



Whose Kids?...Our Kids! Lin-Wood Cooperative School District Parent-Teen Relationships

In November of 2000, the Teen Assessment Project (TAP) was conducted in the Lin-Wood Cooperative School District to learn more about the youth in the community. The Lin-Wood Cooperative School District granted permission to the Lin-Wood/ Newfound/Pemi-Baker Community Coalition to re-survey its youth in 2003 to determine what changes in perceptions and behaviors had occurred. In April 2003 approximately 73% of the 174 middle school and high school students (174) participated.

		Male	Female
30	7th graders	20	10
16	8th graders	9	7
26	9th graders	15	11
14	10th graders	5	9
23	11th graders	10	13
18	12th graders	6	12

"Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" is a parent newsletter series of the Teen Assessment Project (TAP), a program of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. This project was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), through the Division for Children, Youth and Families, NH Department of Health and Human Services. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) originated at the University of Wisconsin at Madison under the direction of Stephen A. Small, Ph.D. TAP in Grafton County is under the direction of Deborah Maes, UNH Cooperative Extension Family Development Educator in cooperation with Charlotte W. Cross, UNH Cooperative Extension, Youth Development Specialist. For more information about TAP call Charlotte W. Cross at (603) 862-2495 or e-mail at charlotte.cross@unh.edu.

This issue of "WHOSE KIDS?...OUR KIDS!" focuses on parent-teen relationships. Tips are given to parents on balancing guidance and control with their teenagers' need for independence.

Parenting a teenager can be difficult at times. It also can be exciting and rewarding. Parents who have good relationships with their teens welcome the signs that show their children are growing up.

These parents learn about the normal development of their children. They're also willing to gradually change the parent-child relationship. The relationship changes as the skills, needs, and concerns of their teens change.

Changing your relationship with your teenager doesn't mean giving up your role as a parent. Your teen still needs you, but in a different way.

- How can parents keep a good relationship with their children during the teenage years?
- How can parents balance their teens' needs for independence and guidance?
- How can parents help their teens become responsible and independent?

Building Blocks to Effective Parenting of Teens

Begin with love & support

Allow some independence but provide guidance

Set clear and reasonable limits, but be flexible

Know what to expect & be willing to change

Be fair with discipline

Know What to Expect and Change Your Relationship as Needed

How can you keep a good relationship with your teen? You'll need to change as your teen's needs and abilities change. Consider your growing teenager's:

- need for privacy,
- ability to reason and make decisions, especially those which affect him or her,
- need to spend time with friends,
- need to dress and be like friends,
- need for greater freedom and independence.

Ways to Start Talking With Your Teen

- How was your day today on a scale of 1 to 10? (Where 1 is terrible and 10 is terrific.) What made it that way?
- What was the high point (or low point) of your day?
- Tell me the good news and the bad news about school today (or work today, practice this week, camp this summer, etc.).
- What is a thought or feeling you had today?
- What happened today that you didn't expect?
- I'm wondering what you're thinking about? Would you be willing to tell me? (These two questions may be helpful if your teen seems preoccupied.)

Begin With Love and Support

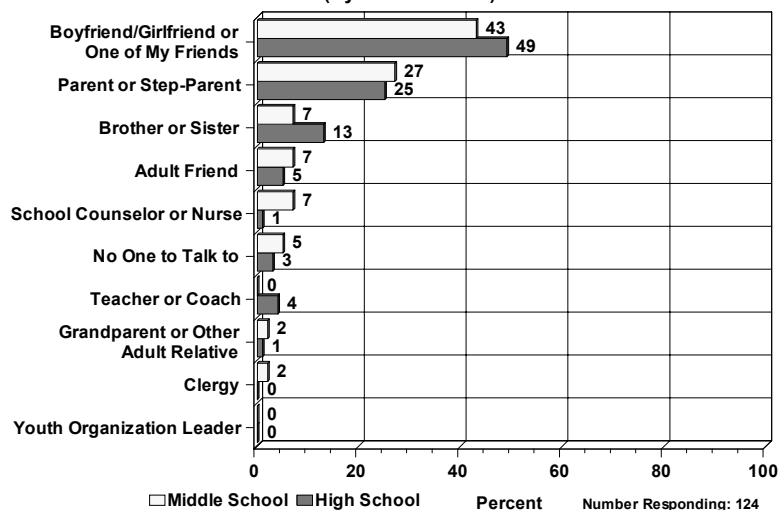
Like younger children, teenagers need to know you care about them. Support and love are important for teens' healthy development and good parent-teen relationships. Here are a few ways to let your teens know you love and support them.

