

## **BODY PIERCING AND RISKY BEHAVIOR: Is There A Connection?**

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

**Body piercing** has become more and more popular among teens and young adults. Pierced ears have been common for many years. But now, no part of the body seems to be off limits for rings, studs, and bars. Navels, tongues, eyebrows, and nostrils have become popular places for piercings.



Piercing has been around for a long time. It has been used in religious and cultural ceremonies and is common in some cultures, but for today's American youth, piercings are more likely to be fashion statements. Like tattoos, daring clothing, and extreme hairstyles, piercing may be a badge of identity or a sign of - - - *rebellion*.

While young people see body piercing as a form of self-expression, adults may worry that it is freakish, unsafe, or just plain wrong. They may view it as a sign of delinquency and rejection of traditional values.

### **So, which is it?**

*Is body piercing a passing phase?*

*Part of a personal declaration  
of independence?*

*Does it signal an urge to push social limits  
and to take risks?*

Getting a body piercing doesn't mean that a young person will engage in risky behavior. Yet, a national study of junior high and high school students showed that adults who are alarmed by youthful body piercing may have reasons to worry.

The study, which was done in 1996, found that those with body piercings, other than in the ears, were much more likely than other youth to engage in substance abuse and other risky or negative behavior. Girls with piercings were two and a half times more likely than other girls to have used

marijuana and to have smoked cigarettes in the past month. Sexual activity, skipping school, and delinquent behavior also were more common among girls with piercings. Both girls and boys with body piercings were more likely to have friends who use illegal drugs and cigarettes.

### **MORE ABOUT RISK**

The term "*risky behavior*" usually refers to irresponsible and dangerous actions such as:

- Alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use
- Early, unprotected, or unwanted sex
- Violence
- Unsafe use of a motor vehicle.

As a concerned adult, you may feel that harm would be avoided if only young people would stop taking risks. But keep in mind that risk-taking can be a growth experience. Those who take too few risks may end up with too little success. Basically, risk is the chance of an unwanted result. So, the key is to take the right kind of risk. This means activities that build ability, awareness, and character.

*(continued)*

# Body Piercing

## WHAT TO DO

Urging caution, keeping an eye on behavior, and enforcing rules can go a long way toward reducing risky behavior. Still, prevention is about more than stopping problem behavior. Channeling a young person's search for adventure can yield great results. Exposing young people to people, places, and ideas can open them up to a world of opportunity. A young person with body piercings is clearly willing to try something new. A healthy diet of risk may satisfy her appetite for adventure.

## WHAT TO SAY

Meanwhile, if a young person wants a piercing or comes home with one, ask why he wants it and how it fits into his self-image and social life. You don't have to go along with the idea. However, discussion will be more useful than anger or immediate rejection. You'll get a chance to offer advice. Besides, you may be reassured to hear his views.

## WHAT TO KNOW

Learn about piercing, including the proper procedures, risks (there's that word again), and safety issues. Having the facts will help you provide guidance and make it harder for a child to dismiss your concerns. If a child gets a body piercing, remember, the industry is not well-regulated. However, there are professional standards for which some piercers are certified.

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