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NATIONAL STUDY LINKS TEENS' "SENSE OF SELF" TO ALCOHOL, DRUG USE AND SEX

BOSTON (March 2, 2004) – How teenagers feel about themselves plays a significant role in whether they choose to drink or use other drugs, according to a new report released today by SADD and Liberty Mutual Group. The *Teens Today* 2003 study also reveals that a teen's "Sense of Self" can influence sexual behavior and reaction to peer pressure and, importantly, be affected by a teen's relationships with parents.

"Sense of Self" is a young adult's self-evaluation on his or her progress in three key developmental areas: identity formation, independence, and peer relationships. The report finds that teens with a high Sense of Self feel more positive about their own identity, growing independence and relationships with peers than do teens with a low Sense of Self. Specifically, high Sense of Self teens reported feeling smart, successful, responsible and confident and cite positive relationships with parents. Also, significantly, the study revealed that:

1. High Sense of Self teens are more likely to avoid alcohol and drug use;
2. Low Sense of Self teens are more likely to use alcohol and "harder" drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine; and,
3. Parental involvement strongly correlates with teens' Sense of Self and the decisions they make regarding alcohol and drug use.

"This information is critically important in helping us to better understand the role that self-definition plays in predisposing young adults to destructive decision-making, establishing a clear link between 'whom they are' and what they do," said Stephen Wallace, chairman and chief executive officer of the national SADD organization.

Among the key findings demonstrating the importance of Sense of Self and parental relationships:

- ♣ Sixty-two percent of teens with a high Sense of Self report that their relationship with their parents helps make them feel good about themselves, while only about one third of low Sense of Self teens report the same.

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- ♣ Only 30 percent of high school teens whose parents provide a strong level of guidance have used drugs, compared to 48 percent of high school teens whose parents do not provide strong guidance.
- ♣ Less than half (47 percent) of high school teens whose parents provide a strong level of guidance have used alcohol, compared to 80 percent of high school teens whose parents do not provide strong guidance.
- ♣ Teens with a high Sense of Self report overwhelmingly that they feel respected by their parents (93 percent) and close to their parents (85 percent), while teens with a low Sense of Self report lower levels of respect from their parents (8 percent) and closeness to their parents (12 percent).
- ♣ Nearly two thirds (64 percent) of teens believe it is very likely they will lose their parents' trust if caught drinking alcohol; two thirds (67 percent) report the same with respect to drug use.

What Does This Mean for Families?

These findings are consistent with past *Teens Today* studies that have shown that teens who report regular, open communication with their parents about important issues say they are more likely to try to live up to their parents' expectations and less likely to drink, use drugs or engage in early sexual behavior.

Paul Condrin, Liberty Mutual executive vice president, Personal Market, said, "We know that parents who cultivate a family environment that includes positive, open channels of communication with their children are much more successful at influencing their children to avoid engaging in dangerous behaviors. Now we know that helping to develop a young person's positive Sense of Self can go to great lengths at improving the odds that the child will avoid alcohol and drug use."

Importantly, *Teens Today* 2003 points to important steps parents can take to positively enhance their teens' Sense of Self.

- Support a wide sampling of interests, activities, and age-appropriate behaviors.
- Encourage separation from parents and age-appropriate independence in decision-making.
- Teach peer-to-peer social skills and facilitate (positive) peer relationships.

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A teen's Sense of Self also relates directly to mental health and relationships with peers. For example, teens with a low Sense of Self are more likely than teens with a high Sense of Self to report regular feelings of stress and depression, weaker relationships with parents, and greater susceptibility to peer pressure. Other key findings from the research:

- Teens who regularly feel stress or depression are much less inclined than other teens to avoid high-risk behaviors such as drinking, using drugs or engaging in early sexual activity.
- Teens who avoid drinking and drug use are more likely to have a favorable self-image.
- Regular feelings of stress and depression tend to be more common among sexually active teens than among their non-sexually active peers.
- High Sense of Self teens are more resistant to pressure from peers to drink, use drugs, or have sex.

Methodology

Teens Today 2003 reports on the completion of a total of 2,753 self-administered surveys by middle and high school students in grades 6-12. RoperASW designed the *Teens Today* 2003 study and administered it in a nationwide cross-section of 46 schools (25 middle schools, 21 high schools) between May 6 and June 18, 2003. The sampling error for the study at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3 percentage points for the total sample. Additional findings from qualitative research (focus groups and individual interviews), designed and conducted by Atlantic Research and Consulting, Inc. in April 2003, were used in the development of the student survey.

