
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 develop morality and a sense of values.

This chapter presents the findings of the Teen Assessment Project survey in the area of parent-teen relationships. It is divided into sections which include the Overview of Findings, a summary of key points; and the Presentation of Data, analysis of data presented in graphic form.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

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 about things that were important to them. It seems reasonable to assume that more in-depth conversations on important topics in these areas would benefit both teens and parents. Many youth have *"never"* or *"rarely"* had a good talk with their fathers or 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. Both males and females were more likely to talk with their mothers than their fathers about these important topics. The TAP survey found parents were more likely to talk with their teens about less sensitive topics such as job and education plans after high school.

Getting Along with Parents at Home

The parent-teen relationship can undoubtedly be a stressful one. The TAP survey found that a large number of youth in New Hampshire have some concern about their relationship with their parents. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the teens surveyed worried to some degree about getting along with their parents at home with a third saying they worried *"quite a bit"* or *"very much."* There was little difference between males and females and the grade levels on this issue.

The decision-making process is one area that may cause tension between parents and teens, particularly when parents and teens disagree. 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.*). The TAP survey found that most teens felt their parents have a democratic parenting style (fathers, 55%; mothers, 66%). Autocratic and permissive indulgent were much less common, and very few teens reported their parents were permissive neglectful. More teens reported their mothers used a democratic parenting style than their fathers, and slightly more fathers (19%) than mothers (16%) were reported to be autocratic in their parenting style.

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. The TAP survey asked New Hampshire teens a few questions to assess how they felt about their parents' level of love and support. Most of the teens surveyed felt their parents were “often” or “very often” there for them (fathers, 65%; mothers, 81%) and even more teens reported they felt their parents care about them. Mothers were more likely than fathers to be reported as supportive and caring (fathers, 81%; mothers, 91%). Most teens (88%) felt their parents were interested in what they were learning and how they were doing in school. Overall, the New Hampshire teens surveyed by TAP reported feeling loved and supported by their parents. Fewer teens, however, assessed their parents as being fair when enforcing family rules (fathers, 57%; mothers, 64%).

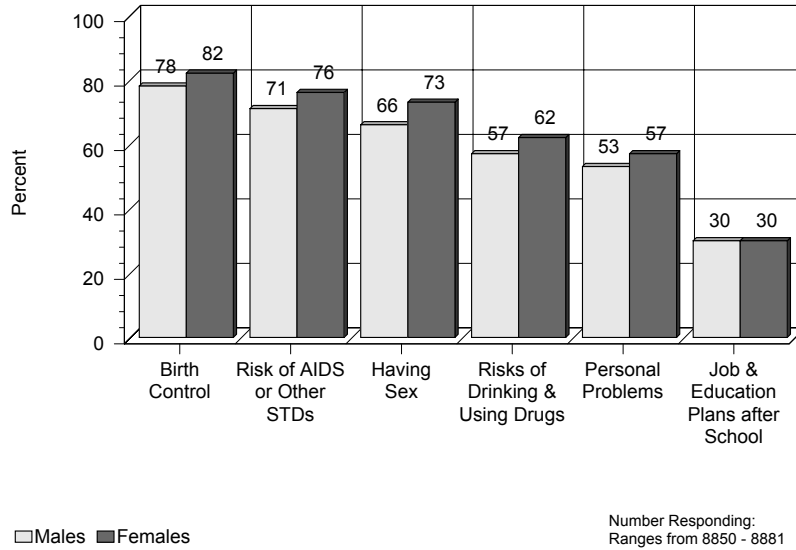
Parental Monitoring

Past research has suggested that levels of parental monitoring are linked to levels of adolescent problem behavior. 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 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. Most New Hampshire teens surveyed (about three-quarters) reported close monitoring by their parents. They reported having to tell their parents when and where they go, who they are with and what they are doing, and to call when they are going to be home late. Teens were less likely to say their parents know how they spend their money or that they talk with their parents about their plans with friends. Middle school youth and females reported being more closely monitored by their parents than high school youth and males.

Figure 5-9 in Chapter Five shows the level of sexual activity among teens with low parental monitoring is over three times the level of sexual activity of teens with high parental monitoring. In Chapter 4, Figure 4-38 shows the level of monthly drinking among youth with low parental monitoring is higher than the level of drinking among youth with high parental monitoring. Figure 4-48 shows the rate for monthly tobacco smoking is 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).

