



Parents Make A Difference! Teens and Community

November 2007

“Students who have supportive families and communities are better at avoiding activities that can threaten their education and their future.”

Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005

Communities play an important role in the positive development of young people. The Tuft’s 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development (PYD), 2007, revealed that youth who are involved in structured programs outside of school are more likely to experience PYD than their non-participating peers.

According to the study findings, youth involved in 4-H are more likely to contribute to themselves, their families and their communities by living a healthy lifestyle, supporting family activities, volunteering and helping friends and neighbors.

According to the 2005 Southwest Youth Survey (SWYS) of 3,727 7th through 12th graders, 78 percent of these teens in southwest Wisconsin express attachment to their community.

Teens in the SWYS survey were also asked if they believe “adults in my community respect and listen to me (my opinions, values, etc.)” Overall, 73% of males and 73% of females *agree* or *strongly agree* with this statement. Figure 1 shows the responses to this question by grade and gender.

Adults in My Community Respect and Listen To Me

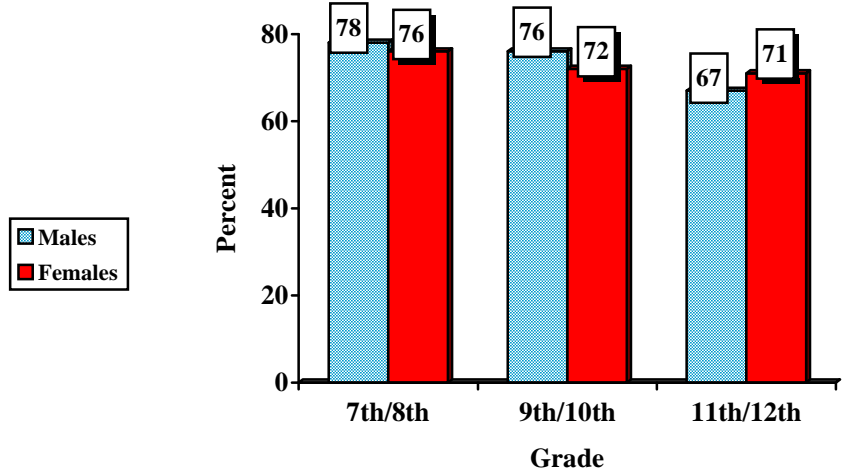


Figure 1: Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with the statement, “Adults in my community respect and listen to me (my opinions, values, etc.)”

Teens also need caring adults, who are not their parents, as role models and supporters. Research shows that teens are more connected to their community and relationships between generations are stronger and more meaningful when teens feel adults in their lives care about them. These adults provide reinforcement and role modeling for intellectual, social and emotional growth.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of teens in SWYS who “strongly agree” with the statement, “if I were having a serious personal problem, there are at least three adults who are not my parent whom I would feel okay talking to”:

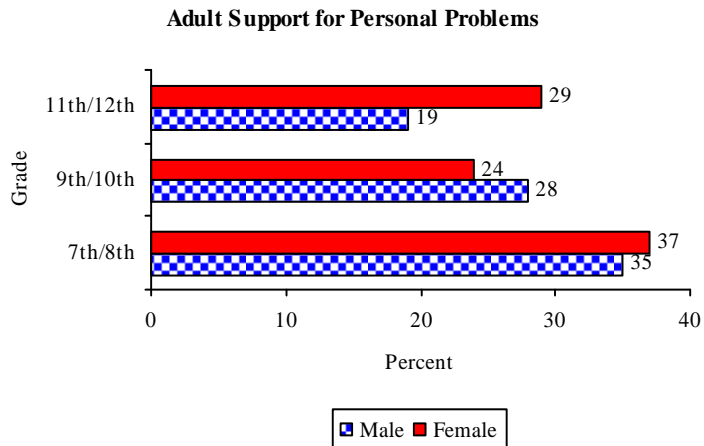


Figure 2: Percentage of students who *strongly agree* with the statement, “If I were having a serious problem, there are at least three adults who are not my parents whom I would feel okay talking to.”

SUPPORTING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Learn the names of children and teens who live near you or who work in shops you frequent. Greet them by name and take time to talk to teens.
- Model a positive, healthy lifestyle.
- Expect teens to behave responsibly. Let them know what you expect from them—before there is trouble.
- Thank people who work with teens in your community—teachers, 4-H and Scout leaders, clergy, and others.
- Look out for children and youth. Help keep them safe in your community and your home.

**REMEMBER:
PARENTS MAKE
A DIFFERENCE!**

Teens and Community Service

Community service and citizenship activities provide a means for youth to connect to communities and to learn to give back to others. Teens also enhance their understanding of civic duty, ethics and the importance of service.

In the Southwest Youth Survey, teens were asked to respond to the statement, “I’m given a lot of opportunity to make my community a better place.” Figure 3 shows the percentage of teens who “strongly agree” or “agree” with this statement:

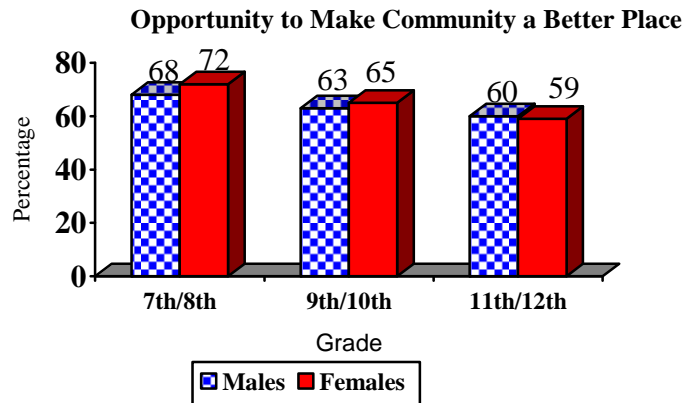


Figure 3: Percentage of students who *strongly agree or agree* with the statement, “I’m given a lot of opportunity to make my community a better place.”

A Positive Youth Development Approach

Communities can work together to help all young people achieve their full potential by building a strong foundation for teens. This includes giving young people the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and help their communities. It also means using youth as resources in communities and it means strengthening families and communities as well.

Research supports that integration of family, school and community is critical for youth to be successful. Youth who are supported by their parents are more likely to believe that their effort in school will pay off. Youth whose parents are active in the community showed higher academic and peer success.

Why is it important for youth to see themselves as active participants in the future? The more experiences youth have, the better they will be able to see themselves in the future. Giving youth opportunities to think about how they want to live in the future will aid them in making better life choices.

“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 newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” Teens and Community newsletter, which was originally written by Deb Ivey. This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was written by Jessie Potterton, UW-Extension Lafayette County and edited by Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County, Bev Doll and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant County and Pam Hobson, UW-Extension Richland 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 www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/SWYS2005.html for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Richland County (608) 647-6148 and Crawford County (608) 326-0224.