



Grading GROWN-UPS

American adults report on their
real relationships with kids

A Nationwide Study from

Lutheran Brotherhood

and Search Institute

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By

**PETER C. SCALES, PH.D., PETER L. BENSON, PH.D.,
AND EUGENE C. ROEHLKEPARTAIN**

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Grading Grown-Ups:

American Adults Report on Their *Real* Relationships with Kids

By Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

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— *Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a society where—despite widespread concerns about children and teenagers—the vast majority of adults are not actively involved in the lives of young people outside of their own families. This reality has a profound impact on community life and on young people’s development. Without the attention of many adults in all parts of their lives and community, young people are deprived of important sources of guidance, nurture, care, and socialization.

Conducted by Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute, *Grading Grown-Ups: American Adults Report on Their Real Relationships with Kids* provides a first-ever portrait of how adults think about their capacity, responsibility, and motivation for contributing to young people’s healthy development. Based on a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,425 American adults conducted by the Gallup Organization, the study seeks to determine whether—and to what extent—adults support and engage in 19 specific positive, asset-building actions with children and teenagers outside their own families. These actions relate to Search Institute’s framework of 40 developmental assets, which are positive experiences, relationships, and personal qualities that help all young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

The asset framework affirms the central role that parents and professionals need to play in nurturing young people. At the same time, it invites *every* person and institution in a community also to recognize and act upon their own capacity and responsibility to kids. This sense of shared responsibility for nurturing the youngest generation is an essential, but neglected, resource for increasing the chances that all young people will make positive choices now and grow up to be engaged, contributing members of society.

Actions That 70 Percent or More of American Adults Say Are “Most Important” to Do with Kids

- Encourage success in school
- Expect parents to set boundaries
- Teach shared values
- Teach respect for cultural differences
- Guide decision making
- Give financial guidance
- Have meaningful conversations
- Discuss personal values
- Expect respect for adults

Actions That Fewer Than 70 Percent of American Adults Say Are “Most Important” to Do with Kids

- Report positive behavior
- Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids
- Report misbehavior
- Discuss religious beliefs
- Pass down traditions
- Know names
- Seek opinions
- Provide service opportunities
- Model giving and serving
- Give advice

A Consensus on What's Important

The good news is that the vast majority of Americans believe it is important for adults to engage in the lives of children (ages 5–10) and teenagers (ages 11–18). This support for engagement is strong across a wide spectrum of beliefs and backgrounds, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and other differences.

As shown in the chart on the previous page, at least 70 percent of adults believe that nine of the 19 positive actions examined in this study are “most important” for adults to do. All but one of the remaining actions (giving advice to young people) are seen as most important by approximately 50 to 70 percent of adults. Thus, in the midst of America’s rich pluralism, there are core actions that adults of all backgrounds and beliefs hold to be important.

The Gap between Beliefs and Actions

Despite this broad consensus, however, relatively few adults follow through with concrete engagement in the lives of children and youth. On average, most adults engage in only two of the 19 actions: encouraging school success and expecting respect for adults. Furthermore, two-thirds or more of adults do not engage in 12 of these 19 actions.

If this report were actually giving grades to grown-ups, only about one in 20 American adults would get an A for being actively engaged in young people’s lives. Many more adults might receive a B or C because of their concern. The majority of American adults would receive lower—even failing grades—because they simply are not engaged.

Cultivating a Developmentally Attentive Culture

Building ongoing, meaningful relationships with young people needs to become an integral, natural part of life for the vast majority of adults in every rural area, town, suburb, and city. Such a culture is one in which every individual, organization, and system makes it a priority to attend to the developmental needs of young people. Such a vision is far removed from the current reality in which young people’s needs are too often ignored, downplayed, or seen as the responsibility of only a few people.

A developmentally attentive culture intentionally brings many resources to child rearing. In the ideal, these resources include enlightened public policy, an aggressive attack on forces that undermine healthy development (e.g., poverty, racism, child abuse, violence), strong support for families, access to quality schools, affordable child care and after-school programs, and the availability of effective services where trouble brews. All of these public investments are crucial.

In addition to these resources, this study emphasizes another critical factor in healthy development: the power of engagement, connection, being known, valued, guided, watched out for, and included in the daily life of community life. Less about money, policy, rules, mandates, and top-down change, this dimension thrives on relationships driven by a social will and personal choice.

Moving from current realities toward becoming a developmentally attentive culture poses a long-term critical challenge for this new millennium. This report suggests a number of strategies for initiating the process of change. They include:

- Customizing approaches to address specific people and realities;
- Cultivating a widespread, strong expectation for engagement;
- Rebuilding neighborhood connections, engagement, and trust;
- Identifying and cultivating influential role models, opinion leaders, and champions;
and
- Strengthening people’s capacity for engagement.

Forming meaningful relationships across generations needs to become an expected part of everyday life. All adults need to see being engaged with kids as part of their responsibility as part of their community and this society. Children and youth need to be able to count on adults for support, guidance, and modeling.

That kind of change won’t happen by decree or mandate or law. It happens as each person decides to act upon what’s already important to them—and then actually does something. As it grows and spreads, this personal engagement can also generate the kind of grassroots support and advocacy that demand the significant public investment that our young people need and deserve.

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CHAPTER 1

EXAMINING ADULTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

Sun City is the kind of place where, one might assume, young people are rarely seen or heard, much less valued. Indeed, similar adults-only communities have been built precisely so that residents won't have to worry about kids. In this case, though, the community near Georgetown, Texas, has made caring for young people a major focus of shared life. Young people are, according to Danny McCoy, executive director of the community association, "an extension of the Sun City community." Residents make connecting with kids a major part of their daily lives.

Many Sun City residents are retired professionals who have the time, expertise, and energy to engage with young people in meaningful ways. Some have extra grandparent energy to give away as mentors, friends, and guides. About 200 Sun City residents formed the Eagle Boosters Club and have season tickets for Georgetown High's football games. And the best fourth-grade spellers in town compete against Sun City residents in an annual spelling bee.

