



The National Center on  
Addiction and Substance Abuse  
at Columbia University

633 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10017-6706

phone 212 841 5200  
fax 212 956 8020  
www.casacolumbia.org

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## The Importance of Family Dinners V

September 2009

Conducted by QEV Analytics, Ltd.

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## Accompanying Statement by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Founder and Chairman

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More than a decade of research at The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University has consistently found that the more often children have dinner with their parents, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs.

Simply put: Dinner makes a difference.

In this report, *The Importance of Family Dinners V*, we probed the link between the frequency of family dinners and teens' substance use, their access to substances, their relationship with their parents, and the signals they receive from their parents about substance use. We also took a closer look at the quality of dinners teens are having with their parents, and the impact of distractions such as cell phones, Blackberries and other electronic devices at the table.

The findings presented in this report come from *The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XIV: Teens and Parents*, which CASA released on August 26, 2009. We surveyed 1,000 teens, age 12 to 17 (509 boys, 491 girls), and 452 of the parents of these teens. The methodology for CASA's 2009 survey is described in Appendix A. Elizabeth Planet, CASA's Vice President and Director of Special Projects, managed this complex undertaking.

This 14th annual "back-to-school survey" continues CASA's unique effort to track attitudes of teens and those, like parents, who influence them. Through this survey we have identified factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of teen substance abuse. Armed with this knowledge, parents, teachers, clergy, coaches and other responsible adults have been better able to help our nation's teens grow up drug free.

We regard this as a work in progress as we try each year to improve our ability to identify those situations and characteristics that influence the risk that a teen will smoke, drink, get drunk, use illegal drugs, or abuse prescription drugs.

Over the past decade and a half of surveying thousands of American teens and their parents, we have discovered that one of the most effective ways parents can keep their kids from using substances is by sitting down to dinner with them.

Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are:

- twice as likely to use tobacco or marijuana; and
- more than one and a half times likelier to use alcohol.

The research shows clearly how important it is to get to the dinner table with your kids. And it is also important for parents to give kids their undivided attention--and to get theirs.

Teens who have infrequent dinners are likelier to say people at the table are talking or texting on cell phones or using other devices at the table such as Blackberries, laptops or Game Boys. Teens in households where dinners are infrequent and such distractions are present at the table are:

- three times likelier to use marijuana and tobacco; and
- two and a half times likelier to use alcohol.

The message for parents could not be any clearer: turn off your cell phone (and tell your kids to do the same), and make a regular date with your kids. Let them know how important they are to you. Listen to what they have to say.

The bad news in this year's survey is that 69 percent of teens and parents who aren't having frequent family dinners are too busy with work and other activities to get around the table. But the good news is that two-thirds of teens and three-quarters of parents would be willing to give up a weeknight activity to have dinner with their family.

Our research findings on the importance of family dinners inspired us in 2001 to create an annual, national day of celebration, *CASA Family Day—A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™*. Family Day is celebrated every year on the fourth Monday in September, as a reminder to parents of the importance of family dinners. In 2009, Family Day will be celebrated on September 28<sup>th</sup>.

The president, the governors of all the states, and more than a thousand cities and counties all across America recognize the importance of family dinners by proclaiming and supporting Family Day. Hundreds of community organizations, churches, schools, and social centers celebrate Family Day. For more information about Family Day, and for ideas about how to make dinner together fun, visit our website at [www.CASAFamilyDay.org](http://www.CASAFamilyDay.org).

If you make every day Family Day, you will take a giant step toward raising your children to be emotionally and physically healthy.

# Chapter I

## The Importance of Family Dinners

### Frequency of Family Dinners

This year, 59 percent of teens (and 62 percent of their parents) report having dinner with their families at least five times a week, the same proportion we have observed in the past several years, and an increase in family dining from the 1996 CASA survey, when the relationship of frequent family dinners to substance abuse risk was first detected. (Figure 1.A)

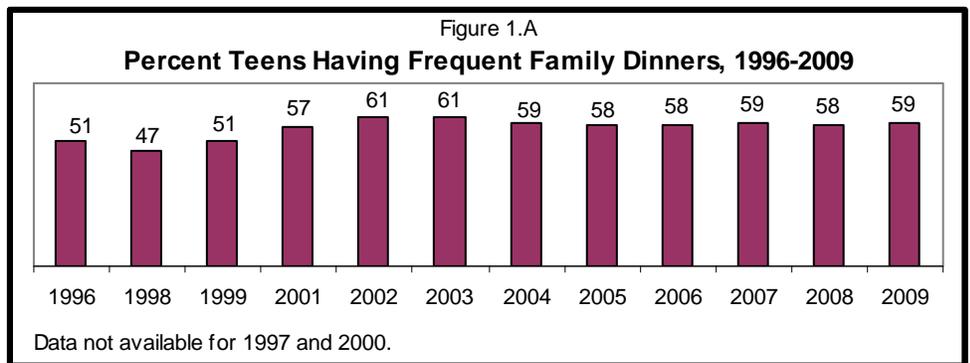


Table 1.1  
Percentage Teens/Parents Who Say Dinner Not More Frequent Because...

