

Every Child Every Promise

TURNING FAILURE INTO ACTION

ISSUE BRIEF

P A R E N T I N G

Every Child, Every Promise examined how much children and youth experience the Five Promises, or positive features of development, that research shows are connected both to avoiding risky behavior such as alcohol or other drug use and to positive outcomes such as volunteering or doing well at school.

The Five Promises are Caring Adults, Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others.

AMERICA'S PROMISE
ALLIANCE



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NATIONAL STUDY:

Teens with Stronger Parent Influence Fare Better in Health, Education

The conventional wisdom that all relationships between teenagers and their parents are tumultuous is wrong, according to research from the America's Promise Alliance. In fact, the overwhelming majority of young people ages 12-17 say they have a "mostly" or "very" close relationship with their mothers and fathers and can usually or always talk with their parents about problems they might be having with school or friends, finds *Every Child, Every Promise: Turning Failure into Action* (ECEP).

The Alliance surveyed a national sample of more than 2,000 teenagers and 2,000 of their parents in a telephone poll, with the help of Search Institute, Child Trends and the Gallup Organization. More than 80% of teens said they had a close relationship with their mother, and more than 70% said the same about their fathers. About 80% also said they could usually talk with their mothers about problems. Teens said they talk with their fathers a little less, but even so, nearly two-thirds said they could usually talk with their fathers about problems.

Those high quality parental-teen relationships make a difference in how well young people are doing in their health, at school, and in other aspects of their lives. The researchers created a "parent influence" index from those relationship quality questions, plus several other questions that asked teenagers how much their parents know about their friends and whereabouts after school, how safe teens feel at home (nearly 90% always feel safe), and how much teens and parents talk about school. When the results to all those questions were added up, and young people with the top, middle, and bottom third of scores on "parent influence" were compared, the top third were consistently better than the middle and lower third on a variety of health and education outcomes. Having even some of this positive parent influence was beneficial too, since the middle third were consistently better than the lowest third in those measures of well-being.

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Young people with high quality parental influences were, not surprisingly, more likely to experience the Caring Adults Promise. But, they were also far more likely to experience Safe Places, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others. For example, 67% of teenagers with high quality parental influence felt safe and had constructive things to do with their time, such as involvement in high-quality after-school programs, versus just 20% with low quality influence. And 61% with high quality influences had schools where students felt challenged and treated fairly, among other aspects of effective education, versus just 21% in the low quality group who enjoyed such schools. Overall, 50% of teens who had high quality parental influence also experienced at least 4 of the Five Promises, what we would consider to be “enough” of these key developmental resources. This compares to less than 10% of those with low quality parental influence.

Given the importance of academic achievement, high school graduation, and workplace readiness in public policy, the researchers also looked at other relevant measures of academic and workforce skills and found the same impact of parent influence. Teenagers with high parent influence were more likely than those with less parent influence to attend school, work up to their

ability, and get mostly As. They were also more likely to say they could communicate well, get along well with diverse people, budget and save money, and use computers.

PERCENTAGE WITH OUTCOMES, BY PARENT INFLUENCE SCORES

OUTCOME*	HIGH THIRD	MEDIUM THIRD	LOW THIRD
Safe Places & Constructive Use of Time	67	43	20
Healthy Start	49	36	22
Effective Education	61	37	21
Opportunities to Help Others	61	55	44
Experiences 4-5 of the 5 Promises	50	24	8
Gets Mostly As	50	33	28
Gets Mostly Bs	88	82	73
School Attendance	94	89	84
School Engagement	55	35	22
Everyday Workplace Skills	69	56	44

N = 2,015 12-17 year olds

* For binary scoring, young people were counted as “experiencing” a Promise if they met the criterion for having about 75% of the individual indicators that comprised each Promise. They needed to “have” 5-6 of the 6 indicators to “have” the Safe Places Promise, 6-8 of 8 indicators to have A Healthy Start, 7-9 of 9 indicators to have Effective Education, and 4-5 of 5 indicators to have Opportunities to Help Others.

Although it can be challenging for parents to have a close relationship with their teenage sons and daughters from time-to-time, ECEP shows that the desire to shut parents out is far less than imagined. The right balance in parenting is always a work in progress and is different for every family — being close but not smothering, monitoring their kids but not spying, available to talk and listen but not interrogating, having meaningful conversations about school, not just asking questions that can be answered with a

shrug or a yes-no. ECEP shows, though, that parents who find the right balance and end up having a high level of influence in their children’s lives will have something worth celebrating on Mother’s and Father’s Day children who are safe, healthy, and engaged, and on the right track to achieving their own American Dream.

Details about the large “National Promises Study” are available from America’s Promise at www.americaspromise.org, and from Search Institute at www.search-institute.org