"It's not typically assumed that members of a community like this would want to be involved with youth," says JoAnn Ford, a Sun City resident and retired school administrator. "But they really miss the kids, and they specifically seek out opportunities to be part of their lives."¹

This intentional effort to connect generations in Sun City stands in contrast to the prevailing norms in most U.S. communities. Yes, virtually everyone says they care about kids. But most adults do little to help kids outside their own families succeed and grow up healthy. Instead, American kids—particularly teenagers—are too often ignored or pushed away by adults. The bottom line is that we deprive our young people of the kinds of support, connection, engagement, and inclusion they need for healthy development.

The journalist Patricia Hersch spent several years chronicling the intimate lives of a half-dozen youth. She describes today's teenagers as "a tribe apart," bereft of adult contact outside their own families other than the limited, formal relationships they have with adults at school:

America's own adolescents have become strangers. They are a tribe apart, mysterious, vaguely threatening. . . . Somewhere in the transition from twelve to thirteen, our nation's children slip into a netherworld of adolescence that too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of estrangement. The individual child feels lost to a world of teens, viewed mostly in the aggregate, notorious for what they do wrong, judged for their inadequacies, known by labels and statistics that frighten and put off adults.²

Strong Beliefs, Minimal Action

It's not that adults don't care. This study shows that they do. They believe it's important for adults to guide, support, encourage, and be role models for kids. Yet, despite this stated concern, fewer than one in 20 adults consistently contributes to the healthy development of kids.

This reality has a profound impact on community life and on young people’s development. Without the attention of many adults throughout a neighborhood and community, young people are deprived of important sources of guidance, care, and socialization. This lack of connections undermines our ability to nurture generations of caring, responsible, and healthy young people who are prepared to contribute their fullest to society as citizens, parents, neighbors, workers, and leaders.

We recognize that the “formula” for raising healthy human beings is complex. Certainly, the mix of ingredients includes multiple economic, programmatic, health-care, and safety factors—each of which can be advanced by enlightened policies and civic leadership. In addition, parents and other family members play essential, central roles in nurturing, loving, and guiding children. Numerous studies have focused on the roles of families, socializing institutions (such as schools, child care, or congregations), and public policy in healthy development.

Grading Grown-Ups is different. This study—conducted by Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute (see sidebar below)—provides a first-ever portrait of how adults think about their capacity, responsibility, and motivation for contributing to the healthy development of children (ages 5–10) and teenagers (ages 11–18) outside of their own families. As such, it focuses on the potential to marshal and energize a web of meaningful, sustained intergenerational relationships to help nurture and guide this society’s youngest generations.

The study is based on a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,425 American

A DECADE-LONG PARTNERSHIP FOR ASSET BUILDING

This study grows out of a decade-long partnership between Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute that focuses on promoting the healthy development of all children and adolescents. This partnership initially focused on Lutheran Brotherhood’s RespecTeen Program, for which Search Institute contributed technical assistance and research beginning in 1989. Since 1995, Lutheran Brotherhood has been the national corporate sponsor of Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth, a national initiative of Search Institute that seeks to motivate and equip individuals, organizations, and their leaders to join together in nurturing competent, caring, and responsible children and adolescents.

Lutheran Brotherhood is a member-owned organization of 1.2 million Lutherans joined together for financial security, outreach to church and community, and volunteer service. Lutheran Brotherhood helps Lutherans link faith, values, and finances in everyday living.

Founded in 1958, Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. To accomplish this mission, the institute generates, synthesizes, and communicates new knowledge, convenes organizational and community leaders, and works with state and national organizations.

adults conducted by the Gallup Organization, in-depth interviews with a subset of 100 survey participants, and an extensive review of the literature on adult engagement with youth, social norms, and social change. The survey focused on a series of 19 statements about how adults might positively relate to children (defined as ages 5–10 or grades K–5) or teenagers (defined as ages 11–18 or grades 6–12). These actions are defined as asset-building actions. (For more background information, see Appendix A.) Two central themes emerge from this study:

- The vast majority of Americans—across a wide spectrum of beliefs and backgrounds—believe it is important for adults to contribute to the well-being of children and teenagers.
- Despite these shared beliefs, relatively few adults are actively engaged in young people’s lives.

The major gap between what young people need from adults and what adults actually do for them clearly shows that this society is not providing young people with the meaningful relationships that are essential to their positive development and success in life. The gap also highlights a significant opportunity, given that adults already believe in the importance of engaging with young people. The challenge is to discover how to mobilize adults to act according to their beliefs.

The Study’s Roots: Developmental Assets

This study is an extension of a decade-long exploration of the factors in young people’s lives that contribute to their healthy development. At the heart of this research is the framework of 40 developmental assets, which are critical building blocks of healthy development. Grounded in the research in risk prevention, resiliency, and healthy development, these developmental assets (listed in Appendix B) are organized into eight categories:

- **Support**—Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment**—Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must feel safe.
- **Boundaries and Expectations**—Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are “in bounds” or “out of bounds.”
- **Constructive Use of Time**—Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home.
- **Commitment to Learning**—Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- **Positive Values**—Young people need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
- **Social Competencies**—Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
- **Positive Identity**—Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.

TABLE 1. 19 ASSET-BUILDING ACTIONS EXPLORED IN THIS STUDY, ORGANIZED BY ASSET CATEGORY*

Related Asset Category	Adult Asset-Building Actions Explored in This Study
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have meaningful conversations—Have conversations with young people that help adults and young people “really get to know one another.” • Know names—Know the names of many children and teenagers in the neighborhood. • Give advice—Give advice to young people who are not members of the family.
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report positive behavior—Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right. • Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids—Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood. • Provide service opportunities—Give young people lots of opportunities to make their communities better places. • Seek opinions—Seek young people’s opinions when making decisions that affect them.
Boundaries and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect respect for adults—Expect children and youth to respect adults and elders as authority figures. • Expect parents to set boundaries—Expect parents to enforce clear and consistent rules and boundaries. • Report misbehavior—Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong. • Model giving and serving—Volunteer time or donate money to show young people the importance of helping others.
Commitment to Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage success in school—Encourage children and youth to take school seriously and do well in school.
Positive Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach shared values—Teach children and youth the same core values as other adults do, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility. • Discuss personal values—Openly discuss their own values with children and youth. • Discuss religious beliefs—Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and youth.**
Social Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach respect for cultural differences—Teach children and youth to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own. • Guide decision making—Help children and youth think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions. • Give financial guidance—Offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.
Positive Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass down traditions—Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture.

