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**KIDS WHO EAT DINNER WITH FAMILY LESS LIKELY TO ABUSE DRUGS,
ALCOHOL: 2004 'FAMILY DAY' SLATED SEPT. 27**

Research shows that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use illegal drugs. Thus, in a continuing effort to help children grow up drug and alcohol free, the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is urging parents to participate in this year's "Family Day: A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children" on Monday, Sept. 27.

Family Day is sponsored nationally by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University in New York City.

Ben Brown, ODMHSAS deputy commissioner for substance abuse services, said teens who eat dinner with their family six to seven times a week are at almost half the risk of substance abuse as teens who eat dinner with family only twice a week. Teens who eat frequent family dinners also are less likely than other teens to have sex at young ages, get into fights or be suspended from school, and are at lower risk for thoughts of suicide. Frequent family dining also is correlated with doing well in school and

developing healthy eating habits, he said. This pattern holds true regardless of a teen's gender, family structure or family socioeconomic level.

Maintaining family ties and making the effort to enjoy frequent meals together is important, especially as children age, Brown said.

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“As teens get older, they are less likely to have dinner with their families. This is troubling because risk of substance abuse increases by almost 500 percent between the ages of 12 and 16,” Brown said. “It is in these ‘dangerous years’ that most teens who use alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana initiate their use. Only 37 percent of teens in grade 12 eat family dinners, compared with 58 percent of children in eighth grade.”

Parents don't need to make a family meal, as anything, even takeout pizza, will do, he added.

“The real purpose of Family Day is to take time to get to know your children, to make a commitment to make family dinners a regular part of their lives,” Brown said.

“Parents need to realize they are the most powerful – and the most underutilized – resource we have to prevent drug and alcohol abuse by our kids.”

Here are ways to implement more meals into the family schedule:

- Every Sunday, pick several nights during the upcoming week when the entire family can eat together. Make your best attempt to stick to the schedule.
- Encourage children to create menu ideas and participate in meal preparation.
- During dinner, turn off the TV and the phone.

- Talk about what happened that day, at school or work, with friends, or regarding current events.
- Establish a routine to start and end each meal. Light candles, say grace or tell a story. After dinner, play a board game or serve dessert to encourage the family to continue the conversation.

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- Keep conversation positive and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.
- If you can't have dinner together, try having breakfast together or engaging in another family activity.
- If your family eats together often, volunteer to serve a Family Day meal to children who don't have families.

“Eating dinner as a family may seem like a simple action, but it is one that can make a world of difference in the lives of young people,” Brown said.

In addition to dining together, other family activities that can reduce the risk of child and adolescent substance abuse include helping with homework; attending religious services as a family and making religion an important part of kids' lives; praising and discipline children when their behavior merits it; monitoring television viewing, music purchases and internet usage; establishing curfews and knowing where kids are after school and on weekends; and sending a clear message of disapproval regarding the use of cigarettes, alcohol and illegal drugs.

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GOVERNOR BRAD HENRY OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION

Whereas, the use of illegal drugs and the abuse of alcohol and nicotine constitute the greatest threats to the well-being of America's children; and

Whereas, surveys conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University have consistently found that the more often children and teenagers eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink and use illegal drugs; and

Whereas, teenagers who virtually never eat dinner with their families are 72 percent more likely than the average teenager to use illegal drugs, alcohol and cigarettes; and

Whereas, teenagers who almost always eat dinner with their families are 31 percent less likely than the average teenager to use illegal drugs, alcohol and cigarettes; and

Whereas, the correlation between family dinners and reduced risk for teen substance abuse are well-documented; and

Whereas, parental influence is known to be one of the most crucial factors in determining the likelihood of substance abuse by teenagers; and

Whereas, family dinners have long been a substantial pillar of family life in America;

Now, Therefore, I, Brad Henry, Governor of the State of Oklahoma, do hereby proclaim September 27, 2004, the fourth Monday in September, as

“Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children”

in the State of Oklahoma.

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