



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Diversity

November 2008

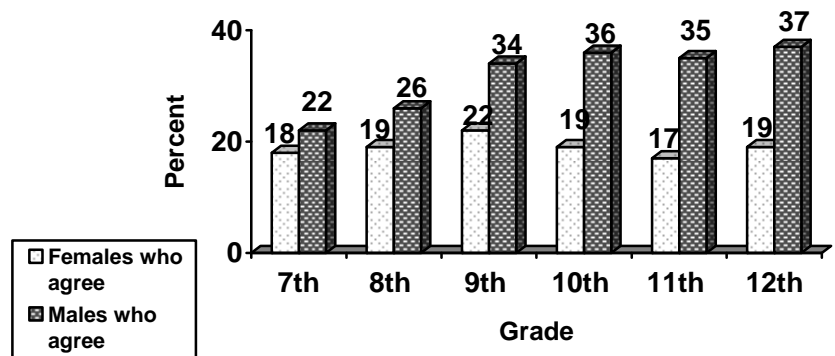
If southwest Wisconsin were an ideal world, our residents would all know and live comfortably with people of different cultures, races and ethnic backgrounds. We would all have caring relationships with many people who are not like us.

Southwest Wisconsin does not provide many opportunities for teens to live with and know people from different cultures. Over 95% of those who live in southwest Wisconsin are white, non-Hispanic. This poses some difficulty for parents and teens who would like to learn about different cultures, new places and varied ways to look at the world.

Yet, Search Institute reports that even in diverse communities “the majority of people spend time with people who look like them, think like them and act just like them. People do not do this because they are prejudiced, but because they do not know how to reach out to people who are different.”

Teens in southwest Wisconsin reflected this uncertainty in the 2005 Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS). This survey of 3,747 7th to 12th graders asked teens various questions about diversity.

Think of Other People Differently Because of Race/Color

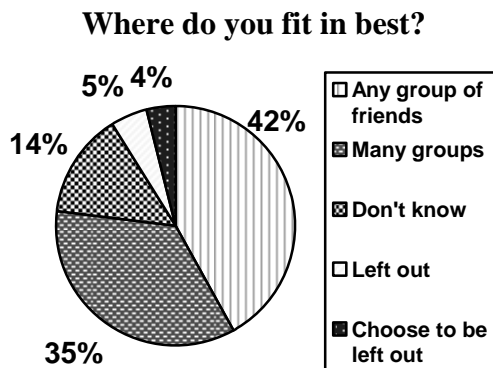


SWYS asked teens if they think of other people differently because of their race or the color of their skin. Responses indicate more males than females strongly agree or agree that they think they would treat others differently. For males, older teens report this more often than younger teens. This same question was asked in 2001 and the results indicate that teens then were less likely to think of other people differently because of race or color of their skin than teens that completed the 2005 survey.

Teens today are growing up, and will work, in a world that is more racially, economically, religiously, linguistically and culturally diverse than the world their parents grew up in. Teens do express interest in learning more about those who are different. In the Wisconsin conversations on Youth Development, the fourth priority issue identified by youth and adults was: “Provide more opportunities for youth and adults to learn about and experience cultural diversity.” Families, schools, communities, and youth organizations can help provide opportunities for youth to interact and learn about those who are different.

Getting along with teens who are different can be as simple as reaching out to new students at school or learning something about classmates. Many teens talk about how hard it is to fit in at school. In a Mix It Up Survey conducted by Teaching Tolerance, 70% of the students named the cafeteria as the school setting where most

social boundaries are clearly drawn. SWYS results echo a similar pattern. The chart below shows that 77% of the teens reported that they feel they fit in best with any or many groups of friends. Five percent said they are left out and 4% report they choose to be alone and another 14% don't know where they fit in.



When asked in SWYS how they think and act towards teens who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, 74% of teens indicated they would treat them the same as everybody else. Males in the upper grades were more likely to report they would treat these teens differently than middle school males. Conversely, females in the upper grades appeared more tolerant than females in the lower grades.

People who see others as individuals instead of labeling them according to a group they belong to are people who show respect or tolerance for each other.

Parents can also help teens develop the skills they need to work and live with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives. These tips from Search Institute are a starting a point.

Tips to Build Cultural Competence in your Teen

★Expose your teen to different kinds of people.

Travel to different communities and states. Take advantage of cultural offerings in your community.

★Help your teen develop an ethnic awareness and cultural identity of his or her own.

Together learn about your own ethnic heritage. Listen to stories from your family history. Celebrate cultural customs and rituals from your heritage.

★Examine images that television, movies and books project of people of various cultures or groups.

Discuss what is authentic and what is stereotypical. How can your teen tell the difference?

★Invite to dinner a family that is culturally or ethnically different from your own.

Share stories about different customs, traditions, holidays, foods, etc.

★Take advantage of opportunities to host visitors from other countries.

While your family teaches the visitor about your community, the visitor will teach your teen about another culture and ethnicity.

★Help your teen feel proud, but not superior, about his/her cultural, ethnic and racial identity.

Encourage your teen to talk about where his/her prejudices come from.

Remember: PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series written by S. Small, M. Huser, K. Hintz and D. Doll-Yogerst. This issue was written by Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County (adapted from "Parents Make a Difference," written by Deb Ivey) and edited by Jessie Potterton, UW-Extension Lafayette County, Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County and Pamela Hobson, UW-Extension Richland County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2005 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information, or by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Richland County (608) 647-6148 and Crawford County (608) 326-0224 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/SWYS2005.html>