* Because the actions emphasize informal, nonprogrammatic relationships outside of the family, they do not directly address the constructive-use-of-time assets, which focus on involvement in activities, programs, and organizations.

** While this action is clearly related to important values that people hold, the framework of developmental assets does not include specific religious values.

Research involving more than 1 million 6th- to 12th-grade youth over the past decade has consistently shown that young people are more likely to make positive choices and avoid negative, risky behaviors when they experience more of these assets. Yet the average young person surveyed experiences only 18 of the 40 assets. Indeed, across all cultural groups, types of communities and families, and socioeconomic groups, too few young people experience high levels of these assets in their lives.³

These realities challenge everyone to focus on building the strengths young people need to thrive. This includes recognizing and emphasizing the vital role that all adults can play in young people's lives. The 40 developmental assets are built largely through multiple, long-term relationships with adults in all aspects of their lives. Quality relationships with parents certainly play a pivotal role. But young people also need positive relationships with teachers, coaches, youth leaders, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors, congregation members, employers, and other caring adults. These relationships provide an essential foundation for healthy development, providing the "channel" through which many developmental assets are built and reinforced.

Dimensions of Intergenerational Relationships

There is clear evidence that young people benefit from multiple, sustained relationships with adults outside their immediate family. For example, Search Institute research has found that the more adults a young person reports that he or she can turn to, the better off that young person is. Yet just 22 percent of the youth surveyed reported having strong relationships with five or more adults other than their parents.⁴

Just having these relationships in place is important. But what should they entail? What kinds of interactions are appropriate, valued, expected, and possible—particularly in a society that tends to discourage people from getting too involved with "other people's kids"?

Grading Grown-Ups examined these questions, shedding light on the unwritten social rules and expectations that shape how adults really relate to children and youth outside their own families. At the heart of this study was a set of 19 asset-building actions that could be part of healthy adult-youth relationships.⁵ As shown in Table 1, each of these actions ties directly or indirectly to one of the eight categories of developmental assets. In addition, the 19 actions provide a framework for examining how American adults:

- Feel responsible for the well-being of the children and youth of their community;
- Form meaningful relationships with children and adolescents; and
- Teach, model, or encourage positive behaviors.

The survey approached these actions from two perspectives. First, it asked adults to judge how important they believe each action to be. Second, it explored whether adults actually engage in these asset-building actions, using a "proxy" measurement of actual adults' engagement.⁶ In addition, a subset of 100 adults was asked to reflect on how they would react in four different situations that involve adult-youth relationships. Their responses gave some clues to how and why adults connect with young people.

Overview of the Report

This report examines in depth adults' beliefs about their roles in young people's lives as well as their actual engagement with children and teenagers. Chapter 2 focuses on adults' beliefs about the importance of the 19 asset-building actions, highlighting the consensus among adults about the importance of at least half of the actions that were examined.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts to the actual engagement of adults in each of the asset-building actions, emphasizing the consistent gap between what adults say is important and what they actually do. It also examines some of the possible reasons for the gap between beliefs and actions. Chapter 4 deals with the recognition that every community has strength in a small group of adults who are actively engaged with young people. These people can serve as guides, role models, and champions to encourage more adults to act upon their beliefs by connecting with kids.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we offer strategies and ideas for beginning to strengthen adults' engagement in young people's lives. This chapter focuses both on changing individuals' behavior and working to reshape social norms or expectations so that they reinforce—rather than inhibit—adults' positive engagement in the lives of children and teenagers. This shift, we suggest, is an essential foundation of creating a society and culture that is developmentally attentive—one that makes it a top priority to ensure that all kids have the relationships and resources they need to thrive and contribute to their communities, nation, and world.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN ADULTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS?

Much of the national dialogue about children and teenagers focuses on differences of opinions, conflicts over priorities, and seeking to balance divergent, contradictory viewpoints on what's best for kids. And while American adults believe that raising successful young people should be one of the nation's top priorities (according to one poll, it is more important than preventing crime and creating more jobs),¹ rarely is there a consensus about what needs to be done or who should do it.

This apparent lack of consensus reflects a historic reality in the United States. As cultural observers from Alexis de Tocqueville to Robert Bellah to Francis Fukuyama² have noted, ours is a society that is built on a strong commitment to protecting individual rights and tolerating individual differences. This emphasis on individual rights certainly brings important strengths to our culture. However, these observers and others have worried that, if individualism is not balanced with a sense of communal responsibility—responsibility to others and to the common good—society risks, in Fukuyama's words, falling “prey to excessive individualism” in which “tolerance would become the cardinal virtue . . . in place of moral consensus.”³

Yet, when it comes to informal relationships between adults and kids, our national survey findings show a broad consensus about some of the positive ways that adults can—and should—engage in the lives of children and teenagers outside of their own families. Rather than cultural diversity, pluralism, and tolerance undermining moral values, the great majority of Americans across a wide range of differences seem to have defined a core set of shared priorities for relating to the younger generations. The challenge is to motivate adults to act on those priorities—something that few currently do, partly because they are unaware that others share their belief in the value of interacting with kids.

Overview: Ratings of Importance

For each of the 19 asset-building actions examined in this study, we asked adults how important it was for adults to do or believe in the action. All but one of the actions were rated “very” or “most” important by at least 75 percent of respondents. The only exception was “neighbors giving advice” to kids, which only 33 percent of adults said was “very” or “most” important.