	Teens	Parents
<i>(Multiple responses accepted)</i>		
Too busy/different activities	35%	35%
At work/late shifts	34%	34%
Family members not home/out	12%	8%
Involved in sports	8%	20%
Everyone wants to do their own thing	7%	2%
With friends/girlfriend/boyfriend	7%	6%
Family argues/not close	3%	
School activities		10%
Extracurricular/recreation activities		9%

### Why Aren't Family Dinners More Frequent?

We asked teens and parents who have fewer than five family dinners per week, "What are some of the reasons you and your family do not have dinner together more often?"

A comparison of the top response categories of teens and parents follow: (Table 1.1)

### Family Dinners More Frequent When Parents Were Growing Up

Three-quarters of the parents we surveyed (77 percent) say that when they were growing up they had family dinners five or more nights in a typical week. Today, 62 percent say they have frequent family dinners with their kids.

## Teens and Parents Want More Family Dinners

Two-thirds of teens (65 percent) and three-quarters of parents (75 percent) say they would be willing to give up a weeknight activity if it meant they could have dinner with their family.

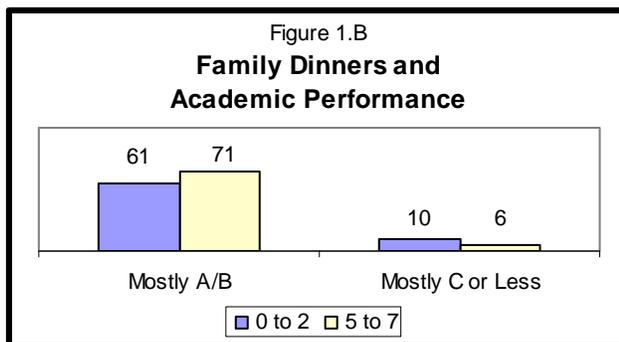
## How Long Does Dinner Last?

On average, family dinners last 35 minutes. Twenty-eight percent of teens say their family dinners usually last less than half an hour, 34 percent say they last half an hour, and 35 percent of teens say their family dinners usually last more than half an hour.

## Family Dinners and Academic Performance

Teens who report typically receiving grades of C's or below in school are likelier to smoke, drink and use drugs compared to teens who typically receive all A's or A's and B's in school.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are one and a half times likelier to report getting mostly C's or lower grades in school. (Figure 1.B)



## Chapter II

# The Relationship Between Family Dinners, Teen Substance Use and Availability of Substances

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### Family Dinners and Teen Substance Use

As frequency of family dinners increases, reported drinking, smoking and drug use decreases.

Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven family dinners per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are twice as likely to have used tobacco or marijuana, and more than one and a half times likelier to have used alcohol. (Table 2.1)

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Table 2.1  
**Percentage Teens Who Have Tried...**

	0 to 2 dinners/week	5 to 7 dinners/week
Alcohol	44%	25%
Tobacco	20%	10%
Marijuana	25%	12%

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The relationship between the frequency of family dinners and substance use is especially strong among the youngest teens in the survey.

Compared to 12- and 13-year olds who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are six times likelier to have used marijuana, four times likelier to have used tobacco, and three times likelier to have used alcohol.

## Teen Substance Use Likelier When Family Dinners Are Infrequent and Distracted

Teens who have infrequent family dinners are likelier to say there are distractions at the table.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are one and a half times likelier to say someone is usually either talking or texting on a cell phone at the table or using a Blackberry, laptop or Game Boy.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are almost five times likelier to say both kinds of distractions are present. (Table 2.2)

Table 2.2  
**Percentage Teens Who Say There Are Distractions At The Dinner Table...**

	0 to 2 dinners/week	5 to 7 dinners/week
Someone is EITHER talking/texting on cell phone OR using a Blackberry, laptop or Game Boy	30%	20%
Someone is BOTH talking/texting on cell phone AND using a Blackberry, laptop or Game Boy	14%	3%

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week without distractions at the table, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week and say there are distractions at the table are three times likelier to have used marijuana (12 percent vs. 40 percent) and tobacco (nine percent vs. 31 percent), and two and a half times likelier to have used alcohol (25 percent vs. 63 percent).

