

CHAPTER 7

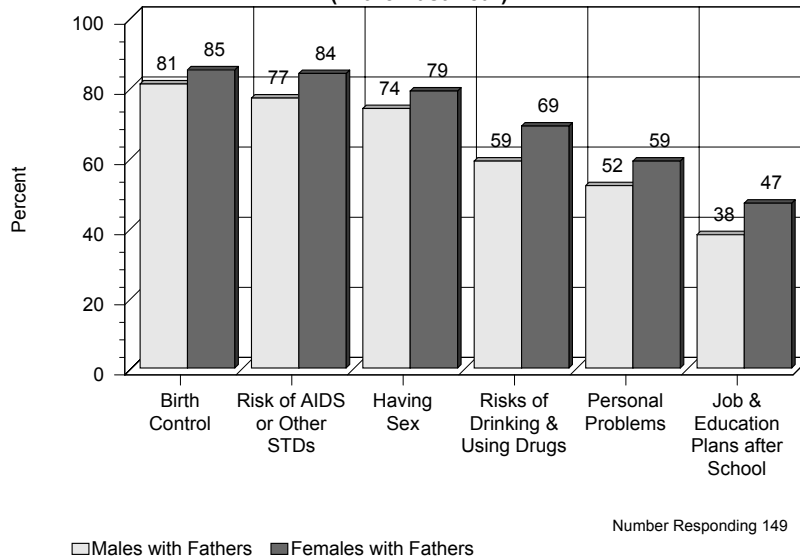
Parent-Teen Relationships

Most would agree the family is the most influential socializing agent in the lives of children. It is through parents that children learn about themselves, how to interact with others, how to make decisions, and how to develop morality and a sense of values.

Communication

Parent-teen communication is an important vehicle for sharing ideas, values, concerns and dreams. As numerous scholars and family professionals have noted, good communication is vital to the well-being of parent-teen relations. Yet, many local youth felt they had not had a good talk with their mothers or fathers in the past year. It seems reasonable to assume that more in-depth conversations on important topics in these areas would benefit both teens and parents. Figure 7-1 shows that many youth have "never" or "rarely" had a good talk with their fathers in the past year about birth control, risk of AIDS or other STDs, whether or not it's ok for teens their age to have sex, risks of drinking and using drugs, and personal problems.

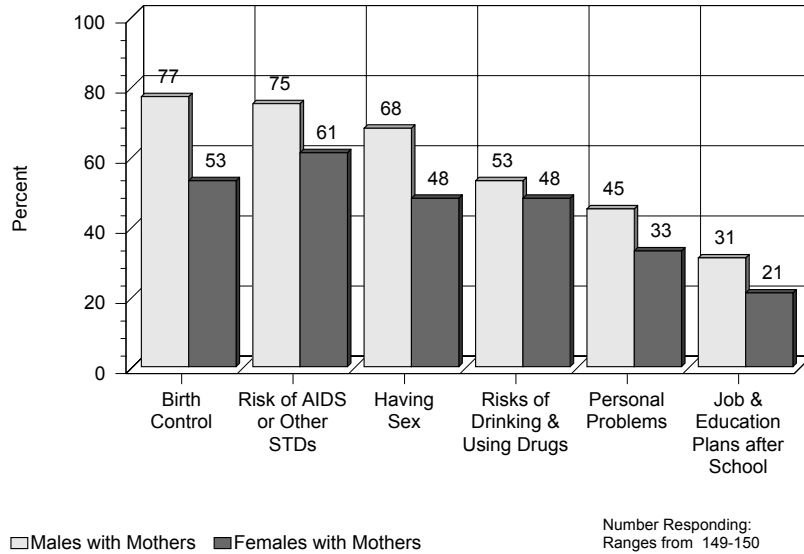
**Figure 7-1: Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Fathers
(In the Past Year)**



Note: Due to rounding, graphs may not total 100%.