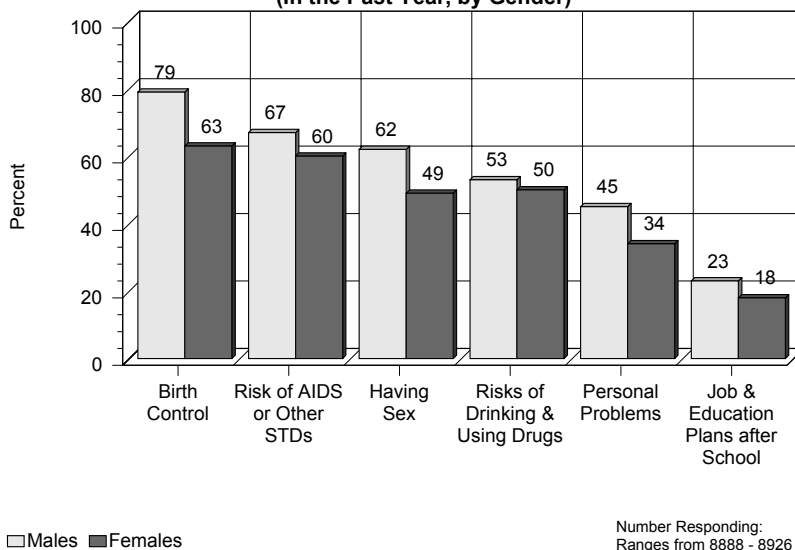
PRESENTATION OF DATA (Note: Due to rounding, some graphs may not total 100%.)

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



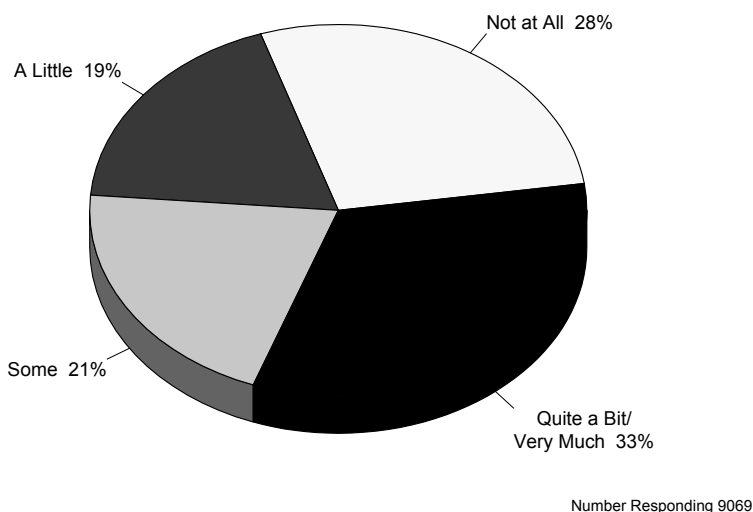
- Fewer females than males reported talking about these subjects with fathers.
- Birth control, AIDS and other STDs, and sex were the least discussed topics.
- Job and education plans after school were the most discussed topics.

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



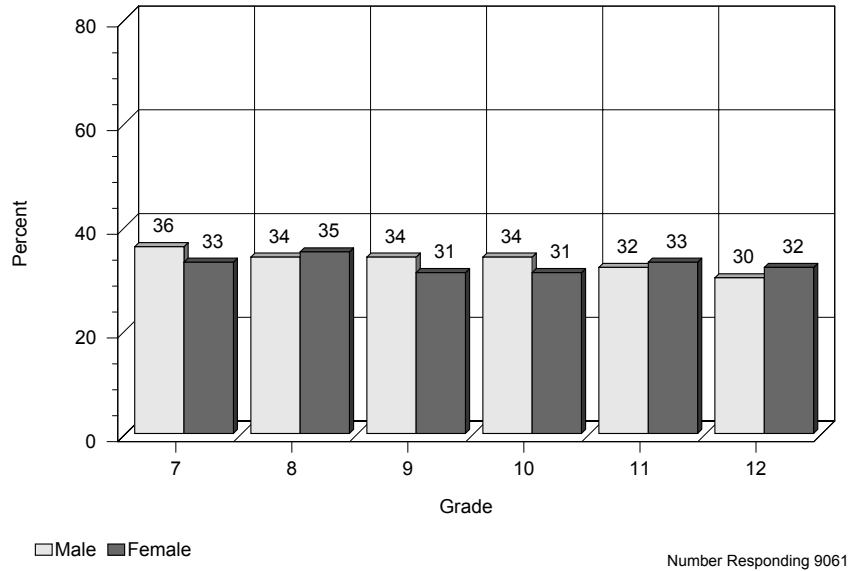
- Birth control, AIDS and other STDs were the least discussed topics.
- Job and education plans after school were the most discussed topics.

