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Summary Report
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Canada

***Decision-making in 9-12 year olds
in eastern region Nova Scotia***

Eastern Nova Scotia: Decision-making in 9-12 year olds

The prevalence of risk behaviours among youths has been well documented. Less understood is how to address a youth's decision to engage in these risk behaviours. What is needed is a better understanding of how decision-making could be influenced at a younger age to better prepare kids to make better decisions in their teen years. Such information is necessary in the development of any evidence-based primary prevention strategy to address youth risk behaviours.

Evidence: In total, students in all grade 4-6 classes in Eastern Nova Scotia were surveyed in 1999 to assess decision making and influences in relation to healthy child development (89%, n=6915). Some 84% (n=307) of teachers and 63% (n=4916) of parents responded by self-administered questionnaire. Students participating in 21 focus groups were presented the results of this survey and consulted for risk behaviour prevention strategies.

In a number of areas parents differed from students in their perception of parental support in their relationship. Parent-child communication proved to be crucial for some outcomes analysed in this study.

Compared with students who often spoke with their parents about important things, students who seldom spoke with their parents are:

- 90% more likely to have smoked
- 38% more likely to have consumed alcohol
- two and a half times more likely to first express anger violently
- two and a half times more likely to like themselves some or none of the time
- twice as likely to consume breakfast some fewer than three times a week

A student with parents who smoke is 70% more likely to smoke compared with a student with parents who do not smoke

A student with parents who drink is 81% more likely to drink compared with a student with parents who do not drink

Some interaction between different risk behaviours was noted. A student who drinks alcohol is nearly ten times more likely to smoke compared with a student who does not drink alcohol. A student who drinks alcohol is four and a half times more likely to hit back in a conflict scenario compared with a student who does not drink.

Planning and action to date: In May-June 1999, survey results were presented to students, parents and teachers by Eastern Region Public Health Services staff. Pamphlets were distributed to parents and teachers along with survey result fact sheets on alcohol use, tobacco use, anger expression and parent-child communication. Strategic planning with community partners is scheduled following the release of the final report in January 2000.

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