Figure 7-2 shows many youth have "never" or "rarely" had a good talk with their mothers in the past year about birth control, risk of AIDS or other STDs, whether or not it's ok for teens their age to have sex, risks of drinking and using drugs, and personal problems. In students' discussions with both their mothers and fathers, birth control and the risks of AIDS and other STDs are the least discussed subject, while job or education plans are discussed most often.

Figure 7-2: Teens Who Never or Rarely Had Good Talks with Mothers (In the Past Year)



Getting Along with Parents at Home

As shown in Figure 7-3, 87% of local teens worried to some degree about getting along with their parents at home. Forty-seven percent (47%) worried "quite a bit" or "very much" about this issue (middle school, 57%; high school, 42%; males, 49%; females, 46%).

Figure 7-3: Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home

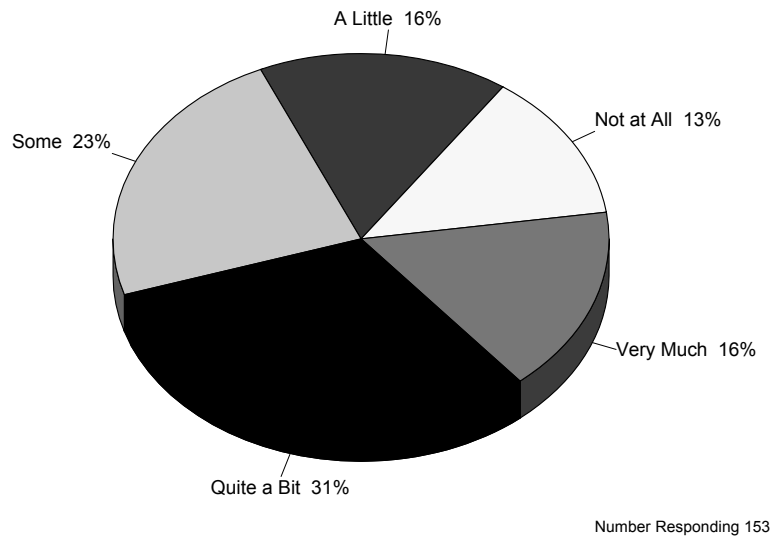
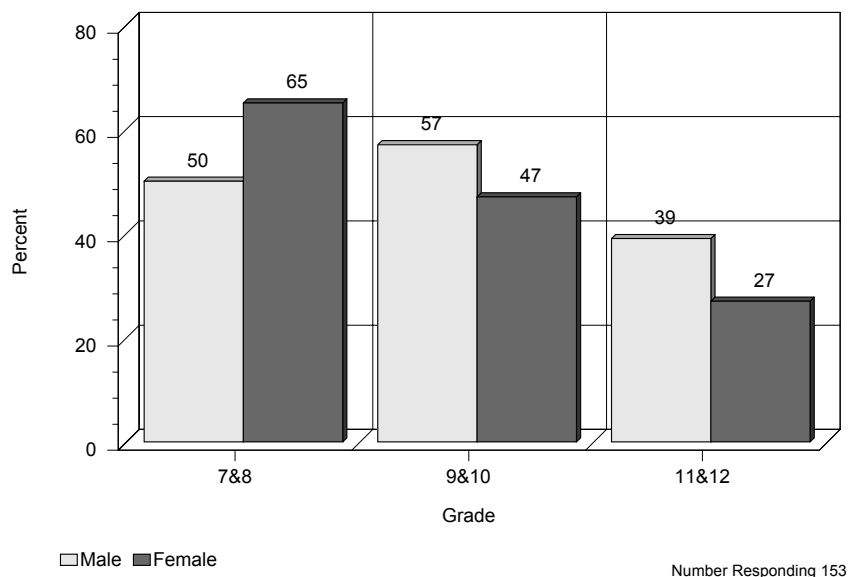


Figure 7-4 shows the percentage of teens who said they worried "quite a bit" or "very much" about getting along with their parents, on the basis of gender and grade level.

