



START THE CONVERSATION. STOP UNDERAGE DRINKING.

North Carolina Surveys: Executive Summary

Parents & Students in Middle & High Schools

May 3-19, 2023

Methodology: McLaughlin & Associates partnered with nineone marketing co. to conduct surveys in North Carolina among 505 parents and 306 students in middle and high school between May 3-19, 2023. All interviews were conducted online. Survey invitations were distributed randomly within predetermined geographic units. These units were structured to correlate with North Carolina’s middle and high school student population. The accuracy of the sample of 505 parents is within +/- 4.4% at a 95% confidence interval. The accuracy of the sample of 306 students is within +/- 5.6% at a 95% confidence interval. Numbers in this report are rounded and may not equal 100%.

Survey Takeaways

Conversations:

- Parents are waiting too long to have a conversation with their children about underage drinking and dangers of alcohol.
- Students are saying their parents are not talking to them as often as parents portray.
- Parents need to start an open and welcoming dialogue, including listening to their children, as 1 in 2 students are embarrassed or afraid to talk to their parents about alcohol and underage drinking.
- Most students believe having conversations with parents and amongst their friends will help stop underage drinking.

Perceptions & Concerns:

- Parents are concerned but not “very” concerned that their children will drink alcohol.
- Students see underage drinking as more of a “serious” problem in their local community than parents.
- Students are normalizing underage drinking by posting on social media with alcohol.
- There are alarming indicators that students are abusing alcohol, drinking enough to get sick or even pass out.

Drinking Behavior:

- The majority of students know people their age who have tried alcohol and 2 in 5 admit to personally drinking alcohol.
- Getting alcohol from home provides easy access for minors. A large majority of parents have alcohol at home.
- Parents and students say 19 is an appropriate age to start drinking; however, students typically start by age 14.
- Students say 2 in 5 that drink alcohol do so regularly.

Covid-19 Pandemic Impact:

- One-third of parents noticed mood or behavioral changes in their children during the Covid-19 pandemic and 1 in 5 worried about their child turning to alcohol due to the pandemic.
- One-quarter of students say they know someone their age who started drinking or drank more alcohol because of the pandemic.

Marketing:

- The advertising about underage drinking works.
- Parents who recall an ad say the ads help them talk to their own children about underage drinking and the dangers of alcohol.
- Creating greater awareness of TalkItOutNC would generate better outcomes, particularly driving parents and students to the website as a valuable resource.
- Parents who have visited TalkItOutNC.org have more conversations with their children and are more likely to take underage drinking seriously.

Key Findings:

Conversations:

Conversations are starting later than age 8.

- Only 1 in 5 parents (19%) think it's appropriate to start a conversation by age 8.
- The mean age to start a conversation is age 11, three years past the preferred starting point.
- Half (51%) would wait until their children are age 12 or older.

Conversations have started but there is a disconnect on frequency between parents and students.

- 4 in 5 parents (84%) and students (80%) say they have had a conversation about alcohol.
- However, parents recall more frequent conversations than students.
 - One-quarter (27%) of parents say "often," which is 13-points greater than students.
 - About half (46%) of parents say "sometimes," which is 8-points more than students.
 - Over one-quarter (28%) of students say "rarely," which is 17-points higher than parents.

Increase Recent Conversation by Greater Exposure & Education to Severity of the Problem

Among **parents** who have had a conversation with their children about alcohol, 4 in 5 (81%) had a conversation in the last few months.

- If **parents** believe underage drinking is a serious problem = 92% had recent conversation
- If **parents** recall seeing an ad about underage drinking = 87% had a recent conversation
- If **parents** are very familiar with risks and consequences = 86% had a recent conversation
- If **parents** visited TalkItOutNC.org = 96% had a recent conversation

Over half (56%) of **students** say they have had a recent conversation with their parents in the last few months. Middle school students have had more recent dialogues with their parents than high school students. Like parents, greater exposure, and education to the severity of the problem appears to increase the likelihood of recent conversations.

- If **students** believe underage drinking is a problem = 59% had recent conversation
- If **students** are very familiar with risks and consequences = 68% had a recent conversation
- If **students** visited TalkItOutNC.org = 67% had a recent conversation

Half of students believe people their age are embarrassed or afraid to talk to their parents about alcohol.