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



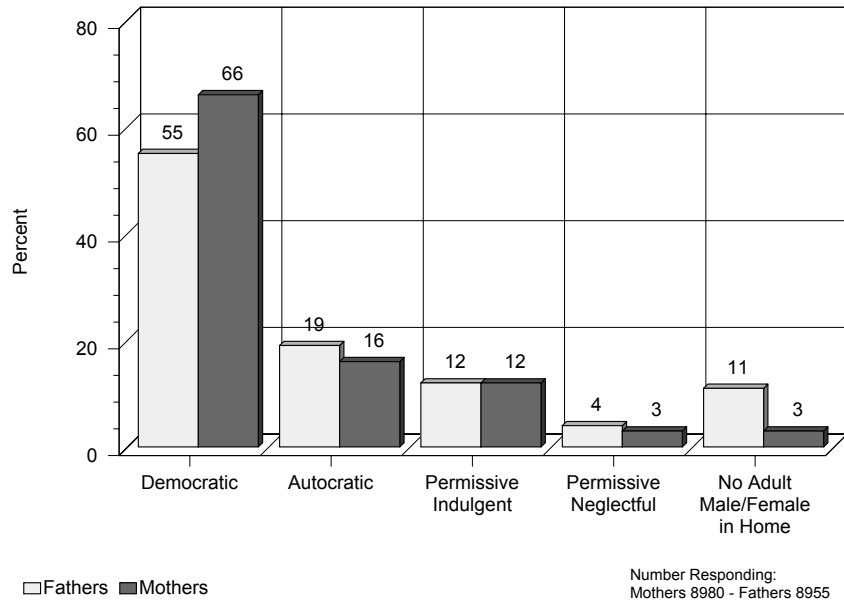
- Seventy-two percent (72%) of teens worried at least a little about getting along with parents at home.

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



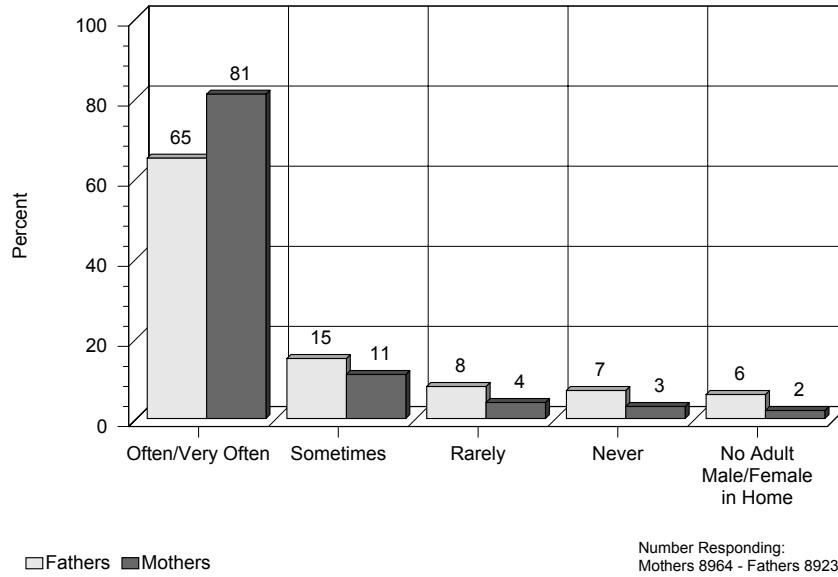
- Overall, thirty-three percent (33%) worried quite a bit or very much about getting along with parents.