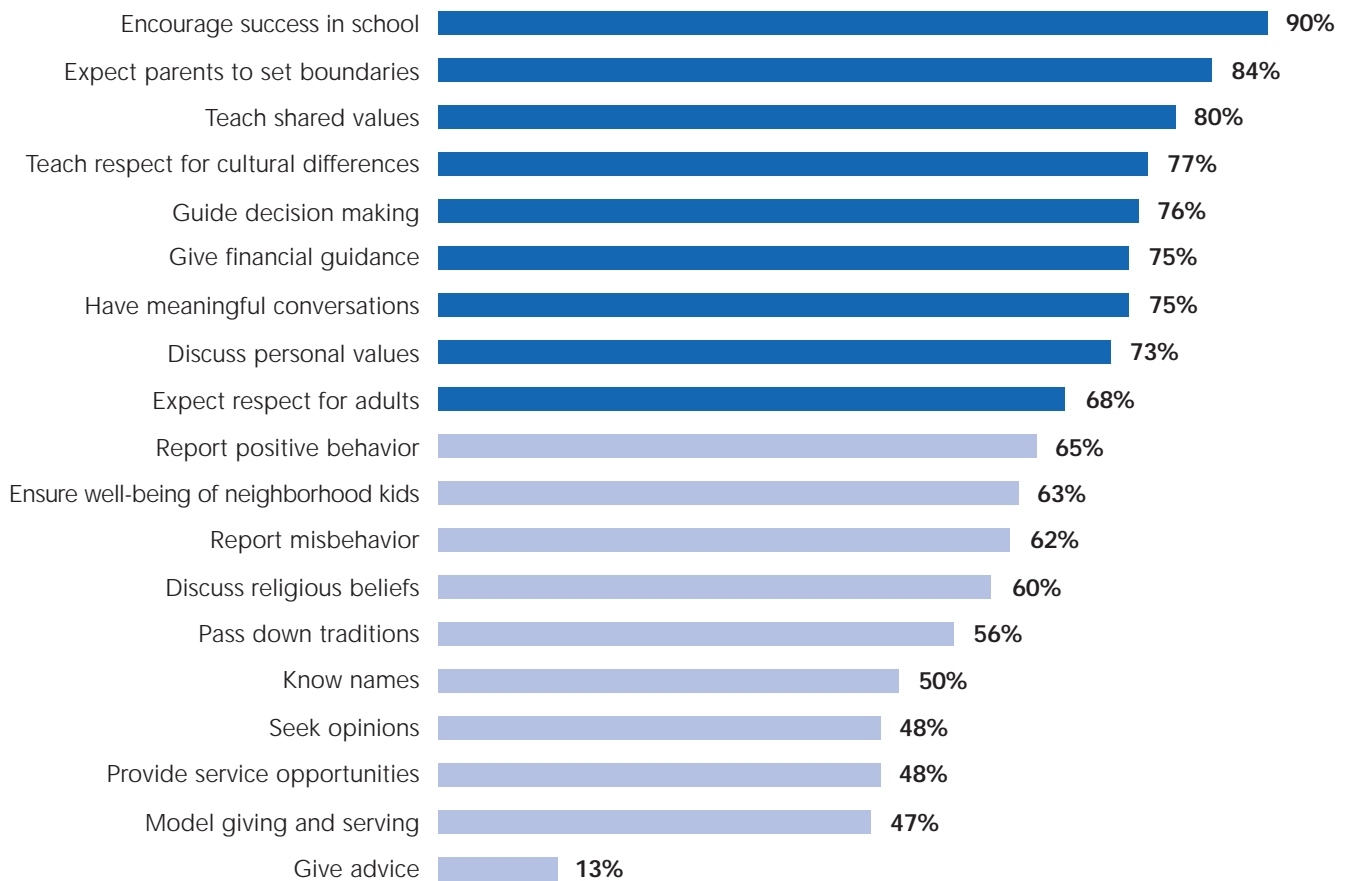
Because adults are more likely to act on attitudes or beliefs that they strongly hold, we focused on the percentages of adults who said that each action is “most important”—the highest rating on a five-point scale. As shown in Figure 1, eight of the 19 asset-building actions were rated “most important” by 70 percent or more of respondents.

These asset-building actions, plus one that fell within the +/- 4 percent margin of error at 68 percent, represent priorities for interactions between adults and children or teenagers for which there is broad support among American adults. And while there are some modest

variations in levels of support, the vast majority of people from all cultural backgrounds, economic levels, educational levels, age groups, and other differences share the belief that these kinds of interactions are “most important.”

The differences among various groups of adults, while of some interest, are far less meaningful than the great consensus that exists across these groups. Figure 2 shows that, across subgroups formed by adults of different races/ethnic backgrounds, religious attendance, annual income, and educational background, the mean proportions of those rating the top nine actions as highly important were not significantly different. (In almost all cases, they were well within the margins of error.) For example, on average, 76 percent of those with less than a high school education rated these nine actions highly important, but so did 72 percent of those with college or post-high school education. Among African Americans, an average of 83 percent rated the nine actions as highly important, but so did 75 percent of

FIGURE 1
Proportion of American Adults Ranking Each Action as “Most Important”



The nine dark bars at the top of the figure indicate those actions about which there is broad consensus.

Hispanics and 77 percent of whites. The beliefs of people who never attend religious services and those who say they attended daily were hardly different (75 percent and 79 percent, respectively). And regardless of income level, 71 to 83 percent of Americans rated these nine asset-building actions highly important.

Beyond the top nine actions, the survey found widespread support for nine of the 10 remaining actions, with half or more of the adults surveyed rating each as “most important” (including items that fall within the +/- 4 percent margin of error). So while there is not a clear consensus about these nine additional actions, there certainly is significant support among adults for all of them. Only one of the actions (neighbors giving advice to kids) received a significantly lower rating, with only 13 percent of adults saying it was “most important.”

It is pleasantly surprising that, in the midst of America’s rich pluralism, there is a core set of nine actions that most adults believe (at least on the surface) are important to them to do. These asset-building actions—which relate to sensitive topics such as values, money, cultural heritage, and decision making—suggest that there is a strong foundation for building meaningful relationships between adults and kids. Not only do adults “buy into” the importance of these actions, but because the support is widespread, the risk of negative consequences for getting involved (such as being told to “mind your own business”) should be relatively low. Furthermore, the possibility of receiving affirmation for getting involved is likely to be strong. (Notwithstanding the wide expression of support, most adults do not actually perform most of these actions, as we’ll examine in Chapter 3.)

