



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Peers

April 2007

True or False? – Most teens are comfortable with their group of friends.

True or False? – Most teens report that their parents know their friends.

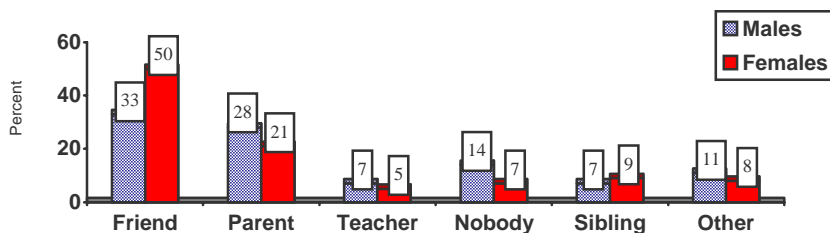
True or False? – Most teens report that they can stand up for their beliefs and resist negative peer pressure.

According to the 2005 Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 3727 7th-12th graders, the correct answer to all three of these questions is "true"!

Teen Friendships are Important

Peers are very important for teens since friends are a source of support and influence. In fact, if faced with a personal problem 50% of female teens and 33% of male teens would choose to talk to a friend before anyone else.

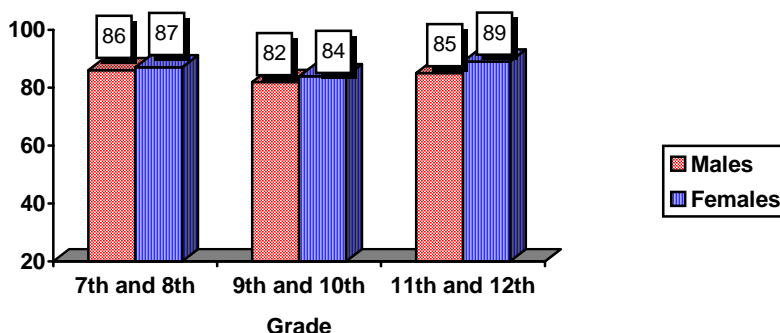
Percent of student responses to the question, "If you were having a personal problem and needed someone to talk to, who would you most likely go to?"



As teens grow older, they tend to spend more time with their peers and less time with their families. As a result, many parents worry about their teens' relationships with other teens. Parents hear stories all the time about good kids getting in with the wrong "crowd" and no parent wants that to happen to his or her son or daughter. According to Nina Mounts, University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, it appears that many parents have a couple of misperceptions about teen peer relationships.

First, many parents believe that peers are always a bad influence on teens. SWYS findings illustrate that almost all of our teens feel they can resist negative peer pressure as illustrated on the chart below.

Percent of students who agree or strongly agree with the statement: "I stand up for my beliefs and can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations."



Research shows that peers can be a negative *or* a positive influence. Yes, peers can lead your child to drink alcohol or smoke. But peers can also encourage your teen to resist these pressures and push your child to go to school, excel in academics or extra-curriculars, and pursue a college education. The type of friends your teen chooses determines the type of influence that they might have on him or her.

Second, many parents believe that they will always be at odds with what their teen's friends believe. Many parents believe that the generation gap puts their teen at odds with them on key values and moral issues. Research in this area shows, however, that parents and peers hold many of the same values. Parents' values about long-term plans for the future are especially important to teens, and these same values are usually supported by peers. Where teens and their peers usually differ most with parents is on things such as clothes, hair, or music – which have few long-term effects.

What Can Parents Do To Support Positive Peer Relationships?

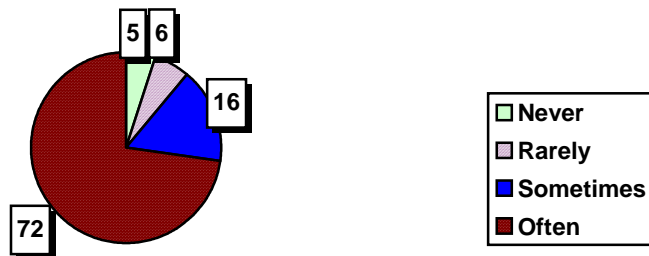
Remain close to your teen – a close relationship with parents is the best insurance that the teen will choose friends the parents like. It also helps to be able to resist negative peer pressure. Even if they may say otherwise, teens want and need the security their parents provide.

Encourage your teen's decision making – teens who practice decision making at home are more likely to use these skills to make good decisions when they interact with peers.

Know your adolescent's friends – a teen's selection of friends says a lot about who they are and what they are likely to be doing when you're not around. Without trying to be one of the gang, try to get to know your teen's friends as individuals. When parents show genuine interest in their friends, teens are less likely to see their parents and friends as opposing forces. In southwest Wisconsin, 74% of teen males and 79% of teen females reported that their parents "often" knew their friends.

Know where your teen is at and who he/she is going to be with – the majority of teens report that their parents know where they will be and who they will be with. When parents know what teens are doing and who they are with, teens are less likely to participate in risky behaviors.

Teens who report "my parent(s) know where I am & who I am going to be with" at night



Get the facts – Don't jump to conclusions based only on what your teen says is happening with friends. Parents often hear "OTHER kids' parents don't make them come in THAT early!" or "ALL the kids are going to that party!" Some parents may feel coerced into changing the rules because they don't want to be different from other parents. Ask for more information from your teen.

And you may also want to have a conversation with your teen's friends' parents. In southwest Wisconsin, 58% of the teens reported that their parents "often" knew the parents of their friends.

Make room for peer activities – teens do need time with their friends. It allows them to learn more about themselves and other people. Offer your home as a place to gather or offer to drive younger teens to a social function. You will be able to have greater influence and monitor activities if you provide a respectful, welcoming atmosphere.

Encourage positive teen relationships – with peers who have values you approve of. If your teen has friends that you're concerned about, keep a closer eye on their activities. Don't say anything positive about the friend and don't say anything negative either. Your lack of response toward the friend will signal your teen about your feelings.

Hang in there – keep communicating, setting limits, emphasizing values and standards, and providing support – even when teens seem to be turning a deaf ear, violating the rules, or actively resisting you. You are more of an influence than you realize!

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 by Huser, et.al. and "Parents Make a Difference! Teens and Their Peers" by Schriefer et al. This issue of "Parents Make a Difference" was written by Jessie Potterton, UW-Extension Lafayette County, and edited by, Pam Hobson, UW-Extension Richland County, Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County, and Bev Doll and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant County. Thanks are extended to the 3,727 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2005 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608) 326-0223; and Richland County (608) 647-6148. Or visit the website at: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>. References for this edition of "Parents Make a Difference" include: Parenting Teens.aboutcom, Mississippi & Wisconsin State University Extension Publications, Positive Parenting Series.