



Whose Kids?...Our Kids!

Lincoln-Woodstock Cooperative School District Parent-Teen Relationships

Recently, the Lincoln-Woodstock Cooperative School District, Grafton County UNH Cooperative Extension, Lin-Wood Drug and Alcohol Committee and community members joined together to learn more about the youth in our community by conducting the Teen Assessment Project (TAP).

Approximately 75% of the students were surveyed in the Lin-Wood School District. In all, information from 153 surveys was used for this newsletter.

		Male	Female
31	7th graders	20	11
25	8th graders	10	15
29	9th graders	13	16
24	10th graders	10	14
23	11th graders	8	15
21	12th graders	10	11

"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. Support for this project was provided by a grant received from the State Incentive Grant. 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

Getting Along With Parents

In our survey, we found most youth thought their mothers cared about them "often" or "very often" (89%). Many said the same about their fathers (80%). But a few of the teens believed their father "never" or "rarely" cared about them. A small number of teens believed the same thing about their mothers.

Most local teenagers believe they have a good relationship with their parents. However, they seem to worry about getting along with their parents at home. Many said they worried "quite a bit" or "very much." Some reported they worry at least "some" or "a little." In addition, many students worry "quite a bit" or "very much" about their parents getting along with each other.

"How much do you worry about getting along with your parent(s)?"

Number Responding 153

"How much do you worry about your parents getting along with each other?"

Number Responding 150

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.

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.

Parents and Teens: Decision-Making

How do local teens and their parents make important decisions? "What time do teens need to be home?" "Where can they go with friends?"

As the charts below show, most parents use a "democratic" parenting method. With this method, both parents and teens voice their opinions about issues. They come to a decision together.

There are also parents who use more of an "autocratic" style. They tell their children exactly what to do. Fathers were slightly more likely than mothers to use an "autocratic" style.

A number of parents use a "permissive" style. These parents aren't involved in making decisions. They trust their teens to make their own decisions ("permissive indulgent"). Or, they simply aren't interested in their childrens' lives ("permissive neglectful").

Mothers

Number Responding 148

Fathers

Number Responding 146

Many parents are afraid their teens will suddenly turn away from family values. Studies show that most teens don't. Teens will try to be like their friends in style of dress, hair, and music. Many families argue over chores, curfew, hairstyles, and clothes. But even with this bickering, most teens feel close to their parents. Many have similar values to their parents, even as they try to become independent and make their own decisions.

Balance Guidance and Control With Independence

Teenagers are soon to become independent young adults. Therefore, they need more and more freedom. At the same time, they need guidance and direction from their parents. How can parents give guidance and independence?

- Involve your teen in decision-making. Some teens are successful, responsible, and feel good about themselves. These teens have parents who allow them to talk about their ideas and opinions. Their parents explain the reasons behind the rules they set. They don't just set rules in a "no-questions-asked" way.

In addition, parents involve their teens in making many rules and decisions. These include decisions about curfews, household chores, use of the family car, and family activities. By making decisions together, parents teach their teens how to think about choices.

This "democratic" parenting style differs from an "autocratic" one. Autocratic parents make most or all of the decisions. They don't allow their teens to have a say in making decisions or rules. It also differs from a "permissive" parenting style. Permissive parents have practically no rules. Parents allow their teenagers to make all of the decisions with little or no parental input, guidance, or advice.

- Give your child freedom a little at a time. There are some things that parents can allow their teenagers to decide on their own. These decisions are about clothes and music, when to do schoolwork, and participation in activities such as sports, clubs, and hobbies. Teens usually don't try to show independence by doing riskier things when their parents let them make day-to-day decisions. Parents who try to manage all areas of their childrens' lives often have teens who "talk back" and/or misbehave. These teens may take riskier ways to show independence, like driving too fast.

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	82%
• Know who my friends are	82%
• Ask me where I'm going when I go out	80%
• Know where I am when I go out at night	78%
• Know who I'm going to be with	77%
• Know what I'm doing after school	65%
• Know the plans I have with my friends	54%
• Know how I spend my money	46%

- Monitor your child's behavior. Monitoring your child means knowing where your child is. It also means knowing about his or her activities and friends. Teenagers spend more and more time away from home, often unsupervised. Still, parents must continue to guide and monitor teens to some degree.

Parental monitoring doesn't mean being overly involved in your teenager's life. Teenagers need privacy, independence, and to feel they are trusted. But, it does mean that parents show an active interest in the lives of their children. Parental monitoring can help keep teenagers out of trouble. Studies show parental monitoring is related to lower rates of teenage drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, delinquency, and victimization.

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 parents set for their children. These are rules that are very important to parents. They aren't easily changed. Have only a few of these rules. They should deal with the child'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. There are some non-negotiables that will probably never change. On the other hand, as your teen becomes more mature, some non-negotiable rules may become negotiable. Not talking on the phone after 9:30 may be a firm rule for your 14-year-old. It may be a flexible rule for your high school senior.

- Negotiable rules. These are rules that teens and parents make together. Again, they should be changed as a child 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."

Number Responding 149

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

Number Responding 148

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.

- What should I do if my teen does something wrong?
One way is to stand back and let your teen suffer the results of his or her behavior. For example, don't drive your teen to school or work if he/she is late.
- 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 stays out past curfew again, he'll be grounded for a week. 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."

Be Fair With Discipline.....

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.

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- 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. Hauppaisge 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.

UNH Cooperative Extension Resources:

- Publication Series:
Living with your Teenager
- Workshop Series:
Family Focus: Parenting the Adolescent

Helpful Resources

Abuse	
NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)	1-800-894-5533
Sexual Assault Support Services	1-888-747-7070
Task Force Against Domestic and Sexual Violence	536-3432
Alcohol and Drug Abuse	
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)	524-1654 or 1-800-593-3330
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery	1-800-804-0909
Treatment Hotline	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)	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 Control	1-800-562-8236
Pemi-Baker Youth and Family Services Council	536-9773
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)	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 Susan Silverberg, 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. Tenke, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Human Development, with technical assistance from Karen M. Watts, Program Assistant, UNH Cooperative Extension. Desktop publishing provided by UNHCE Educational Marketing & Information Office.

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