Asset-Building Actions with Broad Support

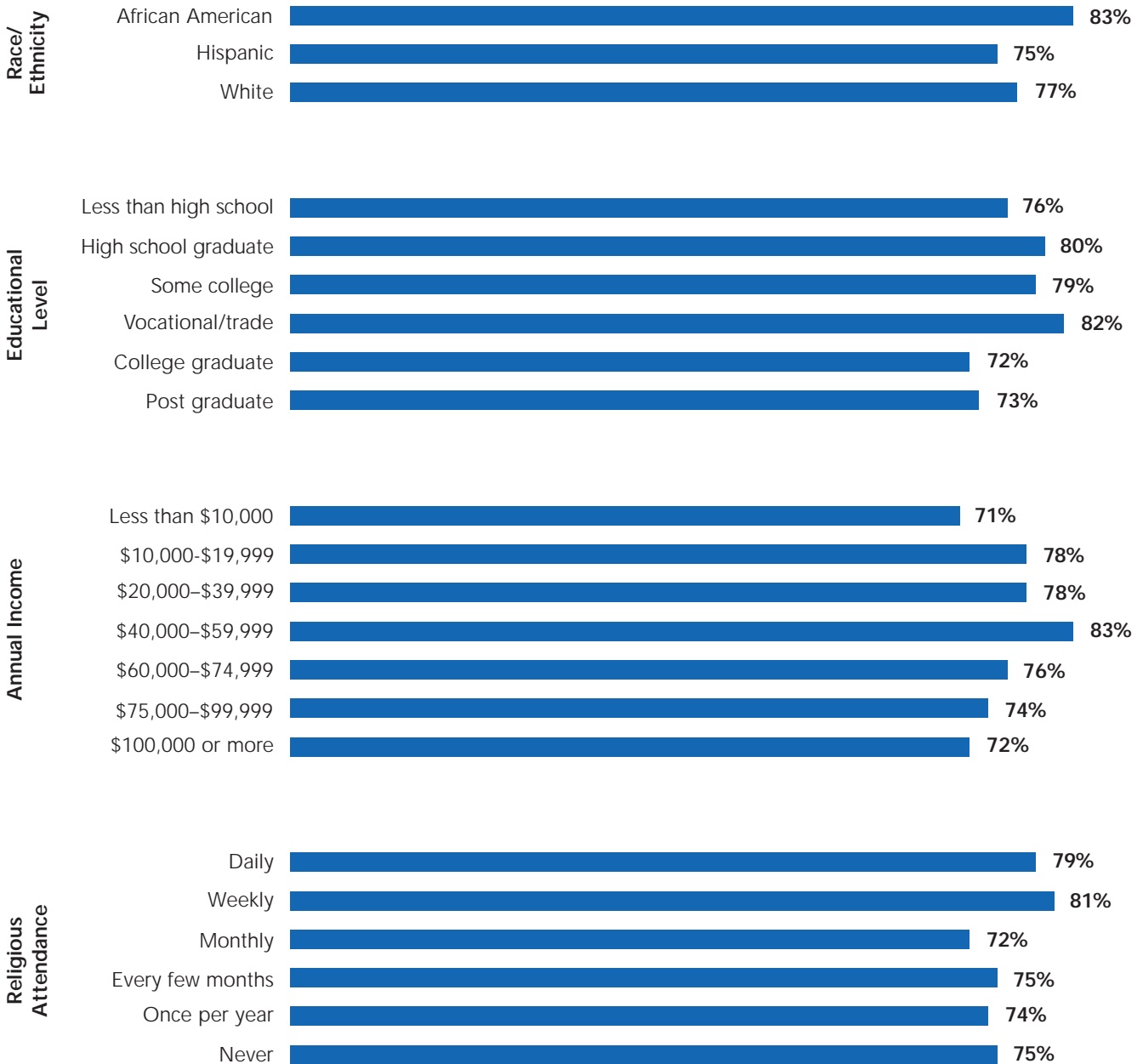
To gain a deeper understanding of each of these asset-building actions and the survey findings related to each of them, we now highlight each action, starting with the nine about which there is the broadest consensus.

Encourage success in school—Because American adults consistently rate the quality of children’s education as one of the nation’s top priorities,⁴ it should be no surprise that the action that adults are most likely to strongly support is helping young people “take school seriously and do well at school.” Across the spectrum, nine out of 10 adults believe it is “most important” for adults to do this with both children and teenagers.

Yet it is difficult to know how adults would act upon this general belief. In in-depth interviews with 100 of the survey respondents, we asked whether adults would feel any sense of responsibility if they saw “a group of middle school boys you know who should be in school, but are obviously just hanging out on the street corner.” Many adults said that they would feel responsible. As one put it, “I don’t think it’s okay [to do nothing]. I think you have the responsibility to your neighbors and to your neighborhood.” However, one in five indicated that it was not their responsibility to do anything. One said, “It’s none of my business.”

Expect parents to set boundaries—Eighty-four percent of U.S. adults believe it is important for parents to establish clear and consistent rules and boundaries. Such a perspective reinforces the central role of family in young people’s development, and it is consistent with the family-boundaries asset. Among the important boundary-setting activities

FIGURE 2
Mean Percentage of American Adults Rating the Top Nine Actions “Most Important,”
by Selected Variables



within a family are having clear rules and consequences, and keeping track of where young people are and who they are with. Supporting and reinforcing parents in these boundary-setting roles is one way a community strengthens families.⁵

Setting boundaries is a complex task, as they must be appropriate to the young person's temperament and stage of development, consistent with cultural norms (with some cultures being more restrictive than others), and fit within the context of community. In the framework of developmental assets, the family-boundaries asset is reinforced by boundaries in school and neighborhood. This consistency across different parts of the young person's life both reinforces the boundaries set by parents and increases the likelihood that he or she will live within those boundaries.

Our survey included another question related to boundary setting that is not included in the 19 asset-building actions. It asked whether adults believe that parents should discipline their children without interference from others.⁶ Because this question focuses on an exclusive role for parents, it is inconsistent with an asset-building perspective that calls for all adults to share in the responsibility for setting and enforcing a variety of rules and boundaries.

Many adults (55 percent) believe that the exclusive discipline role for parents is very important. This support may reflect an ongoing cultural attitude that, when it comes to important things, parents have an exclusive role and responsibility in young people's lives. Such an attitude may be a significant barrier to other adults playing a role in guiding and setting boundaries for young people. It is important to note, however, that, while a slight majority of adults hold this position, it receives less support than 14 of the 19 asset-building actions examined in this study.

Teach shared values—According to our survey, the vast majority of American adults believe it is important to teach young people *shared* values. Four out of five adults say that it is most important that adults teach children and teenagers a set of shared core values, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility. While there is some variation across subgroups of adults, no group had less than 70 percent of the adults saying that teaching shared values is most important.