- **Spend time together.**
Go to a special event, share an activity you *both* enjoy, work together on a home project, or plan a special family meal. Time spent one-on-one can help strengthen the ties between you.
- **Talk about your teen's interests and concerns.**
Don't read a newspaper when your teen wants to talk. Don't only talk about negative things such as the mess in your teenager's room! Talk with your teen when things are going well. Show an interest in what's happening in your teenager's life.
- **Be supportive.**
Things that don't seem important to adults can be very important to teens. Teenagers may feel angry, sad, or disappointed if they aren't asked to a dance, break out with pimples, or start to shave long after their friends. Remember that teenagers, especially young teenagers, don't have your experience. They can feel deep emotions over their daily ups and downs. Try to be as understanding as you can.

Who Do Teens Talk To About Personal Problems?

Local teens told us that the greatest percentage of them would talk with a boyfriend or with a girlfriend. Teens' second choice was a parent or a stepparent. Five percent of the students reported that they had no one with whom they could talk about a personal problem.

Who Teens Would Talk to About Problems
(By School Level)



Tips for Parents: Keeping Communication Open

- Give your full attention when your teen wants to talk to you.** Don't read, watch TV, fall asleep, or make yourself busy with other tasks. These get in the way of good communication. Listening means "tuning in" to what is said and showing that you understand. Lean forward, establish eye contact, nod, and use brief phrases like "Really?", "Mmmm Hmmm", "What happened next?" If you are too busy at the moment, suggest a time when you and your teen can talk.
- Use a courteous tone of voice that shows respect for your teen.** Respect brings respect. Criticizing, humiliating, name-calling, or laughing at teens can hurt feelings and stop communication. Being gruff or abrupt can lead to teens getting angry. Use a pleasant tone of voice so your teen will come to you for advice and support.

Lin-Wood Cooperative School District teens feel their parents are there for them when they need them.

How often do teens feel their parents are there for them? The percentages below show that the majority of teens reported this.

"Often" or "Very Often"

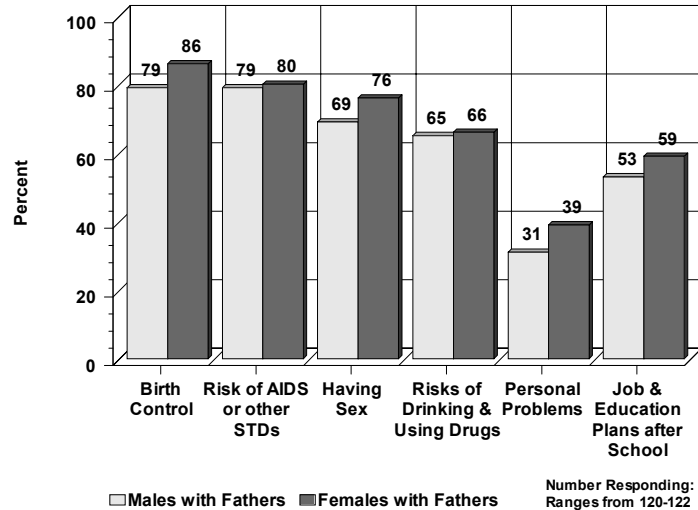
Mother there for boys	87%
Mother there for girls	77%
Father there for boys	67%
Father there for girls	61%

Teenagers may want their privacy. Many may not respond to questions like, "What's wrong?" or "Are you upset?" However, the survey showed most local teens felt their mothers and fathers are there for them.