## Family Dinners and Having Friends Who Use Substances

Teens who have frequent family dinners are less likely to report having friends who use substances.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are likelier to have friends who drink regularly and use marijuana or other illegal drugs, or misuse prescription drugs. (Table 2.3)

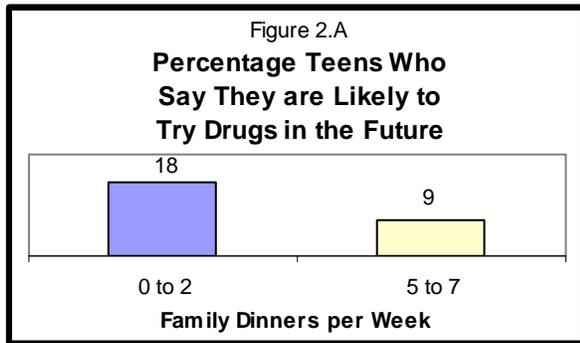
Table 2.3  
**Percentage Teens With Friends Who...**

	0 to 2 dinners/week	5 to 7 dinners/week
Drink monthly	62%	36%
Use marijuana	55%	28%
Use illegal drugs such as acid, cocaine, heroin	42%	31%
Misuse prescription drugs	33%	20%
Use ecstasy	30%	16%
Use meth	22%	13%

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week without distractions at the table, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week and say there are distractions at the table are nearly three times likelier to have friends who use marijuana (26 percent vs. 73 percent) and more than twice as likely to have friends who misuse prescription drugs (18 percent vs. 41 percent).

## The Relationship Between Family Dinners and the Likelihood of Future Substance Use

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are twice as likely to say they expect to try drugs in the future. (Figure 2.A)



Parents who have dinner with their kids fewer than three nights per week are twice as likely to say their child is likely to use drugs in the future, compared to parents who have five or more dinners with their kids each week.

## Family Dinners and Teens' Access to Marijuana and Prescription Drugs

Teens who have infrequent family dinners are likelier to say they have ready access to marijuana and prescription drugs.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more than twice as likely to say they can get marijuana in an hour, and one and a half times likelier to say they can get prescription drugs (to get high) in an hour. (Table 2.4)

Table 2.4  
**Percentage Teens Who Can Get Marijuana, Prescription Drugs in an Hour**

	0 to 2 dinners/week	5 to 7 dinners/week
Can get marijuana in an hour	37%	17%
Can get prescription drugs (to get high) in an hour	27%	18%



## Chapter III

### Family Dinners and Family Relationships

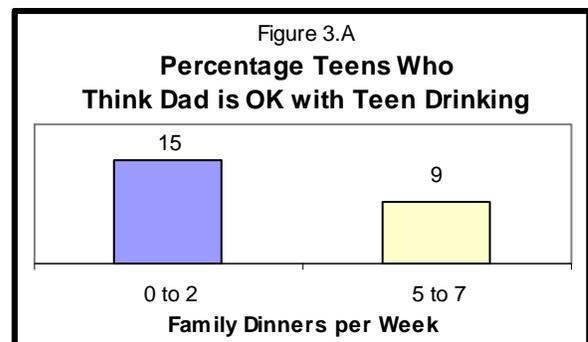
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#### Family Dinners and Parents' Attitudes About Teen Drinking

We asked teens this year how they think their fathers feel about their drinking: are their fathers okay with their drinking, or are they against their drinking?

Teens who think their fathers are okay with their drinking are likelier to drink and get drunk than teens who believe their fathers are against their drinking.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more than one and a half times likelier to think their father is okay with them drinking. (Figure 3.A)



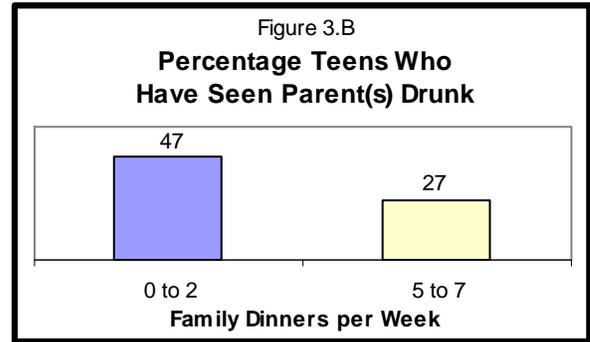
#### Family Dinners and Parents' Drinking Behavior

We asked teens this year whether they have seen one or both of their parents drunk. Thirty-four percent of teens report having witnessed one or both of their parents drunk, and the same proportion of parents confirm this.