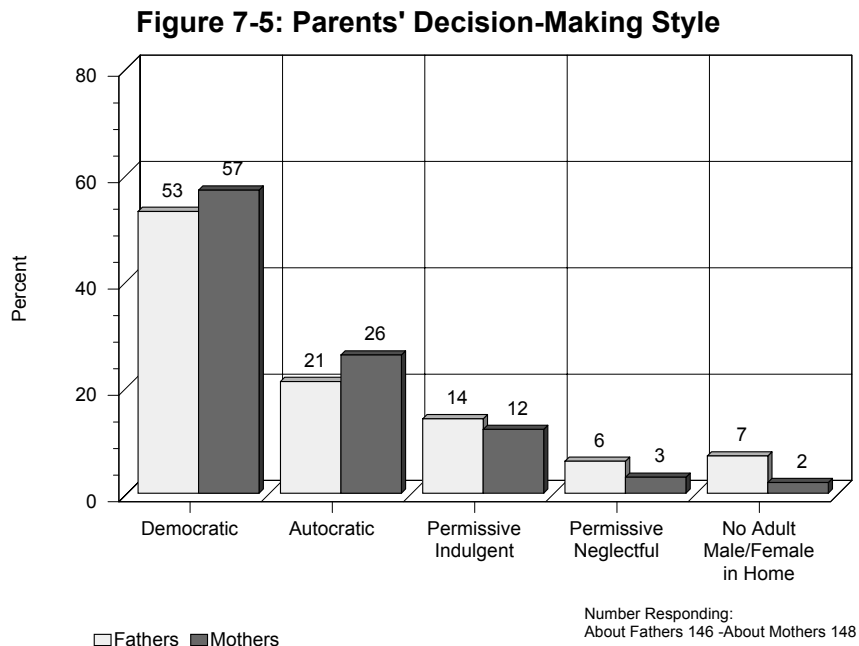
Figure 7-4: Worry About Getting Along with Parents at Home (Quite A Bit or Very Much, by Grade and Gender)



Decision-Making

Research has shown those teenagers who are the most competent, responsible, and have the highest self-esteem are more likely to have parents who allow them to express their opinions, involve them in making decisions and rules, and explain the reasons behind family rules and discipline (Demo, Small, Savins-Williams, 1987; Liprie, 1993). By involving children in making decisions, parents teach their teens how to make important and wise decisions under their watchful supervision. This parenting style is known as democratic (*My mother/father and I talk about it and together we come to a decision* or *My mother/father asks my opinion but she/he has the final say* or *My mother/father discusses the decision with me but then lets me decide*). Such a parenting style can be contrasted with an autocratic style where parents make most or all the decisions and allow their child little say in decisions or rules (*My mother/father tells me exactly what to do*). In a permissive parenting style, parents allow their child to make all decisions with little or no input or advice from them. This style can be either permissive indulgent (*She/he trusts me to make my own decisions*) or permissive neglectful (*She/he doesn't care what I do, so I decide for myself*).