There are inherent risks in seeking to identify and articulate shared values in a pluralistic, multicultural “nation of nations.” However, true community is possible only when people share a set of core commitments. As John W. Gardner writes: “To require a community to agree on everything would be unrealistic and would violate our concern for diversity. But it has to agree on something. There has to be a core of shared values. Of all the ingredients of community this is probably the most important.”⁷

Despite the complexity of identifying, claiming, and passing on basic human values, this task is a critical part of asset building and contributing to young people's healthy development. Groundbreaking research by Francis A. J. Ianni, professor emeritus of education at Columbia University, underscores the importance of this consistency. He concludes:

Congeniality among their values and clarity and consistency in their guidance are essential to the adolescent, who is engaged in a search for structure, a set of believable and attainable expectations and standards from the community to guide the movement from child to adult status. If the values expressed by different community sectors are at odds, if their directions are unclear or inconsistent, the teenager cannot be expected to accept their good will or trust their judgment.⁸

Teach respect for cultural differences—The importance of teaching shared values is appropriately balanced with the importance of teaching young people to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures—even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own. It ties to the developmental asset of cultural competence, which focuses on young people knowing and being comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Overall, three-fourths of adults surveyed across all cultural groups say that this kind of action is highly important.

Between ages six and eight (and, some evidence suggests, as early as preschool), children tend to develop an awareness of similarities and differences in people. As this awareness grows, it can lead either to a respect for others or to the cultivation of prejudice.⁹ By modeling, talking about, and expecting respect for cultural differences, adults can contribute to that respect becoming part of a young person’s values and identity.

Is there a contradiction between the earlier emphasis on teaching shared values and this priority of respecting people whose values may be different? For example, although we did not specify which cultures’ values ought to be respected, adults’ belief in teaching respect for “cultural” differences likely does not include “cultures” such as the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazis who preach hatred of others based on their race, religion, or other characteristics. The foundation of their philosophies contradicts the core shared value of equality. Similarly, large numbers of American adults may want to teach young people not to blindly respect aspects of a corporate or consumer culture, which, in the pursuit of wealth and prestige, may violate two of the three shared values: honesty and responsibility.

Our findings suggest that most Americans recognize that honoring differences in values while preserving core values does not come without ongoing struggle, examination, and refining of personal and social attitudes and expectations. Reconciling those sometimes competing social values is a messy process inherent in democratic societies. It is a responsibility of adults both to engage in that process themselves and also to teach the youngest generations that they, too, must participate in that struggle.

Guide decision making—Adults can be important guides and resources in helping young people learn how to make responsible choices by, among other things, thinking through the possible consequences of their decisions. And, indeed, three-fourths of the adults surveyed believe that offering this kind of guidance is very important.

The difference in the strong support for guiding decision making (considered most important by 76 percent of adults) and the low support for neighbors giving advice (considered most important by only 13 percent of adults) suggests meaningful nuances in adults’ level of comfort with offering guidance. Adults appear to believe it is important to guide, share, help, and

encourage young people in various ways, but they don't believe it's important to give them advice. What explains this difference? Here are some possibilities:

- Adults may believe that young people don't listen to adults' advice, so giving the advice is fruitless.
- Adults may be uncomfortable with neighbors giving advice because they don't really know their neighbors or what kind of advice they would give.
- Adults may worry that, if they *do* give advice, disapproval and negative consequences would follow.
- Adults may reason that, if they did give advice, they would themselves be held responsible or accountable for what the young person does.

As these possibilities suggest, there are some risks involved in adults other than parents *promoting* rather than simply sharing a point of view that might affect young people's decision making. Those risks increase in areas of life that often are considered sensitive, such as sexuality, use of alcohol and other drugs, and financial choices. For example, what if a neighbor knows that the parents and older sibling of a 10-year-old smoke? While there is certainly considerable social support for adults who guide young people not to smoke, how would the child's family react if a neighbor talked with the 10-year-old about the dangers of smoking? And would most neighbors feel it permissible, much less *expected*, for them to talk with the 10-year-old about not smoking, knowing that members of the child's family smoke?

This hypothetical situation highlights some of the complex and problematic aspects of strengthening relationships between young people and unrelated adults in a society that, except in extreme cases, defers to parents' preferences and wishes. One interviewee put it this way when asked whether neighbors should give kids advice about using money: "It's up to the parent of the child because the parents, they might have set a goal for the child and [the neighbor's advice] might be different from what they wanted. . . . The parent might call or come and pay a visit and tell them to mind their own business."

Compounding the complexity, studies of adult-youth relationships show that, while young people generally prefer going to their parents for help, they often prefer to approach unrelated adults on some issues such as school concerns or sexual matters.¹⁰ These realities (coupled with the importance that adults place on offering guidance) present opportunities to initiate dialogue and reflection on how to address such questions so that more adults can play these roles.

Give financial guidance—Perhaps more than any previous generation, today's young people face a dizzying array of financial choices and pressures. Possibly based on an understanding of that reality, three out of four adults we surveyed believe it is most important for adults to offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money. This consensus cuts across all economic levels among the adults surveyed.

Addressing saving, sharing, and spending money with young people clearly can help to equip them to make responsible financial choices in a financially complex world. In addition, offering financial guidance can offer concrete issues around which to address several developmental assets, including those most clearly related to saving, spending, and sharing money,

namely, the assets of caring, equality and social justice, responsibility, and planning and decision making. By helping young people examine their sense of financial responsibility, adults have the opportunity to strengthen all of these assets.

At the same time, the affirmation of the importance of talking about money is a surprise in a society in which money is typically viewed as private. Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University reports on a nationally representative survey of more than 2,000 Americans in the workforce in which he found that 82 percent of adults had “never” or “hardly ever” discussed various aspects of personal finances with people outside their immediate family:¹¹

Observers who have lived in other societies note that Americans are much more reluctant to talk about money than people elsewhere. It is considered impolite here to ask other people what their income is, for example. There are also cultural norms against revealing one’s good or bad monetary fortunes. Many families feel it is important to shield their own children from knowing too much about the family budget—perhaps to keep them from worrying, but perhaps more often to keep them from asking for so much.¹²

While most adults affirm the importance of generally offering financial guidance, they may be more hesitant in specific situations. Only 23 percent of the 100 people who participated in the in-depth interviews said it would be “very common” for most adults to offer advice to dissuade a middle school boy from using all the money he earned from raking leaves on entertainment such as buying compact discs. In addition, only 20 percent of the adults who participated in the in-depth interviews for this study said it was a good thing for adults to give such advice or that all adults were responsible for providing such financial guidance. Most thought it was up the boy and his parents to figure out what to do with the money, as suggested by one interviewee: “His parents should have told him what to do with the money. Not me—I’m just the employer.”