Figure 7-5: Parent(s)' Decision-Making Style



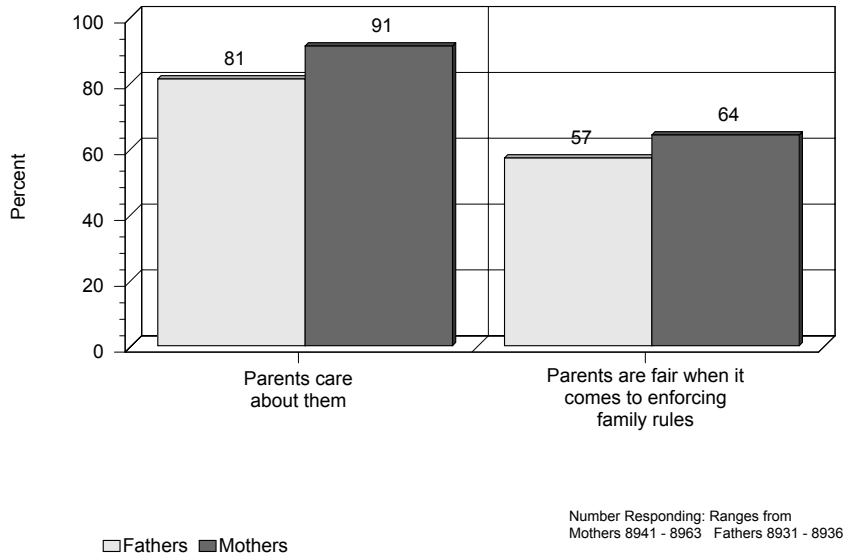
- Teens reported that most parents use the democratic parenting style.
- A greater percentage of mothers than fathers are reported as being democratic.

Figure 7-6: Parents Are There for Them



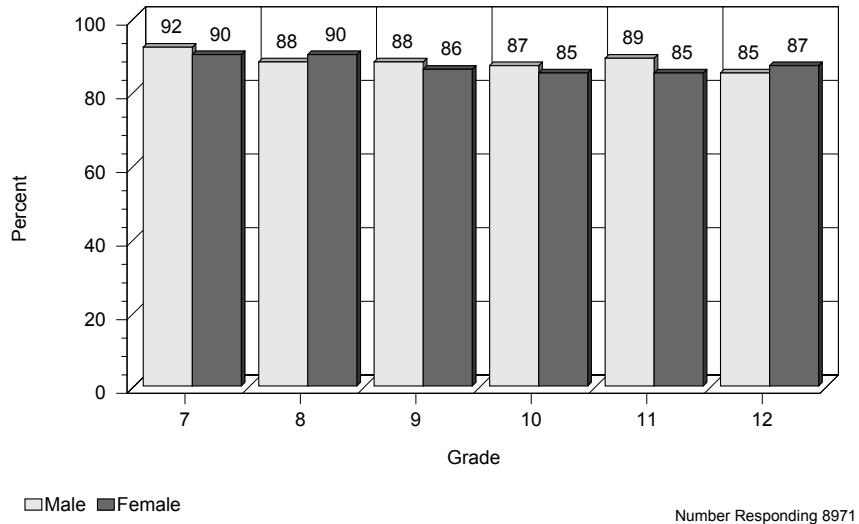
- Most teens feel their parents are there for them.
- Mothers were reported to 'be there' more often than fathers.

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



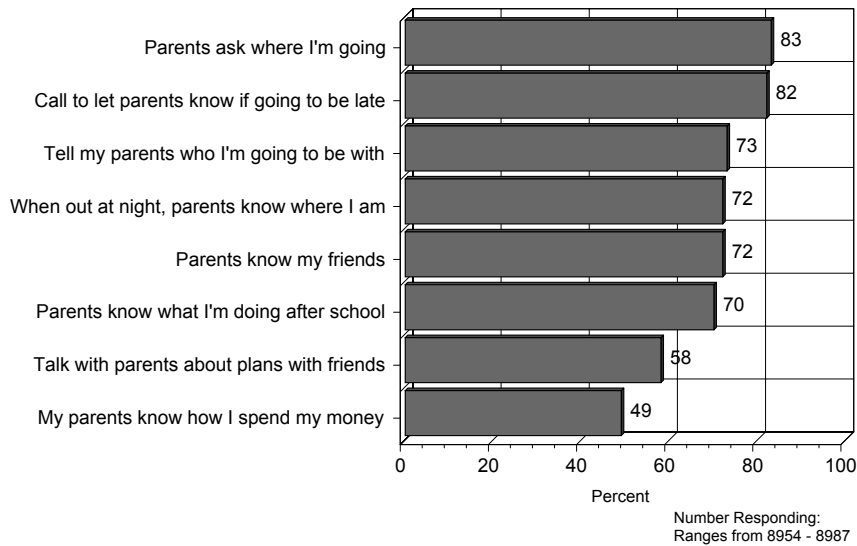
- Most youth feel their parents care about them.
- The majority of students rated their parents as fair in enforcing rules.

