

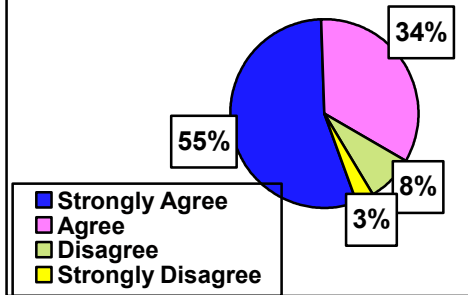


# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teens and Family Support

December 2002

**My Family Loves Me and Gives Me Support (Figure 1)**



Eighty-nine percent (89%) of teens in southwest Wisconsin agree or strongly agree with the statement, “My family loves me and gives me support when I need it.” Fifty-five percent (55%) of teens strongly agree with the statement (Figure 1). These are among the findings of the recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) which surveyed 5,704 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders in 19 of the 31 school districts in southwest Wisconsin.

### What contributes to teens feeling loved and supported?

- The opportunity to communicate thoughts and feelings.
- A sense that their thoughts and feelings are important.
- Consistent rules that are fairly enforced.
- Problem solving within the family that involves discussion and compromise.

Feeling loved and supported is crucial as teens grow to adulthood. During adolescence young people are beginning to discover who they are as individuals separate from their parents. This discovery process involves experimentation with new ideas, different friends, and trying out a variety of new activities. Unfortunately, this natural exploration can lead some teens to participate in behaviors that pose a risk to their health and well-being.

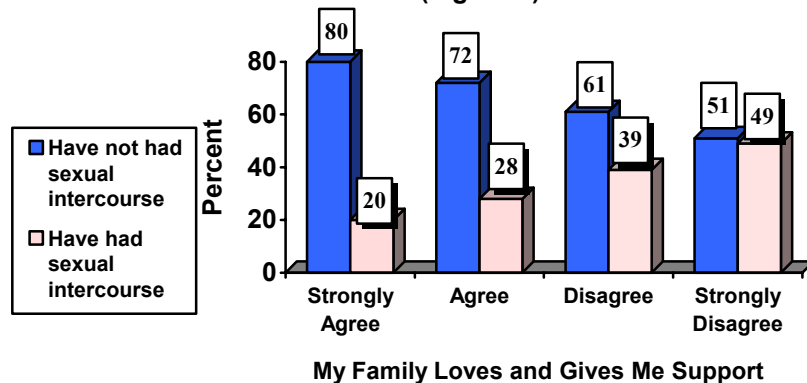
### Parents Make a Difference!

Teens who strongly agree with the statement, “My family loves me and gives me support when I need it,” are much less likely to have tried alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, much less likely to have had sexual intercourse, and are much less likely to feel depressed. The following table and graph illustrate this point (Figure 2).

	Strongly Agree My Family Loves and Supports Me	Disagree/Strongly Disagree My Family Loves and Supports Me
Never tried smoking	73%	44%
Never tried alcohol	54%	23%
Never tried marijuana	86%	62%

Figure 2 demonstrates that of teens who strongly agree they feel loved and supported by their families, 80% of them have **not** had sex. This is in contrast to only 51% of teens who strongly disagree with the statement “My family loves me and supports me when I need it” who report **not** having had sex.

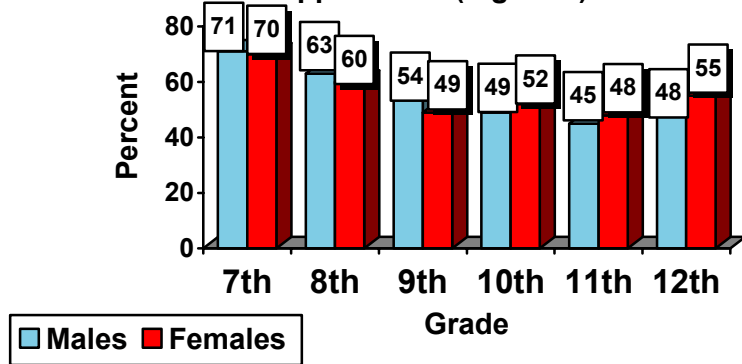
**Family Love and Support vs Sexual Intercourse (Figure 2)**



Of note, 53% of those teens who reported **not** feeling family love and support also reported thinking about suicide in the month prior to the survey. For more information about teens and depression, see the November 2002 **Parents Make A Difference!** newsletter.

Ninety-six percent (96%) of teens who reported that their families most often solve problems through discussion and compromise also reported that their families love them and support them. Contrast this with the 87% of teens who reported adults make most decisions on family problems and the 69% of teens who reported that they do whatever they want no matter what solution is decided upon who also reported feeling family love and support.

**Teens Who Strongly Agree Family Loves and Supports Me (Figure 3)**



**Younger teens are more likely to report strongly feeling family love and support than older teens (Figure 3).**

### Communication Through Family Meetings



Today's family is busier than ever, so it is especially important for families to come together to discuss how things are going, catch up on each other's lives, and settle conflicts that arise.

- Set aside a regular time and place.
- Expect everyone to participate, even the young ones.
- Turn off the TV and don't allow the distractions of telephones and pagers.
- Set a time limit.
- Establish the ground rules together and stick to them.
- Don't focus only on problems; share positive feelings and congratulate yourselves for successes.
- Give everyone the opportunity to be heard.
- Make it fun!

### Who are teens going to for help with personal problems?

Twenty-one percent (21%) of teens report they would most likely go to a parent or step-parent if they were having a personal problem, second only to friends at 46%. Eleven percent (11%) report they would not seek help from anyone. Younger teens are more likely to go to a parent or step-parent with a personal problem. Older teens are more likely to seek help from a friend their own age.

In the year prior to the survey, 32% of males and 48% of females report at least *sometimes* having a good conversation with their mother (or adult female they live with) about personal problems. One-fourth of both males and females report at least *sometimes* having a good conversation with dad (or adult male they live with) about a personal problem during the same time period.

### Want to have good conversations with your teen?

Try beginning with open-ended questions like "What do you think about..." or "How do you feel about...", filling in the topic you would like to discuss. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with one word (like "fine" or "nothing"). Share your thoughts and opinions while giving the teen the opportunity to think about what you have said and come to his/her own conclusions. Most importantly, **listen**. This will make your teen feel that his/her opinions are important to you. Be patient as you begin to open the lines of communication with your teen, but also be persistent. The time and effort are worth the investment.

**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. This issue was written by Christina Kenney, UW-Extension Grant County, and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County, and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County. 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.

More survey results on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/2001/2001surveyresults.html>.