Have meaningful conversations—Three-fourths of adults surveyed (75 percent) believe it is important for adults to have conversations with young people that help adults and young people “really get to know one another.” In reality, though, such conversations occur infrequently. Search Institute surveys of 6th- to 12th-grade students find that only about half of these young people (52 percent) have had a conversation with three or more adults they know well in the past month.¹³

Meaningful conversations are an essential part of a significant relationship. It is through meaningful conversations that adults not only share wisdom, traditions, skills, expectations, and priorities, but also allow young people to express themselves, their beliefs, realities, hopes, and dreams. Furthermore, meaningful conversations are an essential element of the other asset-building actions examined in this study. Only through meaningful conversations can adults teach shared values, discuss their own values, guide decision making, or give financial guidance—all actions that 70 percent or more of adults rate “most important.”

Discuss personal values—While it may not be surprising to learn that adults place priority on teaching *shared* values (see above), it may surprise some that 73 percent of adults believe it is also highly important for adults to “openly discuss their *own* values with children

and youth” (*italics added*). Unlike shared values, personal values may not be shared by others; they may even be controversial. Or, more to the point, they may be values with which the child’s or teenager’s parent disagrees.

Recognizing that a single conversation rarely alters a young person’s deep-seated beliefs and values, young people need to learn from *many* adult perspectives. By talking with adults about their personal values and how they came to embrace those values, young people catch glimpses into the process of values formation. This helps them learn how to shape their own values and beliefs in a complex world.

Expect respect for adults—The great majority of adults believe it is important to expect children and teenagers to respect adults and elders as authority figures. Sixty-eight percent of adults believe that this respect is highly important.

The support for this expectation may speak to the widespread perception among adults that young people are disrespectful.¹⁴ From a developmental perspective, it highlights that children ideally grow a sense of respect for others and an understanding of roles and authority that teaches them to accept reasonable boundaries and expectations. To the extent that they are seen not doing these things, they may be seen as disrespectful. This expectation also underscores the process of socialization in which the elders pass to the younger generations the wisdom and practices of the culture.

Actions with Mixed Support

The preceding nine actions represent a solid core of ways that adults can engage in the lives of young people outside their own families, secure in the knowledge that the vast majority of people (70 percent or more) believe these actions are highly important. Beyond this core are another 10 actions for which there is considerable, but less, consensus among American adults. Indeed, all but one of these actions is considered “most important” by about 50 to 70 percent of adults. These 10 areas (with percentages of adults who believe they are “most important”) are as follows:

- Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right (65 percent).
- Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood (63 percent).
- Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong (62 percent).
- Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and teenagers (60 percent).
- Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture (56 percent).
- Know the names of many children and teenagers in the neighborhood (50 percent).
- Seek young people’s opinions when making decisions that affect them (48 percent).
- Give young people lots of service opportunities to make their communities better places (48 percent).
- Volunteer time or donate money monthly to show young people the importance of helping others (47 percent).
- Give advice to young people who are not members of the family (13 percent).

**TABLE 2. 19 ASSET-BUILDING ACTIONS:
CONSENSUS VERSUS NO CONSENSUS**

Related asset category	Adult asset-building actions explored in this study
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have meaningful conversations—Have conversations with young people that help adults and young people “really get to know one another.” • Know names—Know the names of many children and teenagers in the neighborhood. • Give advice—Give advice to young people who are not members of the family.
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report positive behavior—Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right. • Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids—Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood. • Provide service opportunities—Give young people lots of opportunities to make their communities better places. • Seek opinions—Seek young people’s opinions when making decisions that affect them.
Boundaries and Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect respect for adults—Expect children and teenagers to respect adults and elders as authority figures. • Expect parents to set boundaries—Expect parents to enforce clear and consistent rules and boundaries. • Report misbehavior—Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong. • Model giving and serving—Volunteer time or donate money to show young people the importance of helping others.
Commitment to Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage success in school—Encourage children and teenagers to take school seriously and do well in school.
Positive Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach shared values—Teach children and teenagers the same core values as other adults do, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility. • Discuss personal values—Openly discuss their own values with children and teenagers. • Discuss religious beliefs—Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and teenagers.
Social Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach respect for cultural differences—Teach children and teenagers to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own. • Guide decision making—Help children and teenagers think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions. • Give financial guidance—Offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.
Positive Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass down traditions—Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture.

- Actions about whose importance there is a broad consensus.
- Actions about whose importance there is not a consensus.

From an asset-building perspective, all of these interactions can contribute to young people's well-being. And when we combine the responses of adults who say the action is "most important" and "very important," at least three-fourths of adults support all but one of these actions (neighbors give advice to kids, which only 33 percent of adults say is most or very important).

Yet these actions are clearly deemed less important by American adults than the top nine. As a result, it is likely that adults are less likely to engage in these behaviors with young people. This difference raises several questions about priorities, roles, and capacity to make a difference:

- Are the overall lower ratings a result of significant disagreements in society about the importance of these actions? For example, people who are more religious are much more likely to affirm the importance of discussing religious values. Among those who attend services weekly or more, 75 percent say this action is very important, compared to 34 percent who rarely or never attend.
- Does the lower rating on these actions reflect a belief that they have less impact on young people's lives and thus are less important? For example, many adults may not recognize the impact of reporting positive behavior, knowing the names of young people in the neighborhood, and seeking their opinions as actions that help young people feel known, valued, connected, and empowered. Indeed, Public Agenda found that only 47 percent of adults believe that "neighbors spending more time with kids and watching out for them" is a very effective way to help young people.¹⁵
- Do many adults see these actions as being the primary or sole responsibility of parents (and, perhaps, adults who work directly with children or teenagers)? Such an interpretation would be consistent with previous public opinion polls.¹⁶ As one interviewee put it, "Who are we to interfere and override what the parent thinks is best for their child in some circumstances?"
- Did some respondents feel that the activity was too big or complex for the average adult to have any impact? That may be the case, for example, with helping to ensure the well-being of neighborhood kids. Indeed, previous research has found that a significant barrier to people's involvement in the lives of children is their sense that the issues and challenges in young people's lives are too big for them to be able to make a difference.¹⁷

This study does not answer these questions directly. Additional research could examine these kinds of questions in much greater depth. Yet perhaps it is more important to begin the dialogue within communities about these kinds of issues so that people can reflect upon their assumptions and try to answer the question, What do we agree upon and how can that consensus shape what adults expect of each other when it comes to raising healthy children and teenagers?

