

## Good relationship with parents may prevent teen drinking problems

(April 23, 2009) Teenagers who have a strong relationship with their parents may start drinking at a later age -- which may, in turn, lessen their risk of developing alcohol problems, a new study suggests.

The findings, published in the May issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, underscore the important role parents play in the risk of problem drinking.

Past studies have suggested that the age at which kids start drinking is a key factor in whether they eventually develop alcohol-related problems, like getting into fights or having academic or work problems.

So it often has been assumed that drinking at an early age, in and of itself, is the problem, explained the study's lead author, Dr. Emmanuel Kuntsche, of the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems in Lausanne, Switzerland.

"Our work shows that the 'preventive effect' of a later drinking age is likely to be a side effect of a good parent-child relationship," Kuntsche said. "In other words, the circumstances in which that first drinks occurs -- and how parents deal with it -- is important."

For their study, Kuntsche and his colleagues surveyed 364 teenagers three times over two years. They found that in general, teens who reported an earlier drinking age during the first survey tended to be drinking more heavily by the second survey, and were at greater risk of drinking-related problems by the third survey.

But a closer look at the data revealed the importance of parents' influence. In fact, only teenagers who reported both a later drinking age and a high-quality relationship with their parents had a lower risk of drinking problems compared with their peers.

A high-quality relationship was one where teenagers felt they could discuss their problems with their parents and that their parents respected their feelings.

The findings, Kuntsche and his colleagues say, suggest that such parent-child relationships can "trigger a spiral of healthy development during adolescence" that may lead to a lower risk of alcohol problems.

Parents, Kuntsche said, should remember how important they are when it comes to their children's risk of substance abuse. Being attentive to their children's needs in general, he noted, may be one way to protect them from developing drinking problems.

###

The *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* is the oldest alcohol/substance-abuse research journal published in the United States today (formerly the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* [1975-2006] and the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* [1940-1974]). It is a not-for-profit journal based at the Center of Alcohol Studies at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, NJ. The journal is online at [www.jsad.com](http://www.jsad.com).

Kuntsche, E., van der Vorst, H., and Engels R. The Earlier the More? Differences in the Links Between Age at First Drink and Adolescent Alcohol Use and Related Problems According to Quality of Parent-Child Relationships. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 70 (3): 346-354, May 2009.