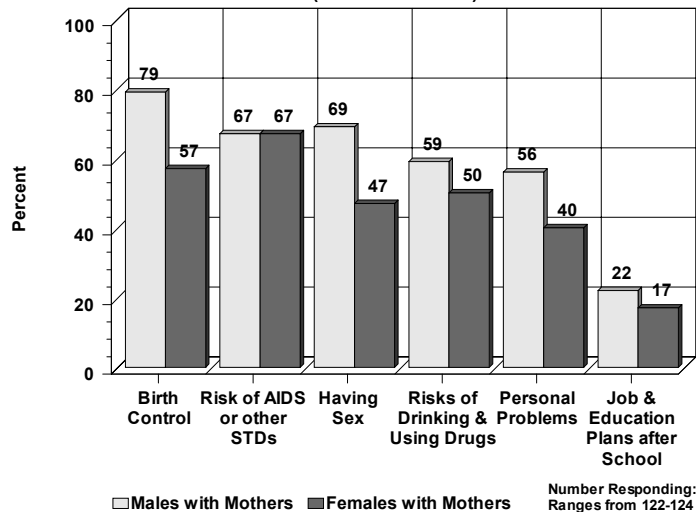
Talking to Parents: Local Teen Responses

Teens may talk to their parents about some topics. But many aren't talking with their parents, especially about personal problems. In our recent survey we asked 7th through 12th graders how often in the past year they had a good talk with mother/father about a number of topics. The results below show what students reported.

Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Fathers
(In the Past Year)



Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Mothers
(In the Past Year)



In students' discussions with both their mothers and fathers, birth control is the least discussed subject, while job or education plans are discussed most often.

How Well Do You Monitor Your Child?

- Do you know where your child is after school and at night?
- Do you talk with your child about his or her plans with friends?
- Do you ask your child to call if he or she will be coming home later than expected?
- Do you know your child's friends?

Parental Monitoring

We asked teens a number of questions about how well their parents monitored them. Many parents knew their teens' friends, who they were with, where they went at night, and what they were doing after school. However, a number of parents did not know this information, according to their teens.

My parents...

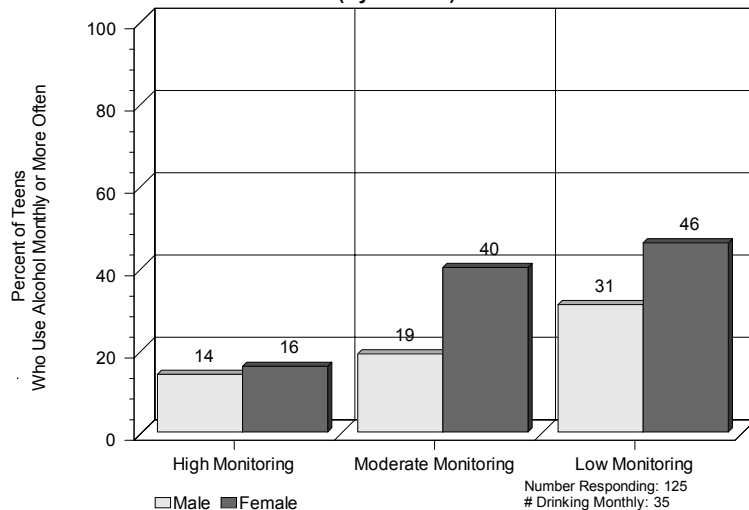
Percentage of Teens Responding "Always" or "A Lot of the Time"

- Expect me to call if I'm going to be home late 89%
- Ask me where I'm going when I go out 83%
- Know who my friends are 79%
- Know who I'm going to be with 73%
- Know where I am when I go out at night 73%
- Know what I'm doing after school 68%
- Know the plans I have with my friends 57%
- Know how I spend my money 49%

Link between Parental Monitoring and Teen Substance Use

The graph below shows that students in the high parental monitoring group report less monthly teen drinking than those in the low parental monitoring group. We cannot infer that one behavior caused another, only that the two behaviors are related.