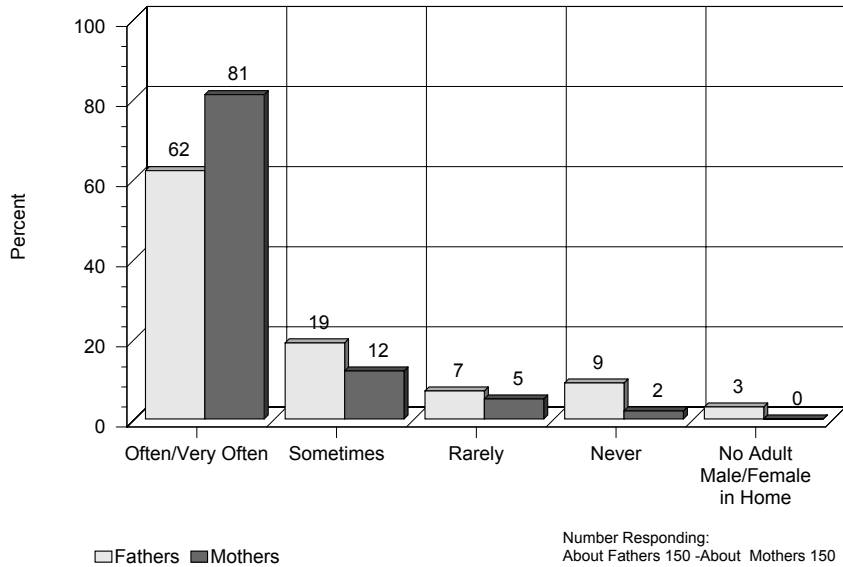
Figure 7-5 compares how students perceive the parenting style of local mothers and fathers. According to the reports of local teens, 53% of fathers and 57% of mothers use a democratic style, while 21% of fathers and 26% of mothers were characterized by their children as being autocratic.



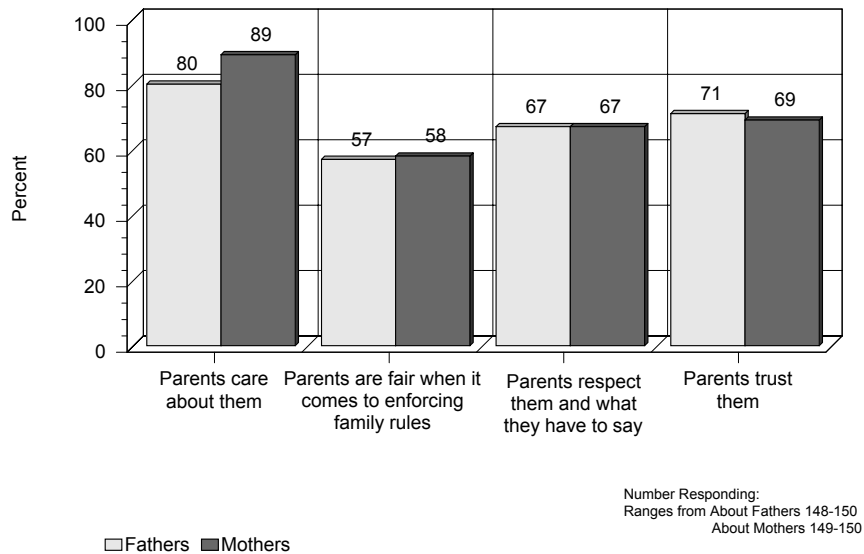
Parental Support and Love

Another factor central to the development of children and the general quality of the parent-teen relationship is how supportive and loving parents are. As Figure 7-6 shows, 81% of all teens felt their mother was there “often” or “very often” when they needed her; 62% felt the same for their father. Figure 7-7 shows students’ perceptions of four parental support factors - whether their parents care about them, fairness in enforcing the family rules, respect and trust.