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)



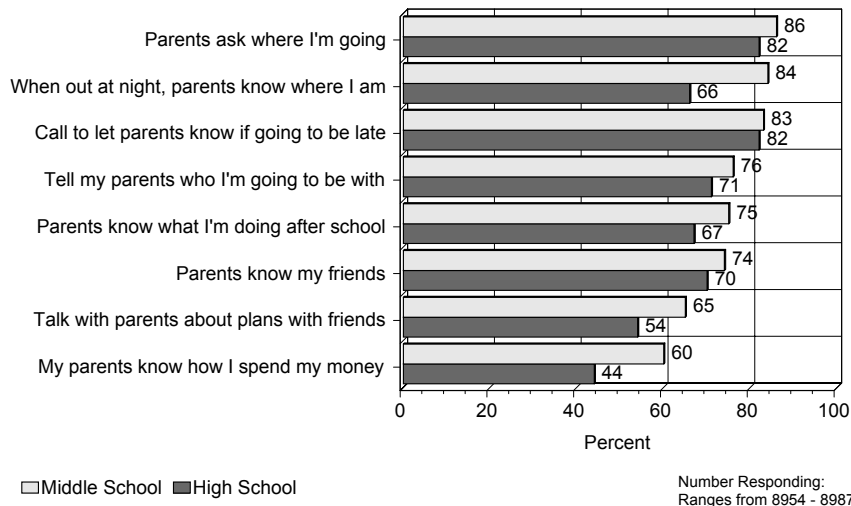
- At least 85% of males and females at all grade levels reported parental interest in school.

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



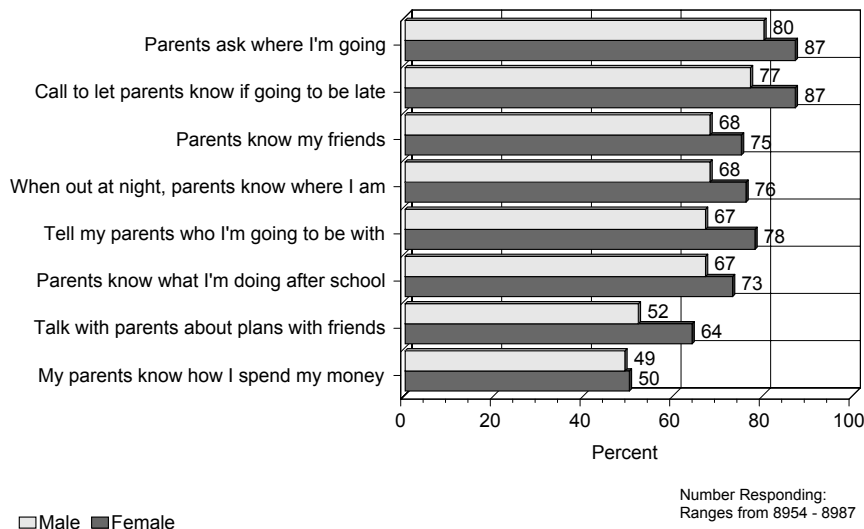
- Most teens are closely monitored by their parents.
- Parents are least likely to know how teens spend their money.

Figure 7-10: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior
(A Lot of the Time or Always, by School Level)



- Overall, a greater percentage of middle school than high school youth reported 'a lot or always' parental monitoring.
- Greatest school level differences are found in parents knowing where their children are at night and how they spend their money.

Figure 7-11: Teens Who Report Parental Monitoring of Their Behavior
(A Lot of the Time or Always, by Gender)



- Females report greater parental monitoring than males.
- At least 10% more females than males reported that they tell their parents who they are with, talk to parents about plans with friends, and are expected to call home if they will be late.