



# Survey shows parents and students not on same page about underage alcohol use

By Anastasia E. Lennon / The Patriot Ledger

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The survey, issued by Safe Harbor Cohasset Coalition, was created to determine parents' perceptions about the nature and extent of underage substance use, gauge their attitudes, and determine their knowledge and involvement regarding their children and substance use.

COHASSET — Results of a 2019 survey show a disparity between students and parents over whether they've shared "the talk" about underage drinking.

The survey, issued by Safe Harbor Cohasset Coalition, was created to determine parents' perceptions about the nature and extent of underage substance use, gauge their attitudes and determine their knowledge and involvement regarding their children and substance use.

This is the first time Safe Harbor has administered this survey, according to Christopher Colleran, the project coordinator for the coalition. It was created to supplement or expand upon some of the data the coalition has seen in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is administered every few years by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"During freshman year, 87 percent of students answered that their parents felt it would be 'wrong or very wrong' for them to drink and that decreased to 47 percent by senior year," Colleran said, citing the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. "So the goal was to talk to parents and see if these perceptions students have are actually true."

The 284 Safe Harbor survey respondents were parents with children in Cohasset middle and high schools and Deer Hill Elementary School, although the majority had children in high school. Parents were questioned about four substances - alcohol, marijuana, vaping and prescription drugs

According to the survey, 68 percent of all respondents reported talking with their children about alcohol use. That percentage goes up when filtered for parents of high school students. About 83 percent reported they talked to their child about alcohol. For parents of middle school students, 76 percent said they spoke to their child about alcohol.

From the students' perspective, that number drops to 40 percent of high school students and 28 percent of middle school students who say their parents talked to them about alcohol, according to the 2018-2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Colleran said the data (particularly the discrepancies) suggests the need to educate parents about how to have a conversation with their child about underage drinking.

"Your children are saying you're not having the conversation, so how do we make it obvious you're having a serious conversation with kid about alcohol?" he said. "Parents could be over-exaggerating, students might not be paying attention, or somewhere in between."

"This advises us that while parents say these conversations are happening, they're clearly not really getting through to the children," Colleran said.

As part of the survey, parents were also asked to provide suggestions or comments. These included requests for workshops about how to display good behavior as parents, scare tactics, such as bringing in presenters who have suffered with addiction, and installing vape detectors in school.

In response to substances becoming "more or much more" of a problem over time, vaping concerns had an overwhelming majority with 91 percent, even though about 90 percent of respondents reported there were no vaping products in the household.

Because the survey was taken in September 2019, Colleran attributes that high percentage to the vaping ban last fall, when many were hospitalized after they used vape pods that contained Vitamin E acetate.

"People were dying from vaping but we didn't really know the cause, so while we do think parents are concerned about vaping, we wonder if that number was over-exaggerated," he said. "That's not to say we're not going to focus on vaping, but we're not sure if it's reflective of parents' concern."