178. The following appeared in a newsletter published by the Appleton school district.

"In a recent study more than 5,000 adolescents were asked how often they ate meals with their families. Almost 30 percent of the teens said they ate at least seven meals per week with their families. Furthermore, according to the same survey, teens who reported having the most family meals per week were also the ones least likely to have tried illegal drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. Family meals were also associated with lower rates of problems such as low grades in school, low self-esteem, and depression. We therefore recommend that families have as many meals together as possible. We predict that doing so will greatly benefit adolescents and turn troubled teens away from bad behaviors."

Write a response in which you discuss which questions would need to be answered in order to decide whether the recommendation is likely to have the predicted result. Be sure to explain how the answers to these questions would help to evaluate the recommendation.

In this argument, the author concludes that troubled adolescents should eat more meals together with their parents in order to help them get rid of bad behaviors. To support this conclusion, the author points out that teens who reported having the most family meals per week tend not to use illegal drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. In addition, the author indicates that family meals have connections with lower rates of problems like low grades, low self-esteem and depression. However, due to lack of accurate information, we cannot make sure if the author’s proposal could bring about desired effect as predicted. Also, from the logical perspective, the augur’s proposal suffers from a few logical flaws that will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

As for the survey that the article cites, the author draws a connection between joint family meals with lesser illegal drugs, tobacco and alcohol abuse. It is not clear, however, the scope and validity of that survey. For example, the survey could have asked teenagers if they prefer usage of illegal drugs all day or would like to have meals with their parents, which might have swayed teens towards having meals with their parents and reduce the percentage of illegal drug abuse. Moreover, the sample might not have been representative of Appleton school district’s teenagers, asking only those teenagers who receive higher education from the best local high school. The survey might have been 10 pages long, with 2 questions dedicated to family meals and illegal drug abuse. In short, without better and more representative evidence that the survey is statistically reliable, the author cannot rest on it to draw any connections between these two.

Additionally, the arguer fails to establish the causal relationship between family meals and lesser illegal drugs, tobacco and alcohol abuse. It’s highly possible that other factors contribute to lesser illegal drugs, tobacco and alcohol abuse. For instance, the decrease of drug abuse might have resulted from better family education. It is also likely that local higher economic level caused less illegal drug abuse. Similarly, the relationship between family meals and lower rates of problems is also trivially indicated. It would be totally possible that those teenagers were themselves well-educated, or from top schools in Appleton district. Therefore, they would not suffer from bad grades, depression and self-esteem issues.

Another problem associated with the arguer’s argument is that the author fails to distinguish the idea of preventing making mistake and correcting mistake. The assumption of preventing making mistake is that initially teens do not have problem or mistake, while the assumption of correcting mistake is that at the beginning, teens have already made mistake. Teens in Appleton school district could originally dislike illegal drug, tobacco or alcohol and have good grades and self-confident. We do not know whether having family meals affects them or not. Even if it indeed prevents those youth from illegal stuff and bad behaviors, there is no signal that we could say it helps turn troubled teens back, and away from bad behaviors. Instead, we could only indicate that joint family meals assist in guarding or preventing teens. It might not have the ability to turn bad teens into good teens.

To sum up, the arguer fails to substantiate his claim that joint family meals could greatly benefit adolescents and turn troubled teens away from bad behaviors, because the evidences cited do not lead strong support to what the arguer maintains. To make the argument more convincing, the author would have to provide more information with regard to the survey, teenagers’ educational level, and average economical level in Appleton school district.