Teens rated themselves according to characteristics tied to the adolescent developmental tasks of Identity, Independence, and Peer Relations. A composite profile rating each participant as high, medium or low Sense of Self was developed and then correlated to three psychographic profiles, or "decision-types," identified in earlier *Teens Today* research: Avoiders (teens who tend to avoid alcohol and other drug use), Experimenters (teens who occasionally experiment with alcohol and other drug use), and Repeaters (teens who regularly engage in alcohol and other drug use).

Sense of Self scores were also correlated with the *Teens Today* decision factors of Mental States (e.g. boredom, depression), Personal Goals (e.g. to feel grown up, to fit in), Potential Outcomes (e.g. impact on academic/athletic performance, chances of getting caught), and Significant People (e.g. parents, peers).

SADD and Liberty Mutual Group

SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions/Students Against Driving Drunk) sponsors peer-to-peer education and prevention programs in middle schools and high schools nationwide.

Liberty Mutual Group is one of the largest multi-line insurers in the property and casualty industry. Offering a wide range of products and services, including private passenger auto and homeowners insurance, Liberty Mutual Group employs 37,000 people in more than 900 offices throughout the world.

SADD and Liberty Mutual make available a number of important family communication tools:

- SADD’s Contract for Life and “Opening Lifesaving Lines” brochure
- SADD’s Family Focus speakers program
- Liberty Mutual’s “Avoiding Collisions: How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years” video and brochure
- SADD/Liberty Mutual “Guidelines for Good Family Communication” brochure

For more information or to receive materials, contact:

SADD, Inc., 1-877-SADD-INC, www.sadd.org

Liberty Mutual Group, 1-800-4-LIBERTY, www.libertymutualinsurance.com

Addendum: Other Key Findings

Drinking

- | Teens' involvement with alcohol increases steadily as they mature.
- | Younger teens are more likely than older teens to drink because of peer pressure.
- | Older teens are more likely than younger teens to drink to escape problems.
- | High Sense of Self teens are particularly resistant to peer pressure to drink.
- | Teens who are alcohol Repeaters and Experimenters are much more likely than teens who are alcohol Avoiders to have immediate family members who drink a lot.

Drug Use

- | The most commonly used drug among teens is marijuana.
- | Younger teens are more likely than older teens to use drugs to feel grown up.
- | Older teens are more likely than younger teens to use drugs because of stress.
- | High Sense of Self teens are considerably less likely than other teens to be susceptible to peer pressure to use drugs.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are more likely than are high Sense of Self teens to use drugs to escape from or forget about problems.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are more likely to have friends who use drugs.

Sex

- | About half of teens have engaged in some sexual activity other than kissing.
- | Teens' motivations for having sex do not vary widely by age.
- | The most common reasons for teens to have sex are to strengthen the relationship with a partner and to have fun.
- | High Sense of Self teens are more resistant to peer pressure when it comes to decisions about sex and are more likely to refuse an offer to have sex.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are more likely than high Sense of Self teens to cite boredom and depression as reasons to have sex.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are more likely than high Sense of Self teens to associate sex with negative emotional outcomes such as depression or loss of self-respect.
- | Girls are more likely than boys to link sex with loss of self-respect and depression.

Drinking and Drugs

- | Teens who avoid drinking and drugs are more likely to have a favorable self-image.
- | One of the most common reasons to avoid drinking or using drugs is to please parents.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are more likely to feel strongly that it is okay to drive after drinking or using drugs.
- | Drug and alcohol Repeaters are particularly likely to have friends who drink or use drugs a lot.

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Drinking, Drugs, Sex and Driving

- | Teens who choose to avoid potentially destructive behaviors are considerably more inclined than those who do not to view drinking, drugs and sex as very harmful for someone their age.
- | Substance Avoiders are more likely to associate specific negative outcomes, such as loss of parent trust, increase risk of auto accidents, chance of risky sexual behaviors and increased risk of poor academic performance, with drinking.

Parents and Teens

- | The quality of parent-teen relationships is likely to play a critical role in determining teens' mood and, thus, their susceptibility to destructive decision-making.
- | Teens whose parents set guidelines for their behaviors are more inclined to feel positively about themselves and to avoid drinking and using drugs.
- | High Sense of Self teens are more likely than other teens to communicate openly and honestly with their parents and to describe themselves as close to their parents.
- | Low Sense of Self teens are particularly likely to feel that they spend an insufficient amount of time with their parents.
- | Younger teens are significantly more likely than are older teens to say that their relationship with their parents makes them feel very good about themselves.
- | Teens who avoid drinking and drugs are more likely to have positive relationships with parents.

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