- Only 1 in 5 (20%) students say their peers aren't embarrassed or afraid. One-third (32%) are unsure.
- The perception of embarrassment or fear is higher among middle school students (52%) than high school students (46%).
- It's higher among male (52%) than female (45%) students.

Most students believe talking about alcohol and its dangers could help stop underage drinking.

- Conversations with parents considered a greater help (93% help with 41% help and 52% maybe help).
- Students talking with each other would be helpful too (80% help with 30% help and 50% maybe help).

Perceptions & Concerns:

Overall, more parents than students (90% to 84%) think underage drinking in their community is a problem; however, students more than parents (50% to 43%) consider the problem to be serious.

- **Parents/Serious Problem Increases:** child in H.S., urban community, Black, Hispanic, recall ad, and visited website.
- **Students/Serious Problem Increases:** peers drank 14/younger and female.

More than two-thirds (69%) of parents are concerned that their child in middle or high school will drink alcohol; however, the level of concern is low with only 21% being "very" concerned.

- Overall White parents are more concerned, but the intensity of concern is greater among Black and Hispanic parents.
- The level of concern is higher among urban parents than suburban and rural parents.
- The overall concern and intensity level is much greater among parents who said their child talked about alcohol since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

More than 4 in 5 parents believe children who drink alcohol are more likely to act irresponsibly and make bad decisions rather than being able to handle drinking alcohol and making responsible decisions.

- The overwhelming consensus cuts across all demographics.
- Women a bit more than men (86% to 82%).
- White (88%) parents more than Black (81%) and Hispanic (78%) parents.
- Rural (91%) parents more than suburban (83%) and urban (72%) parents.

Parents perceive friends as the greatest influencers.

- Nearly three-quarters (72%) of parents say friends have the most influence on whether minors drink alcohol.
- 1 in 5 (21%) believe parents are most influential.
- The percentage saying parents increases among fathers (28%) and Hispanics (34%).
- Among mothers, it's 81% friends and 15% parents.

Students recognize multiple negative outcomes from drinking.

- Over three-quarters (78%) say alcohol leads to bad and risky choices.
- Two-thirds (66%) say it's likely students will drink enough to get sick, suggesting multiple drinks.
- An alarming 48% say students are likely to drink enough to pass out.

Two in five students see their friends posting on social media with alcohol.

- 41% of friends are posting with alcohol, including 12% who are doing it “often.”
- Postings with alcohol increases among high school friends (46%) and friends of students who have tried alcohol (53%).

Drinking Behavior:

The majority of students know people around their age who have talked about and tried alcohol.

- 60% know students who have “talked” about alcohol, which increases among high school students (72%) and students who have personally tried alcohol (86%).
- 67% know students who have “tried” alcohol, which again increases among high school students (75%) and students who have personally tried alcohol (88%).

One-third (32%) of students believe people around their age think it’s okay to drink alcohol.

- 24% and 38% among middle and high school students, respectively.
- 34% among male students versus 30% female students.
- 61% among students who have personally tried alcohol (29% if not personally tried it).

Students who try alcohol typically do so by age 14.

- The average student tried alcohol by age 14.
- Two-thirds (65%) try alcohol in middle school years.
- One-third (35%) try alcohol in high school.

Nearly 2 in 5 students who drink do so regularly.

- 37% regularly (4% daily, 19% weekly, and 14% monthly).
- 63% rarely or only on special occasions.

Home, family, and friends provide students easy access to alcohol.

- Around half of students who drink either get alcohol from home (50%), family members (46%), or friends (45%).
- 25% get alcohol from a store.

Age 19 is perceived as an appropriate age to start drinking.

- The average age when it’s okay to start drinking alcohol among parents is 18.9 versus 19.5 among students.
- More students (63%) than parents (54%) say wait until age 21.
- More parents (33%) than students (25%) say drinking alcohol is okay for high school aged students.
- There is a small group of parents (9%) and students (5%) who approve of middle school aged students trying alcohol.

Student Drinking Profile:

- 37% of all students say they have personally tried alcohol.
- 47% of high school students have personally tried alcohol.
- Greatest access to alcohol for personal use is from home (48%) and friends (39%). Getting alcohol from a sibling (11%) or store (11%) are smaller access points.
- Nearly 1 in 10 (9%) students say they have turned to alcohol to feel better as a coping mechanism.
- About 1 in 10 (8%) students say they have been caught drinking underage. (11% of parents say they have caught their child drinking alcohol.)