Teens who have seen their parent(s) drunk are likelier to drink and get drunk than teens who have not seen their parent(s) drunk. They are also likelier to try cigarettes and marijuana.

As family dinners become less frequent, the likelihood that the teen has seen their parent(s) drunk rises.

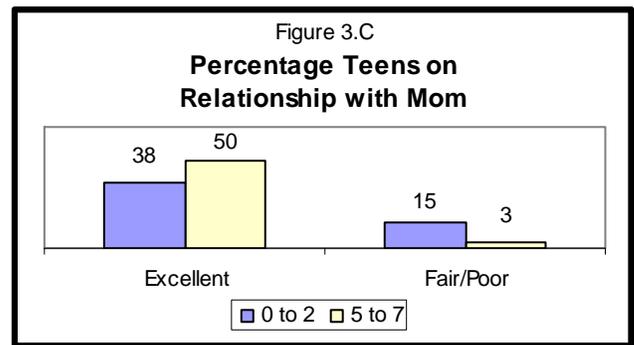
Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more than one and a half times likelier to have seen their parent(s) drunk. (Figure 3.B)



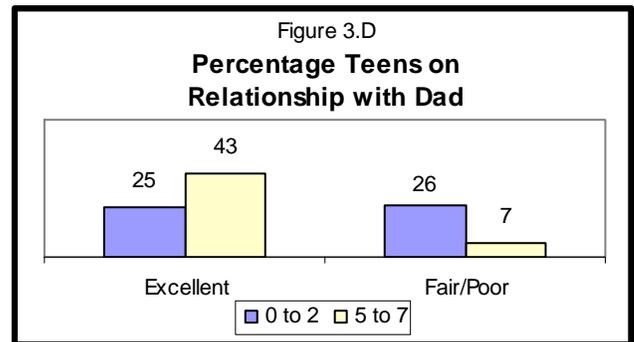
### Family Dinners and the Quality of Teens' Relationships with Mom and Dad

Teens who report having excellent relationships with their parents are less likely to use substances.

Teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven family dinners per week) are likelier to say they have excellent relationships with their parents, and teens who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are likelier to say they have fair or poor relationships with their parents.



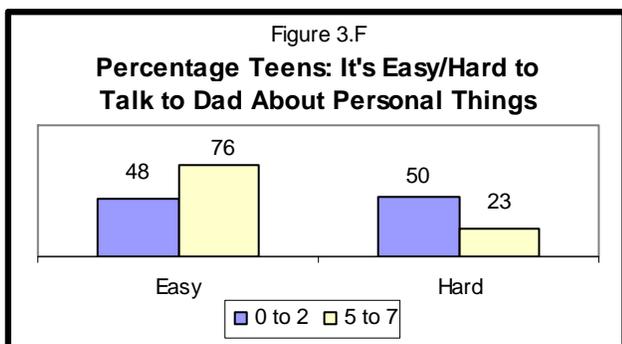
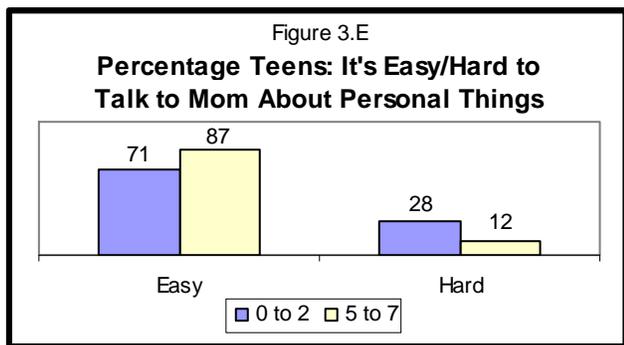
Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are five times likelier to say they have a fair or poor relationship with their mother, and they're almost four times likelier to say they have a fair or poor relationship with their father. (Figures 3.C and 3.D)



## Family Dinners and Teens' Ease Communicating with Mom and Dad

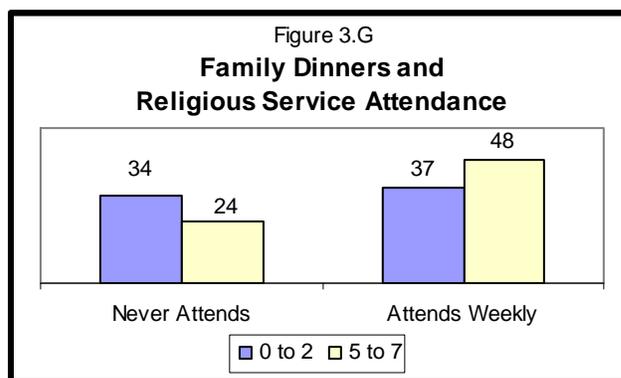
Teens who find it easy to talk with their parents about personal things are less likely to use substances.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more than twice as likely to say it's hard to talk to their mothers and fathers about personal things. (Figures 3.E and 3.F)



