

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 10, 2010

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Studies Show Teen Media Consumption Up, Parents Losing Touch ~ Teens Now Spend 53 Hours a Week Immersed in Electronic Media

The Governor's Prevention Partnership Offers Parents New Ways To Cope

The increasing consumption of entertainment media, including television and the internet, by teenagers not only puts them at risk for poor academic performance, it also makes it harder for their parents to talk to them about the dangers of drug and alcohol use. Parents can reduce the risk of their teenagers ever experimenting with drugs and alcohol by 50 percent just by talking with them, but finding the time has become more challenging.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation study of 2,000 teens released earlier this year¹, the average amount of time young people (8-18 year olds) spend consuming entertainment media is up dramatically to almost eight hours per day – that's at least 53 hours a week of immersion in some form of media. The research also noted that the more media teens consume, the less happy they tend to be, and those who are most captivated by media reported their academic performance suffered. About half (47 percent) of heavy media users reported they usually get fair to poor grades, mostly C's or lower, compared to about a quarter (23 percent) of light media users.

In addition, new omnibus² research from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America shows that more than one-third of parents are concerned that TV (38 percent), computers (37 percent) and video games (33 percent) make it harder for them to communicate with their media-engrossed teens about risky behaviors like drug and alcohol use. The survey of more than 1,200 parents also confirms that a quarter or more are worried that newer forms of media, including cell phone texting (27 percent) and social networking sites like Facebook (25 percent) and Twitter (19 percent) hinder effective parent/child communication about the dangers of teen substance abuse.

"These new findings present a unique opportunity for parents to play a more active role in what their kids are watching, monitor how they are spending their time online and remain aware of the impact all of this media consumption is having on their impressionable teens," said Jill K. Spinetti, President and CEO of The Governor's Prevention Partnership. "We know that kids today are bombarded with pro-drug and drinking messages via everything from song lyrics, movies and video games to social networking sites. Videos of kids abusing cough medicine and common household products to get high

¹ "Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds," released by the Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2010

² Online Omnibus survey of 1,206 parents of children, ages 17 or younger. Data collected in July, 2010, +/- 2.6 margin of error



are all too accessible online, and that's why it's more important than ever for parents to break through the media noise and make their voices heard."

The Kaiser study notes the drastic increases in media consumption among youth are driven in large part by easy access to mobile devices like cell phones and iPod media players. Among kids and teens, cell phone ownership has increased sharply since 2004, from 39 percent to 66 percent in 2009, while ownership of iPods jumped drastically from 18 percent to 76 percent over the same time period. Overall, 20 percent of kids' media consumption comes from mobile devices.³ And, as kids get older and consume even more media, the level of concern among parents increases and can lead to breakdowns in parent/child communication.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership offers the following parenting tips:

- Become mindful of finding time each day to connect personally with your teenager, whether it's getting up with them before school or catching them between activities. Personal connection is the basis for a trusting relationship.
- Insist on "no phone zone" times, as appropriate. Suggestions include turning off phones and technology during meal times, family outings or other times together.
- Just as you monitor your teen's whereabouts when it comes to parties and visiting friends, monitor his or her use of the internet and exposure to the media. Be your child's Facebook friend and monitor their page.
- Take advantage of technology and find new ways to share important messages with your teen, including e-mails, cell phone calls and even texting. Parents can use these methods to communicate with their teens, especially at times when teen drinking and drug use is more likely—after school, on weekends and during unsupervised hours.
- With or without technology, set "no use" expectations for your teen when it comes to drinking or experimenting with illegal or prescription drugs. Educate yourself on what teens are facing when it comes to substance abuse, and be prepared to discuss these topics with your teen.
- Keep the family computer in a central place where you can unobtrusively monitor his or her use of it.

For those parents who are hesitant or don't know how to send text messages The Governor's Prevention Partnership offers a link to a free, downloadable guide called "Time To Text" at <http://www.preventionworksct.org/parents.html>. This tool offers quick tips on how to text, suggests examples of different messages to send to teens and even provides a cheat sheet parents can keep in their wallet.

"Some parents may still feel apprehensive about embracing media and technology as a way of communicating with their children, but, in today's world, it is vital that they connect with their kids in any way possible," said Partnership for a Drug Free America President Steve Pasierb. "It is important that we help bridge the technology gap between parents and 'Generation Text.'"

³ "Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds," released by the Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2010



About The Governor's Prevention Partnership

The Governor's Prevention Partnership, a not-for-profit partnership between state government and business leaders with a mission to keep Connecticut's youth safe, successful and drug-free today for a stronger workforce tomorrow, has four key initiatives: The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership which establishes and supports youth mentoring programs across the state; the Operation Respect, CT initiative which focuses on giving schools and communities the tools to create positive school climates and bully-free communities; the Connecticut Youth Wellness initiative focused on prevention of underage drinking, illicit drug and prescription drug abuse; and the Media Partnership which creates direct relationships with media to raise awareness of each initiative. The Partnership works in collaboration with local, regional and statewide providers and its efforts impact youth in every community in Connecticut.

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