Figure 7-6: Parents Are There for Them

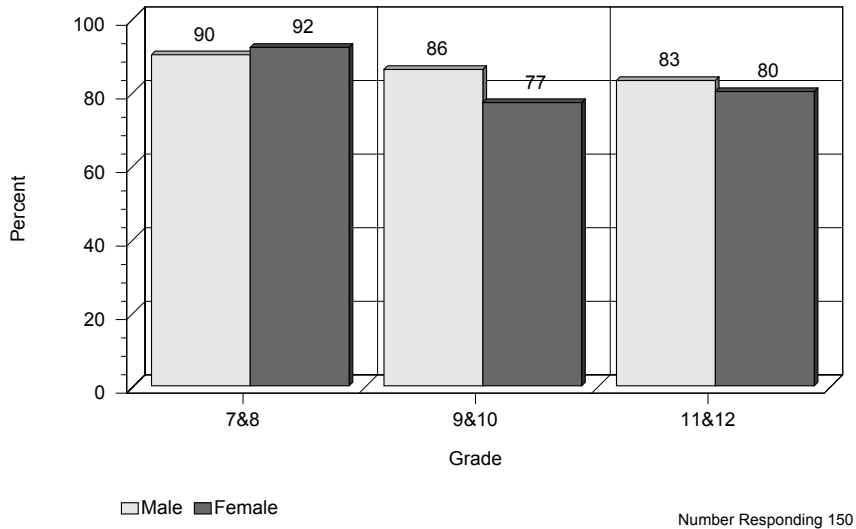


**Figure 7-7: Parental Support
(Often or Very Often)**



A sense of parental support can be seen in the high number of students who "agree" or "strongly agree" their parents are interested in what they are learning and how they are doing in school. This is illustrated in Figure 7-8. Both males and females reported a slightly higher rate of "parental interest" in middle school than in high school (middle school males, 90%; middle school females, 92%; high school males, 85%; high school females, 78%).

Figure 7-8: Teens Who Feel Their Parents Are Interested in What They Learn and How They Are Doing in School (Strongly Agree or Agree, by Grade and Gender)



Parental Monitoring

Past research has suggested parental monitoring can be an important factor in preventing adolescent problem behaviors. Parental monitoring involves a parent's supervision and awareness of a child's behavior and whereabouts. Higher levels of parental monitoring have been found to be related to lower rates of both sexual activity and alcohol and other drug use (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Flannery et al., 1999; Luster & Small, 1997; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Rodgers, 1999). A series of eight questions in the survey was used to assess how well teens were monitored by their parents. For example, teens were asked to indicate how often they talk with parents about their plans, whether they are required to call home if they will be late, and whether their parents know their friends. Figure 7-9 shows students' responses regarding how parents monitor their behavior in a number of different ways.

Figure 7-9: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior (A Lot of the Time or Always)

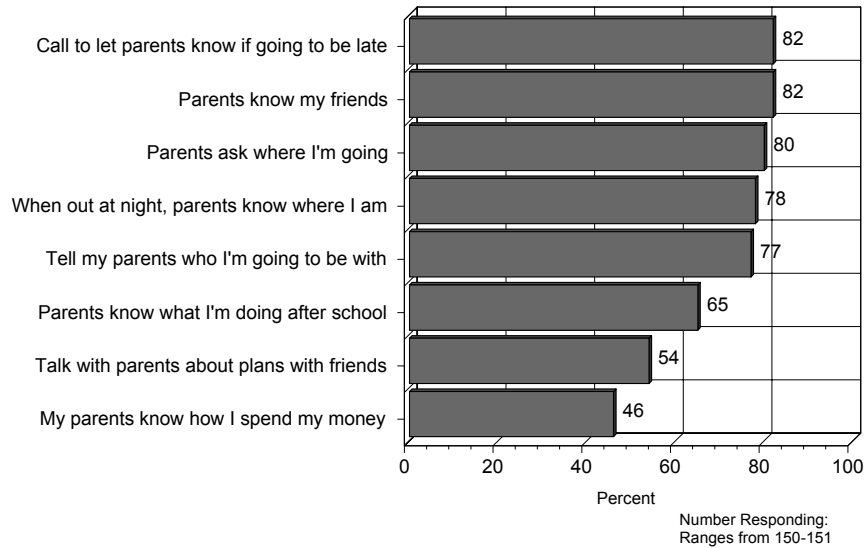


Figure 7-10 shows the difference between middle school and high school students' responses. Middle school students reported higher levels of parental monitoring than high school students for every category.