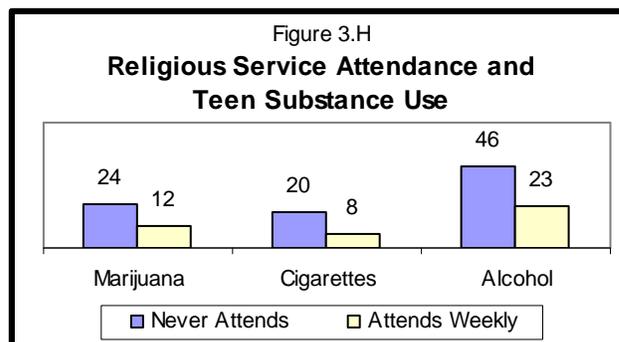
## Family Dinners and Religious Service Attendance

Teens who have frequent family dinners are also likelier to attend religious services at least weekly compared to teens who have infrequent family dinners. (Figure 3.G)



Regular religious service attendance is associated with lower rates of smoking, drinking and drug use.

Compared to teens who attend religious services at least weekly, those who never attend services are more than twice as likely to have tried cigarettes, and twice as likely to have tried marijuana and alcohol. (Figure 3.H)





# Appendix A

## Survey Methodology

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The questionnaire for this survey was designed by the staffs of QEV Analytics and CASA. Questions and themes were pre-tested by conducting two focus groups in Woodbridge, New Jersey. One session was with current high school students (16- and 17-year olds), one with recent graduates of high school (18- to 20-year olds).

This survey was conducted by telephone, utilizing a random household selection procedure called random digit dialing (RDD), in which a pool of telephone numbers was assembled by a commercial survey sample vendor utilizing extensive information concerning telephone number assignments across the country. Numbers in this initial pool represented all 48 continental states in proportion to their population.

Households were qualified for participation in the survey by determining that a teen between the ages of 12 and 17 lived in the household. At least six call back attempts were made to each telephone number before the telephone number was rejected.

Once a household was qualified as the residence of an eligible teenager, 12 to 17, permission for survey participation by the teen was sought from the teen's parent or guardian. After permission was obtained, if the potential teen participant was available, the teen interview was conducted. If the potential teen participant was not available at the time of the initial contact with the parent or guardian, then a call back was scheduled for the teen interview. After the teen interview was accomplished, an interview with a parent or guardian of the teen was attempted in subsequent telephone calls to every household in which a teen interview was completed.

In an effort to improve the obtained sample in terms of its representation of African-American and Hispanic youth, this year we established a quota for interviews to be completed in those

counties with 33 percent or greater total minority population (African-American plus Hispanic).

Forty-one percent (41 percent) of our interviews in the target counties were with African-American or Hispanic youth, versus 17 percent with minority youth in non-target counties. 49.7 percent of the total resident population of target counties is African-American or Hispanic, versus 14.4 percent of non-target counties. Insuring that high-minority population counties are not underrepresented contributes to an improved sample performance.

In total, 1,000 teenagers (509 males, 491 females) and 452 parents of teenagers (121 males and 331 females) were interviewed between March 2 - April 5, 2009 (for teens) and March 21 - April 10, 2009 (parents). The margin of sampling error for the teen survey is  $\pm 3.1$  percent at a 95 percent confidence level (meaning, were it possible to interview all teenagers in the country between the ages of 12 and 17, the results would vary by no more than  $\pm 3.1$  percent, 19 times out of 20, from what was reported in this survey).

This year, all of the 452 parents interviewed reside in two-interview households, meaning that a teen was also interviewed from the same household. The two sets of responses (parent and teen) are linked, so we can relate the teen's risk of using drugs with the parent's responses and characteristics. We only interview parents in households with a teen respondent because the principal utility of the parental data is in its relationship with the teen data. The margin of sampling error for a survey of 452, which is the size of the parent/guardian sample, is  $\pm 4.6$  percent (at the 95 percent confidence level). While we consider the random selection of households with teenagers in residence to yield a representative sample of parents of teenagers as well, it should be noted that parents were interviewed only after assenting to the participation of their teenager in the survey, and the successful completion of the teen interview. This protocol could potentially influence the representativeness of the parents' sample.

The data collection process was supervised by QEV Analytics, Ltd. of Washington, DC. The survey analysis was accomplished by Steven Wagner, President of QEV Analytics, Ltd. and Elizabeth Planet of CASA; this report was written by Planet and Wagner.