

Vermont Parent Survey 2019: Overview and Selected Key Findings

Background and Methods

The 2019 Vermont Parent Survey (VPS) was conducted by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) to support the statewide evaluation of Vermont's Regional Prevention Partnerships (RPP) project. A similar survey was conducted in 2017. Because these surveys provide useful data for purposes other than the evaluation, PIRE provides statewide summaries of the survey data to VDH and interested stakeholders to help inform messaging efforts and other interventions or resources directed to parents. This overview presents selected findings from these surveys. Additional information on the survey methods and findings are available online (see notes at the end of this summary).

The target populations for the two surveys were parents of Vermont children attending middle school (MS) or high school (HS) in Vermont at the time each survey was conducted. Parents were recruited through Facebook ads, supplemented by additional promotional activities by RPP community grantees in the final weeks of the survey. Drawings for cash awards provided an incentive to participate. Statewide sample sizes of 1229 and 1142 were obtained for the 2017 and 2019 surveys, respectively.

Key Findings

The key findings summarized below focus primarily on changes in response patterns between 2017 and 2019 for those questions that were included both years. They also focus on findings that pertain to the entire sample rather than the MS and HS parent subgroups. Other especially noteworthy findings are also identified, including questions that were included in the 2019 survey only.

Parents' interactions with their children regarding substance misuse

- The frequency of talking with their children in the past year about the potential dangers of using alcohol and misusing prescription drugs remained about the same from 2017 to 2019, while the frequency of talking "many times" about the dangers of marijuana use rose slightly; for e-cigarettes it rose dramatically (from 13% to 53%).
- Parents were more likely to talk frequently with their HS-aged children about the dangers of using substances in comparison to their MS-aged children.
- No significant changes between 2017 and 2019 were found in the confidence levels of parents to talk effectively with their children about substance use. The majority of parents (about 70%) reported feeling "very confident" in both years.
- The percent of parents who reported being "very confident" in recognizing the signs of alcohol or drug use by their children dropped substantially, from 59% in 2017 to 37% in 2019. This large change could be attributable to the recent increases in the use of e-cigarettes and vaping, behaviors for which parents may be less confident in recognizing.
- The percent of parents who reported knowing or suspecting their child has been using various substances is consistently, and for most substances dramatically, lower than actual statewide prevalence estimates based on Vermont's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

Perceived risk to their child from using various substances

- A large majority of parents (80 to 90%) perceive moderate or great risk to their child from using any of the three substances referenced (alcohol, marijuana, and e-cigarettes or vaping).
- Between 2017 and 2019, parents' perception of there being "great risk" to their child for using e-cigarettes or vaping devices increased significantly (from 63% to 73%). Perceived risk for using alcohol or marijuana was not as great, and the differences between the two years less striking.
- Among parents who knew or suspected their child was using substances, greater levels of concern were expressed for tobacco and e-cigarettes in comparison to alcohol and marijuana.

Ease of access to substances kept at home

- Alcohol remained the most easily accessible substance (at home) by their child without their parent knowing, with 35% of parents reporting access was “very likely” or “somewhat likely” (35%) compared to access to marijuana (9%) and to prescription drugs (20%).
- Changes from 2017 to 2019 were modest, although the percent of parents reporting access as “not at all likely” decreased significantly for both alcohol and R_x drugs.

Information and community resource needs of parents

- Almost all parents (95%) identified at least one aspect of talking with their child about alcohol and drugs that they wished they were better at or would like more information. The most common aspect identified was getting their child to share their views and experiences (41% of parents), followed by knowing how to respond if their child admits to using substances (35%).
- Parenting topics for which respondents said they were most likely to seek information during the upcoming year were: helping their child deal with stress or mental health issues (62%), followed by helping their child connect with positive role models and peers (43%), and knowing what their child is doing online or on the phone (40%). A much smaller percentage of parents said they were likely to seek information on helping prevent their child from using alcohol or other drugs (16%).
- The most preferred way by parents for obtaining information about parenting topics was via the internet, either through specific health and parenting information websites (60%) or through their own online searches (33%).
- In 2019 the majority of parents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that there were places in the community where they could learn more about helping prevent their child from using substances (65%) and get help if their child was using substances (64%). These percentages were both slightly but significantly lower than corresponding values in 2017 (71% and 73%, respectively).

Exposure to Vermont’s ParentUp messaging campaign

- Having seen or heard of the statewide ParentUp messaging campaign within the past year increased significantly from 16% of parents in 2017 to 20% in 2019.

For more information...

A website maintained by PIRE provides easy access to reports and data tables from the 2017 and 2019 Vermont Parent Surveys, as well as for other materials developed for the evaluation of the RPP and its predecessor, Partnerships for Success (PFS). These materials can be accessed at:

www.vt-rpp-evaluation.org

Questions regarding the survey or any of the findings presented here or posted on the RPP evaluation website should be directed to Amy Livingston at 802-652-4111, or alivingston@pire.org.

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