Relationship Between Levels of Parental Monitoring and Monthly Teen Drinking (By Gender)



Set Clear and Reasonable Limits ... Be Flexible

Gaining a balance of freedom and control is no small order for parents. Family values, a teen's age and level of maturity, and his or her behavior all make a difference.

• Non-negotiable rules.

Most families have some non-negotiable rules that are very important to parents and aren't easily changed. Have only a few of these rules. They should deal with the teen's physical and emotional safety and strongly held family values. For example, "No riding in a car with a driver who has been drinking," and "You must go to school," are non-negotiable rules in most families. Teens sometimes challenge non-negotiable rules. But, they're likely to follow them if parents are willing to calmly explain the reasons. Teens will respect the non-negotiable rules if they're carefully chosen. As your teen becomes more mature, some non-negotiable rules may become negotiable.

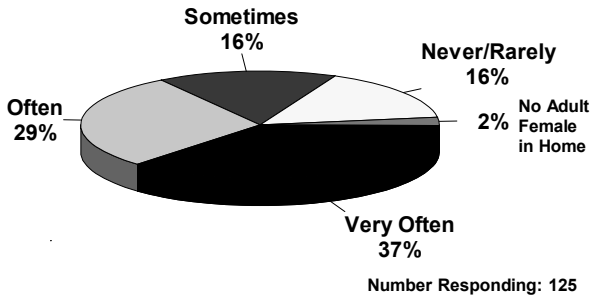
• Negotiable rules.

These are rules that teens and parents make together. Again, they should be changed as a youth becomes more mature and responsible. Issues of household responsibilities, curfew, and use of the family car are negotiables. Rules and decisions about these areas should be made by parents and teens together. Take into account the needs of both.

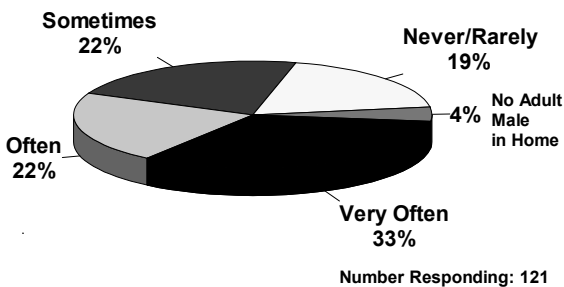
“That’s Not Fair!”

You may hear your teen exclaim, “That’s not fair!” But our survey shows most local teens believe their mothers and fathers “often” or “very often” enforce rules fairly.

“My mother is fair when it comes to enforcing family rules.”



“My father is fair when it comes to enforcing family rules.”



Be Fair With Discipline

If rules and limits are reasonable and fair, teens see the rules as a sign their parents care. But, sometimes teens break rules and limits. When this happens, try not to “blow-up” at your child. It doesn’t do any good to send the message that your teen is a failure. In fact, punishment is not a good way to get your teenager to cooperate and learn for the next time.

- **Share your disappointment and concern.**

A second way is to simply say, “I’m disappointed, and I don’t want this to happen again.” If your teen has a good relationship with you, he or she wants your approval. Your teenager will try to avoid letting you down again. Focus your feelings on the *act*, not the person. Say, “I’m very angry you did that; it was a dangerous thing to do.” Don’t say, “You are so stupid.”

- **Involve your child in setting rules and consequences or outcomes.** A third way is to ask your teen what will happen if a rule is broken. Ask teens to think about how others might feel. Often, teens set harsher consequences for themselves than their parents do! When only parents set rules and consequences, teens may feel angry. When teens help set their own rules, they’re less likely to say “unfair!”

- **Be sure the outcome fits the behavior.**

Discuss with your teen why you can’t allow the behavior. Try to work out a consequence or outcome together. Let your teen know what will happen if he or she breaks the rule. But remember, the consequence should be fair and fit the misbehavior. For example, if your teen doesn’t drive safely, she can’t use the car for two weeks. In some cases, your teen needs to repair the damage. For example, if a lamp is broken in an angry outburst, ask that it be fixed or paid for. Remember to save stiffer consequences for major misbehaviors (like drinking and driving). Use lighter consequences for more minor misbehavior (like staying out a short time beyond curfew).

