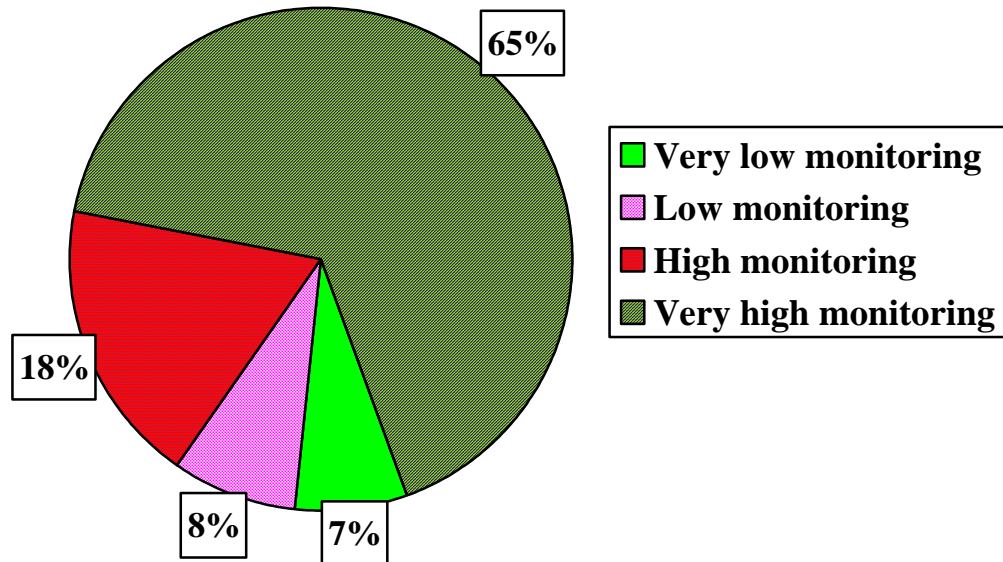


## FAMILY KEY IN TEEN DECISIONS

**Levels of Parental Monitoring**



Over half (54%) of teens “strongly agree” that their families love them and give them support when they need it. Based on teen perceptions, 65% of teens feel their parents monitor them at a “very high” level, while 15% feel their parents practice “low” or “very low” parental monitoring. Teens report they are more likely to have good talks with their parents about personal problems and plans after high school than drugs and sex.

These are among the findings of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) conducted by 15 school districts and more than 3700 students. UW-Extension faculty and academic staff in Crawford, Grant, Lafayette, and Richland counties are involved in processing and presenting the findings. The 7<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who took the survey attended schools in the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) District 3.

“High levels of parental monitoring and consistent enforcement of consequences play a significant role in the decisions made by teens,” says Bev Doll, Grant County Family Living Agent. Teens were asked how often their parents knew where they were after school, or going out at night; who their friends were; and if they knew the parents of their friends. “Seventy-two percent (72%) of teens reported that their parents knew where they were going, whom they were to be with, and if they were going to be late, adds Doll. Interestingly, 20% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade teens report their parents never or rarely know where they are after school.”

“Having open, honest conversations and sharing parental values and beliefs provides guidelines

for teens when faced with life's toughest choices," states Tom Schmitz, Grant County Youth Development Educator. "For example, of the teens who strongly agreed that their parents think it's wrong for teens to drink, 81 % reported not using alcohol in the last 30 days while 40% of teens who strongly disagreed with that statement reported not using alcohol in the last 30 days." Similar results can be seen with the use of tobacco, other drugs, and other teen behaviors.

"Sixty-four percent (64%) of teens who reported having consistent enforcement of family rules strongly agreed that their family loved them and provided support when they need it," according to Amy Mitchell, Crawford County 4-H Youth Development Agent. "On the same note, of the teens who reported inconsistent family rules, only 40% strongly agreed that their family loves and supports them. Consistently communicating and enforcing family rules are key in the reduction of negative behaviors, as well as encouraging good decision making."

"Teens who feel their parents would report and assign consequences if they violated a school code are less likely to binge drink," according to Pam Hobson, Richland County 4-H Youth Development Agent. Binge drinking is defined by drinking 5 or more drinks in a row. "Sixteen percent (16%) of teens who say their parents would report them for school code violations and support the school consequences or assign their own, binge drank in the past month. On the other hand 32% of teens who reported their parents would not report them binge drank in the past month."

The importance of eating family meals together can also be taken into consideration. "An interesting fact is that 21% of teens when asked how many nights a week do you eat as a family reported none," says Jessie Potterton, Lafayette County 4-H Youth Development Educator. "The data however, links eating three or more dinners a week with higher grades and reduced levels of alcohol and tobacco use. Fifty-one percent (51%) of teens reported eating three or more dinners a week together as a family."

The school districts of Argyle, Belmont, Benton, Black Hawk, Cassville, Cuba City, Darlington, Fennimore, Iowa-Grant, Ithaca, Lancaster, Platteville, Potosi, River Ridge, and Seneca participated in the survey, which was conducted in September of 2005. Participating school districts and the Grant County Drug-Free Coalition funded the survey.

A full report on the SWYS results is due out this summer. Hobson, Schmitz, Doll, Mitchell, and Potterton are also giving community presentations on the data. For more information on the survey contact your local school district, Schmitz and Doll at 608-723-2125, Potterton at 608-776-4820, Mitchell at 608-326-0223, or Hobson at 608-647-6148.

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