

## Teens Really Listen to their Parents

“Teens are often very effective at communicating to us as adults that we have become irrelevant in their lives,” says Michael Resnick, PhD, sociologist and professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota. “And we, as adults, turn around and make the mistake of believing it.”

### What’s wrong?

By most measures, teenagers in Minnesota and across the country are doing well. Almost all enjoy good physical health. They have survived early childhood and are decades away from the diseases associated with aging. However, the health of many adolescents is at risk due to:

- Emotional distress
- Cigarette, alcohol & marijuana use
- Early sexual involvement
- Pregnancy
- Thoughts of suicide
- Violence

### The Solution: “Making the Connection”

Connections matter. When we look across all groups of kids —rich, middle income, poor, those from single-parent or dual-parent families, those who are Black, White, Asian, Hispanic or American Indian— we have found that a strong sense of connection to family and to parents, and a strong sense of connection to school, protect youth from health risk behaviors.

Surprisingly, things we once thought mattered —school policies, teachers with advanced degrees, private schools— appear unrelated to teens’ emotional well-being and health risk behaviors. However, students are at increased risk for unhealthy behaviors when they have been held back a grade, look older than peers, have a low grade point average or work 20 or more hours a week for pay.

### The Research: “How Do We Know”

This information is based on Add Health, the largest study ever undertaken of adolescent health in America, mandated by the U.S. Congress in the NIH Revitalization Act of 1993. Some 90,000 students in grade 7-12 answered questionnaires, along with administrators from the 145 participating schools; 20,000 students and 18,000 of their parents completed interviews at home in 1995, an additional 15,000 students completed interviews at home in 1996.

### For More Information

If you want to know more about Add Health or issues of significance and concern in the lives of Minnesota teens, contact:

Judith A. Kahn, Executive Director

Paul V. Snyder, Program Coordinator

Phone: (612) 625-7137

E-mail: [konopka@tc.umn.edu](mailto:konopka@tc.umn.edu)

## Best Bets

### Promising strategies that inform policy...

#### At Home...

Parents can safeguard their teenage children. Here are some **promising strategies**:

- Share activities with your children.
- Lock up cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and guns.
- Expect your son or daughter to graduate from high school.
- Be physically present at a key time during the day.
- Disapprove of early teen sexual activity.
- Support religious identity.

#### At School...

Teachers and staff can safeguard their students. Here are some promising strategies:

- Treat students fairly and help foster a school culture of caring.
- Work to eliminate the existence of prejudice in schools.
- Reexamine attitudes and regulations about teens working in paid jobs 20 hours or more per week.
- Reevaluate policies about student retention in school.

This policy brief was published by the Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health, a program in the Academic Health Center, housed in the Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health in collaboration with the Schools of Medicine, Nursing and Public Health and supported by the Minnesota State Legislature. Designed and edited by Peggy Mann Rinehart.



POLICY BRIEFS FROM THE KONOPKA  
INSTITUTE FOR BEST PRACTICES IN  
ADOLESCENT HEALTH  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BOX 721 MAYO  
420 DELAWARE STREET SE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55455

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Minneapolis, MN  
Permit No. 155