

Parents Are the Foundation

Teens & Values

November 2007

“Values” are like an internal compass that gives direction when teens are making decisions about their actions and behaviors. Values shape relationships and give teens a sense of who they are. All young people need positive values to help guide their priorities and choices.

The Search Institute in Minneapolis, MN has identified six assets or building blocks related to positive values that are important for helping young people grow up healthy. Those values include:

- Caring** – Your teen places high value on helping other people.
- Equality & Social Justice** – Your teen places high value on promoting equality and reducing issues like hunger and poverty.
- Integrity** – Your teen acts on convictions and stands up for his or her beliefs.
- Honesty** – Your teen tells the truth even when it’s not easy.
- Responsibility** – Your teen accepts and takes personal responsibility.
- Restraint** – Your teen believes it’s important not to use alcohol or drugs or be sexually active.

In the 2005 Iowa County Survey of Student Resources and Assets by America’s Promise and the Search Institute, 1,264 7th-12th graders answered questions about their values. Chart A provides an overview of the responses.

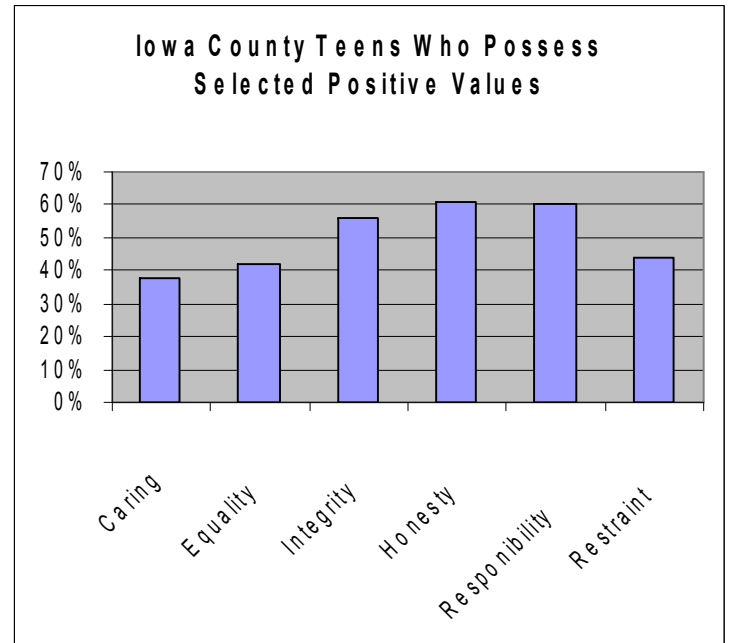


Chart A

A grade level review indicates that 7th through 12th graders were very consistent in their values of integrity, honesty and responsibility and more than half of the teens shared survey responses that supported those values. Younger teens were much more likely to have stronger values for caring, equality & social justice and restraint than older teens so less than half of the teens overall responded strongly to those values.

On five of the six positive values there was a significant gender difference with data from the teenaged girls consistently indicating stronger values than data from the teen boys. 20%–25% of teen girls valued caring, equality & social justice, integrity, honesty and responsibility more than teen boys.

Family communication and values affect a teen's health decisions. Teens in the survey were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements "It is against my values to drink alcohol while I'm a teenager" and "It is against my values to have sex while I'm a teenager". Fifty-three percent (53%) of the teens strongly agreed or agreed that it was against their values to drink and 46% strongly agreed or agreed that it was against their values to have sex. Teens in 7th, 8th and 9th grades were more likely to agree with those statements than 10th-12th graders. Charts B & C illustrates the responses by gender.

Why should parents teach values to their teens?

The values taught by parents are their best protection from the influences of negative peer pressure and the temptations of our consumer culture. If our teens have their own values clearly defined, they are more likely to make their own decisions rather than imitate their friends or be swayed by the media. Parents who teach their values help teens:

- listen to their conscience
- build their integrity
- consider how to support the needs of others
- become more independent
- teach them how to discern between right & wrong
- figure out how to be happy

How can parents influence a teen's values?

- Parents need to teach their teens positive values and model their behaviors based on those values.
- Parents can interact in caring, responsible ways with people of all ages and encourage teens to do the same.
- Parents and teens can watch TV and movies or read the same books and discuss the characters' values.
- Parents can talk to their sons and daughters about their values regarding honesty, alcohol and tobacco use and sexual activity.
- Teens can also be encouraged to volunteer their time with at least one organization.
- Parents as well as teens need to talk about how their values guide their choices and behaviors and how their values influence them.

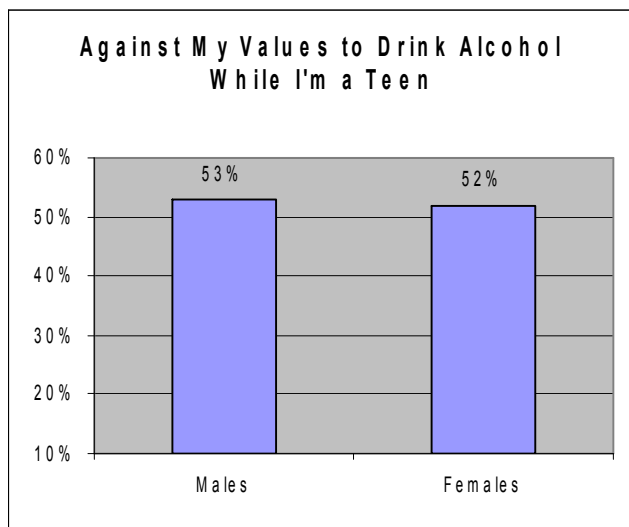


Chart B

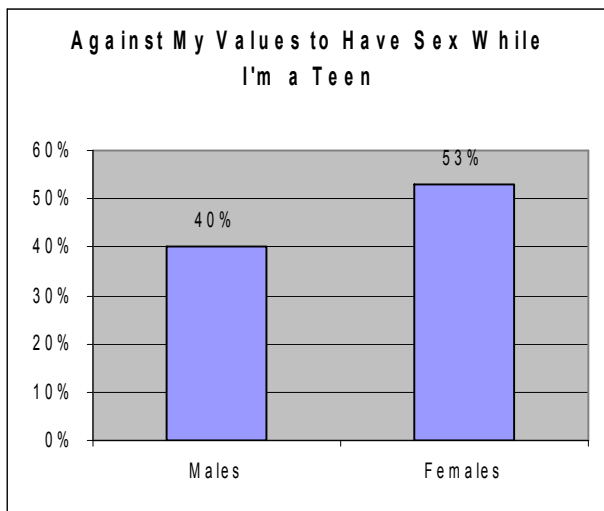


Chart C

REMEMBER:

PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION!

"Parents are the Foundation" is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" newsletter series. This issue was written by Ruth Schriefer and edited by Sarah Weier, Deb Ivey. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pecos, and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>