- **Try to respond in a similar way from one day to the next.**

Don’t enforce a rule one day, then ignore the misbehavior the next day. If you change from day to day, you send a message to your child, “this rule doesn’t really count.” If you have a spouse or partner, both of you need to enforce the rules. If you and your partner don’t agree on a rule, work out your differences in private.

- **Always leave room for change.** Being fair when setting rules and limits means talking about them as your teen changes. He or she develops new abilities and needs, and shows more responsibility. Rules should change as your teen changes.

Books Recommended For Parents

- Bender, P. (2000). **How To Keep Your Teenager From Driving You Crazy.** Chicago, Illinois: Contemporary Books.
- Cohen-Sandler, R. & Silver, M. (1999). **I'm Not Mad, I Just Hate You! A New Understanding of Mother-Daughter Conflict.** New York: Penguin.
- Elias, M., Tobias, S., Friedlander, B. (2000). **Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers.** New York: Harmony Books.
- Emswiler, M.A. & Emswiler, J.P. (2000). **Guiding Your Child Through Grief.** New York: Bantam Books.
- Fontenelle, D. (2000). **Keys To Parenting Your Teenager.** Hauppauge New York: Barron's Educational Services.
- Gurian, M. (1999). **The Good Son: Shaping the Moral Development of Our Boys and Young Men.** New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Knox, D. (2000). **Divorced Dad's Survival Book.** Reading, MA: Perseus Books
- Newberger, E. (1999). **The Man They Will Become.** Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Ricci, I. (1997). **Mom's House, Dad's House.** New York: Fireside.
- Steinberg, L. (2002). **Adolescence.** New York: Knopf.

UNH Cooperative Extension Resources:

- **Publication Series:**
Living with your Teenager
- **Workshop Series:**
Family Focus: Parenting the Young Teen

Helpful Resources

Abuse

NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) 1-800-894-5533
(To report child abuse or neglect)
Sexual Assault Support Services 1-888-747-7070

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) 1-800-593-3330
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention
and Recovery 1-800-804-0909
Treatment Hotline of U.S. Dept. Health & Human Services 1-800-662-4357

Counseling Services

HELPLINE 1-800-852-3388
Parent to Parent of NH Family Support Network 1-800-698-5465
NH Legal Assistance 1-800-334-3135

Crisis Hot Lines

Access Crisis Line 1-800-987-6562
Boys Town Hotline 1-800-448-3000
TeenLine (confidential, for any problem) "Head Rest" 1-800-639-6095
Youth Crisis Hotline 1-800-448-4663

Family Planning/Health Services

Plymouth Family Planning 536-3584
Franklin Family Planning 934-4905
Mt. Mooselauke Health Clinic 764-5704

Information and Referral

Help Line (also crisis intervention) 1-800-852-3388
Info Link 1-888-499-2525
Poison Information Center 1-800-222-1222
Lin-Wood/Newfound/Pemi-Baker Community Coalition
(youth alcohol, tobacco and other drug prevention) 536-3720 x 108

Runaway

Child & Family Services of NH Group Home 224-9313
National Runaway Switchboard 1-800-621-4000

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Plymouth Family Planning (testing, info) 536-3584
Franklin Family Planning (testing, info) 934-4905
Lakes Regional General Hospital 524-3211
NH AIDS Hotline 1-800-752-2437

Suicide and Depression

Speare Memorial Hospital 536-1120
Franklin Regional Hospital 934-2060
Lakes Regional General Hospital 524-3211
TeenLine (confidential, for any problem) "Head Rest" 1-800-639-6095

UNH Cooperative Extension

Grafton County, Family and 4-H Youth Development 787-6944

Also see the "Self-Help Guide to Human Services in N.H." at the front of your telephone book

This newsletter was based on a publication by Stephen A. Small, University of Wisconsin at Madison. The UNH Cooperative Extension newsletter "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" was edited by Charlotte W. Cross, Extension Specialist, Youth Development and Mary W. Temke, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Human Development, with assistance from Fran Chickering, Program Coordinator, UNH Cooperative Extension.

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