



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Community

May 2005

“The more support young people receive from their community, the more likely they are to be successful. “

America’s Promise, 2003

Communities play an important role in the positive development of young people. America’s Promise states that every teen needs five fundamental resources to make their dreams a reality. These resources include a caring adult role model in his or her life, a healthy start, a safe place to learn and grow, an opportunity to learn marketable skills through effective education, and opportunities to give back through community service.

Teens do feel safe in Southwest Wisconsin according to the 2001 Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 7th to 12th graders. Ninety percent of these teens *agree* or *strongly agree* that they feel safe walking around in 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 69% of males and 74% of females *agree* or *strongly agree* with this statement. Figure 1 shows the responses to this question by grade and gender. Females are more confident that adults are listening to them than males.

Adults in My Community Respect and Listen to Me

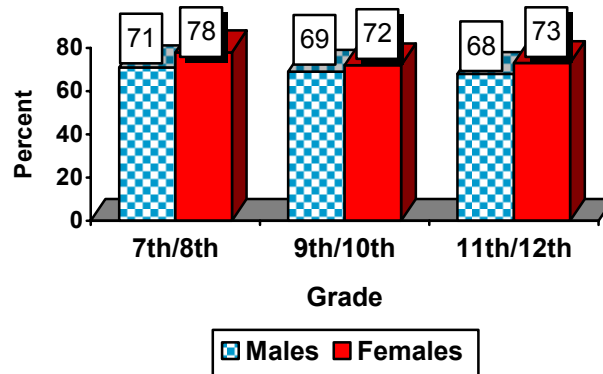


Figure 1: Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with the statement, “Adults in my community respect and listen to me (my opinions, values, etc.)”

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 is an adult who’s not my parent whom I would feel okay talking to*”:

Adult Support for Personal Problems

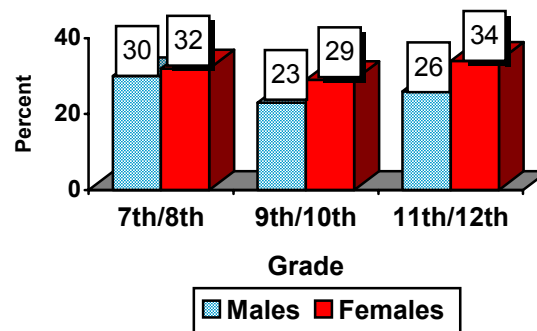


Figure 2: Percentage of students who strongly agree with the statement, “If I were having a serious personal problem, there is an adult who’s not my parent whom I would feel okay talking to.”

Overall, only 29% of youth report there is an adult other than their parent that they would feel comfortable talking to about a personal problem.

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 SYWS, nearly all teens report that it is important to help other people. These numbers were consistent across grade levels and gender lines.

A 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.

As Karen Pittman says, "Together, we can create communities where young people and adults are working together to create the necessary conditions for the successful development of themselves, their peers, families and communities." (Karen Pittman, retrieved from <http://www.cydjournal.org/2002SprSum/contents.html>)

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 home.**

Remember, Parents and Communities 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. This issue was written by Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier, UW-Extension Iowa County, Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County, and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County. Sources for this issue include www.searchinstitute.org, www.americaspromise.org, www.ncfy.com. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391 or on the web at http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parent_resources.html