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National Survey Finds Parents Underestimate Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use by Youth

Parents dramatically underestimate alcohol and illicit drug use by youth, according to data from the most recent national PRIDE surveys of parents and students. One-fifth (21%) of students in 6th grade reported that they had drunk alcohol at least once in the past year. Yet only 5% of parents said that their 6th grade child has tried or is using alcohol. While the gap between students' self-reported use and parents' perceptions of their own children's use narrows with age, parents continue to significantly underestimate alcohol use by youth. More than two-thirds of 12th graders reported past year alcohol use, while only 41% of parents thought that their 12th grade child had used alcohol. Similar results were found for illicit drug use (data not shown). For example, 36% of 12th graders reported using illicit drugs at least once in the past year, while 15% of parents reported that their 12th grade child used drugs. Recent research has shown that early alcohol use increases the likelihood of developing alcohol dependence at a later age (see *CESAR FAX*, Volume 15, Issue 30).

SOURCES: Adapted by CESAR from International Survey Associates, *PRIDE Surveys National Summary for Parents, 2004-05*, 2006; and International Survey Associates, *PRIDE Surveys National Summary for Grades 6-12, 2004-05*, 2005.