1 in 10 parents caught their child drinking alcohol.

- Among these parents, about three-quarters said it happened in the last year (32% last 6-months vs. 42% last 7-12 months).
- Fathers (17%) were more likely to catch their children drinking alcohol than mothers (5%).
- By race, the percentage was highest among Hispanic parents (14%) compared to White (10%) and Black (7%) parents.
- Parents with two (14%) or three/more (17%) children were more likely to catch a child drinking than parents with one child (8%).
- The percentage was higher if they had alcohol in the household (14%) than no alcohol at home at all (4%).
- If they have their alcohol lock-up, 1 in 5 (20%) parents had caught a child drinking alcohol.
- Urban parents (17%) were more likely than suburban (10%) or rural (8%) parents to catch a child drinking alcohol.

Parent Drinking Profile

- 79% of parents drink alcohol.
- 31% of parents drink alcohol regularly (7% daily & 24% weekly).
- 65% of parents have alcohol in their home.
- 36% vs. 29% of parents have their alcohol visible rather than hidden.
- 34% of parents lock up their alcohol at home.

Covid-19 Pandemic Impact on Parents:

- Parents say their own alcohol consumption decreased (31%) more than increased (14%) with the majority (55%) keeping their drinking habits the same.
- One-quarter (24%) of parents say they or someone they know consumed alcohol as a means of coping due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- One-third (35%) of parents noticed mood or behavioral changes from their child since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- One in five (22%) parents say their child mentioned the topic of alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- One in five (21%) parents were/are worried about their child turning to alcohol due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - 36% worried if their child showed mood or behavioral changes.
 - 43% worried if their child mentioned alcohol during the pandemic.
 - 55% worried if they caught their child drinking alcohol before.

Covid-19 Pandemic Impact on Students:

- Close to 1 in 5 (17%) students say their thoughts about alcohol have changed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The top verbatim responses from those who have changed their thoughts about alcohol are:
 - “they (peers) drink more/bored” 13%
 - “bad/more against” 11%
 - “less drinking” 11%
 - “positive” 8%
 - “want to drink/would help” 6%
 - “Covid with alcohol is bad” 4%
 - “better ways” 2%
 - “help people get by” 2%
 - “easier to get alcohol” 2%
 - “thought age was 18” 2%
 - “should use moderately” 1%
 - “worried” 1%
 - “effects” 1%
 - “unsure” 26%
- One-quarter (27%) of students know someone around their age who started drinking alcohol or drank more because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - 32% and 20% among high school and middle school students, respectively.
 - 30% and 23% among male and female students, respectively.

Marketing:

One-third (35%) of parents recall seeing an ad about underage drinking.

- Ad recall is higher in Raleigh DMA (37%) than Greensboro DMA (33%) and Charlotte DMA (27%).
- Nearly half (46%) outside the big markets recall seeing an ad.
- **Remember Most:** “talk to your kids” (11%), “accident/car crash” (9%), “on the rise/statistic” (8%), “risks/consequences” (6%), “stop underage drinking” (5%), “death from teen DWI” (4%), “drink/prom/party” (3%), “drunk driving” (3%), “watch your kids” (3%), “say to kids/don’t drink” (3%), and “alcohol/alcoholic” (3%).

Among those who recall an ad, about two-thirds (64%) believe the ads are more likely to help them talk to their children about underage drinking and the dangers of alcohol.

One-third (35%) of parents have heard of TalkItOutNC and over one-quarter (28%) have visited TalkItOutNC.org website or social media site.

- Advertising increases awareness of the campaign (46%) and increases website-social media traffic (35%).

Nearly all parents (95%) say they are familiar with the risks or consequences associated with underage drinking, including two-thirds (68%) who say they are “very familiar.”

Four in five parents (82%) say know where to learn about risks or consequences associated with underage drinking.

One-quarter (26%) of students have heard of TalkItOutNC.

- Awareness increases among high school students (34%).
- Awareness is higher in the Raleigh DMA.
- Awareness is greater among male (29%) than female (23%) students.

Over one-third (37%) of students who are aware of TalkItOutNC have visited the campaign’s website or social media sites.

Four in five (83%) students say they are familiar with the risks or consequences associated with underage drinking, including 45% who say they are “very familiar.”

Three-quarters (73%) say know where to learn about risks or consequences associated with underage drinking.