that allow underage youth to drink on their property. When it comes to talking with youth about underage drinking and alcohol, just over half of adults who are parents reported talking frequently to their youth about the harmful effects of alcohol, while only a third of youth reported that their parents frequently talk to them about this topic

Interestingly, the majority of both adults and youth (75% and 67% respectively) said their community feels it is wrong or very wrong for youth to use alcohol. This suggests a fascinating dichotomy. While our community generally knows and/or feels that underage drinking is not ok, there are still quite a few points of access that make it easy for youth to engage in underage drinking.

Next we looked at marijuana. Similar to underage drinking, the majority of both adults (73%) and youth (62%) said their community feels it is wrong or very wrong for youth to use marijuana. Yet at the same time, almost 3 out of every 4 adults and youth reported that it is easy or very easy for youth to get marijuana. There was, again, a difference in perception between parents and youth about how often the dangers of marijuana use are talked about. Almost half of adults who are parents reported talking frequently to their youth about the harmful effects of marijuana, while less than a quarter of youth reported that their parents frequently talk to them about this topic.

Last, we looked at Rx medication misuse, specified as ones not prescribed to you by a medical professional. According to the survey responses, the majority of both adults (90%) and youth (73%) said

their community feels it is wrong or very wrong for youth to use Rx medications not prescribed to them. Relatedly, over 90% of both adults and youth reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that sharing prescriptions with family and friends is ok. However, 64% of adults and 53% of youth reported that access to Rx medications (not prescribed to them) for youth is easy or very easy. A follow-up question suggests a potential explanation for why access is so possible; over half of both adults and youth report that medications in their home are not secured or locked up in any way. The numbers for reported parent-youth communication about Rx medication are almost exactly the same as with marijuana. Almost half of adults who are parents report talking frequently to their youth about the harmful effects of marijuana, while less than a quarter (21%) of youth reported that their parents frequently talk to them about this topic.

So, what are the main takeaways? It is clear that people of all ages perceive that the use of these substances by underage people/youth is harmful; however, access is reportedly easy. Where is the breakdown between this knowledge and the provision of/access to these substances happening? Let's take note of this contradiction and work to prevent that access in the ways that are available to us. There are some basic and easy things that we can each do, personally, to affect change in this area. Things like securing alcohol and medications in the home, safely disposing of them when we no longer need them, and not providing any of these substances to youth or underage people. Another key consistency throughout was the difference in perception between how often youth report adults talk with them about the dangers of misusing these substances and how often adults report talking to youth about these topics. We must remember that our youth are getting messages daily from many different sources, including social media, music, peers and the parents of their peers. Clearly, repetition is critical to make sure the message is clear. Is your voice the one being heard? To learn more about how to talk with kids in your life, go to www.orangepartnership.org or visit us on Facebook at Safe Homes Network of Orange County or Twitter @OPYouthVoice.