Figure 7-10: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior

(A Lot of the Time or Always, by School Level)

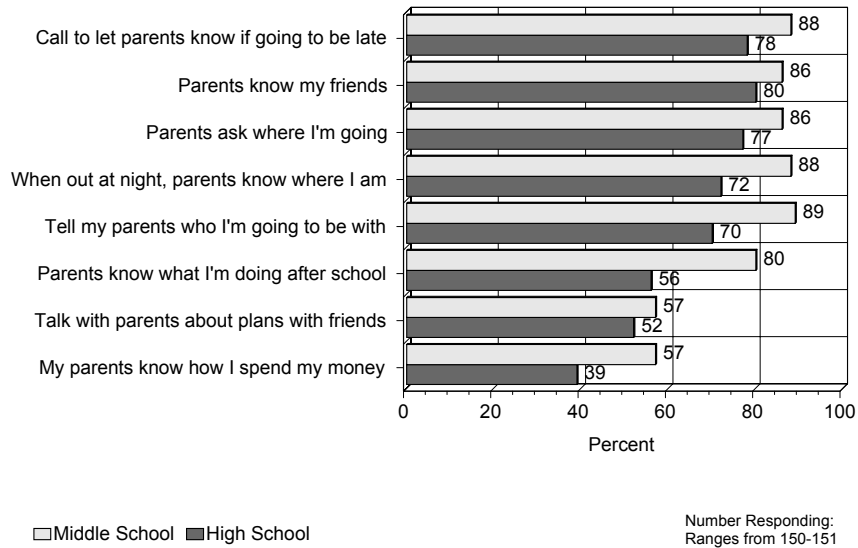


Figure 7-11 shows differences between the responses of males and females. The chart indicates that females usually report a higher level of parental monitoring than males.

Figure 7-11: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior

(A Lot of the Time or Always, by Gender)

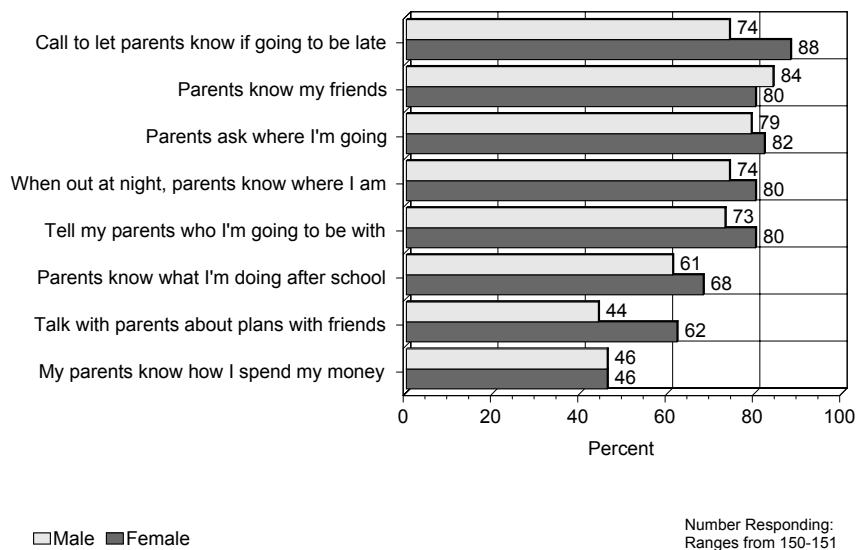


Figure 5-21 in Chapter Five shows the level of sexual activity among teens with low parental monitoring is almost three times the level of sexual activity of teens with high parental monitoring. In Chapter 4, Figure 4-44 shows the level of monthly drinking among youth with low parental monitoring is five times higher than the level of drinking among youth with high parental monitoring and Figure 4-56 shows the rate for monthly tobacco smoking is significantly higher among youth with low parental monitoring than for youth with high parental monitoring. This supports research which has demonstrated that teens who are monitored by their parents are less likely to engage in health compromising behaviors (Flannery et al., 1999; Luster & Small, 1997; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Rodgers, 1999). Unlike supervision, monitoring does not require parents' physical presence; however, monitoring does entail an active, but nonintrusive, interest, awareness and involvement in teens' day-to-day life (Small & Eastman, 1991).