Interpreting the Findings through an Asset-Building Perspective

The differences in support for each of the 19 actions offer insights into adults' recognition of their roles in asset building. As shown in Table 2, in which actions that are deemed "most

important” by at least 70 percent of adults are shaded, support for actions varies by different categories of developmental assets.

Some intriguing patterns emerge when these actions are organized to relate to each category of assets:

- The support-related actions are mixed, with adults rating one highly, but giving two less support. This finding may reflect an inaccurate belief that these actions are not that important or are not high priorities, particularly with respect to unrelated adults.
- None of the actions related to empowerment reach the level of consensus among adults.
- The two actions related to the boundaries-and-expectations assets that received broad consensus focus on what parents and young people need to do. The actions that focus on unrelated adults intervening and being role models do not garner as much support. This finding reinforces the perception of parents having primary, if not exclusive, responsibility for boundary setting and discipline.
- There is a consensus about the only action included in the study related to the commitment-to-learning assets.
- Two out of the three actions related to positive values are supported by a consensus of Americans. This finding suggests that there are some core values that we share across our religious, political, cultural, and socioeconomic differences.
- There is a consensus on the importance of all the actions related to social competencies.

The 19 actions examined in this study reflect a few of the many different ways adults can help build assets in each of the eight categories. The overall patterns offer some starting points for dialogue about areas where adults may be most ready to engage in more intentional asset-building relationships. The patterns may also help to raise questions about how adults perceive young people and their role in communities and society.

Children or Teenagers: Does It Make a Difference?

For most of the actions we studied, adults are as likely to say they are as important in relationships with teenagers as they are with children. This finding challenges the all-too-common assumption that adults have less responsibility for adolescents than for children. However, there are four actions that adults believe are more important for children (ages 5–10) than for teenagers (ages 11–18): teach respect for cultural differences; guide decision making; help ensure well-being of neighborhood kids; and provide service opportunities (Figure 3).

The stronger emphasis on being engaged with children versus teenagers may provide insight into the differences in how children and teenagers are viewed in our culture. For example, the difference in emphasis on teaching respect for cultural differences may reflect adults’ assessment that racial attitudes are heavily influenced in the early primary years—a view borne out by reality.¹⁸ From this perspective, adults may be correct in believing it is particularly important to do these things with children.

Still, such values may be challenged and solidified by opportunity, circumstance, and experimentation during adolescence as young people “own” or internalize their identities and values and make critical decisions. As a result, adolescents may have a *greater* develop-

mental need than children for adults to discuss values about cultural differences openly with them and guide their decision making.

In addition, the emphasis on addressing decision making with young children may also reflect an adult concern that teenagers won't accept adults' views. Based on the lower levels of importance that adults place on asking young people for their opinions, many adults may be uncomfortable debating with adolescents about decisions young people are making. This reluctance is further underscored by responses to several in-depth interview scenarios. As many as 20 percent of adults view relating to older teens (compared to middle school-age youth or younger children) as threatening or uncomfortable enough to be an obstacle to getting involved at all.

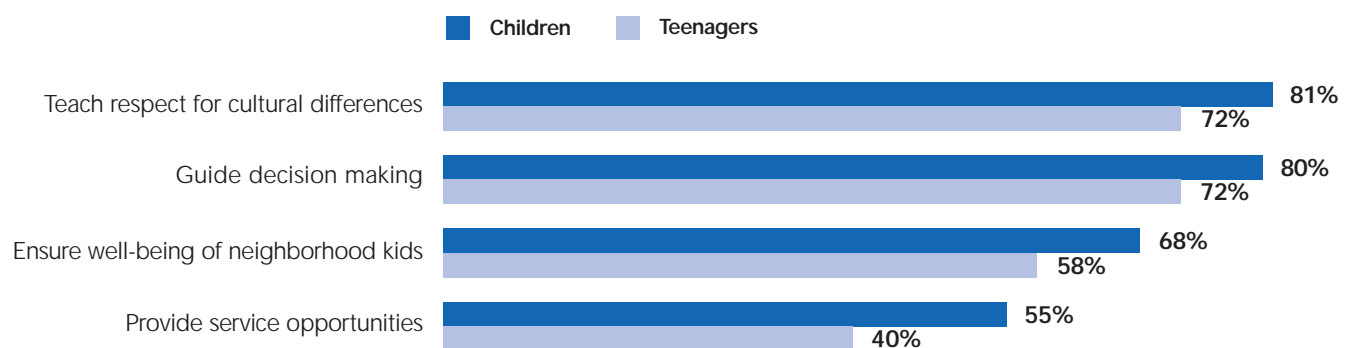
The responses to the statement concerning providing service opportunities, however, were perplexing. Adults thought it was more important to give younger children chances to improve their communities than to give these opportunities to adolescents—an age group presumably with greater wherewithal to contribute, particularly in terms of skills, experience, and opportunities. Moreover, although only about half of the youth population is actively engaged in service to others, teenagers are generally more aware than children of both needs and opportunities to help others.¹⁹ If Americans really believe that community service is an expression of an important shared value, there is much to be done to tap young people's capacities and give them practice in “living” this shared value.

Some Differences among Us

As we have noted, there is widespread consensus on the importance of many of the asset-building actions that are at the heart of this study. Indeed, at least seven out of 10 adults in every subgroup studied believe the top nine actions are “most important.” Some differences emerge, however, particularly related to the second set of actions, around which there is less consensus. Exploring these differences can help not only to identify areas of strength and

FIGURE 3

Proportion of Adults Saying Action Is “Most Important” in Relationships with Children versus Teenagers



A split-sample format was used, with half of the respondents being asked about children ages 5–10 and half being asked about adolescents ages 11–18. Differences between the ages were not statistically significant on the other 15 asset-building actions.

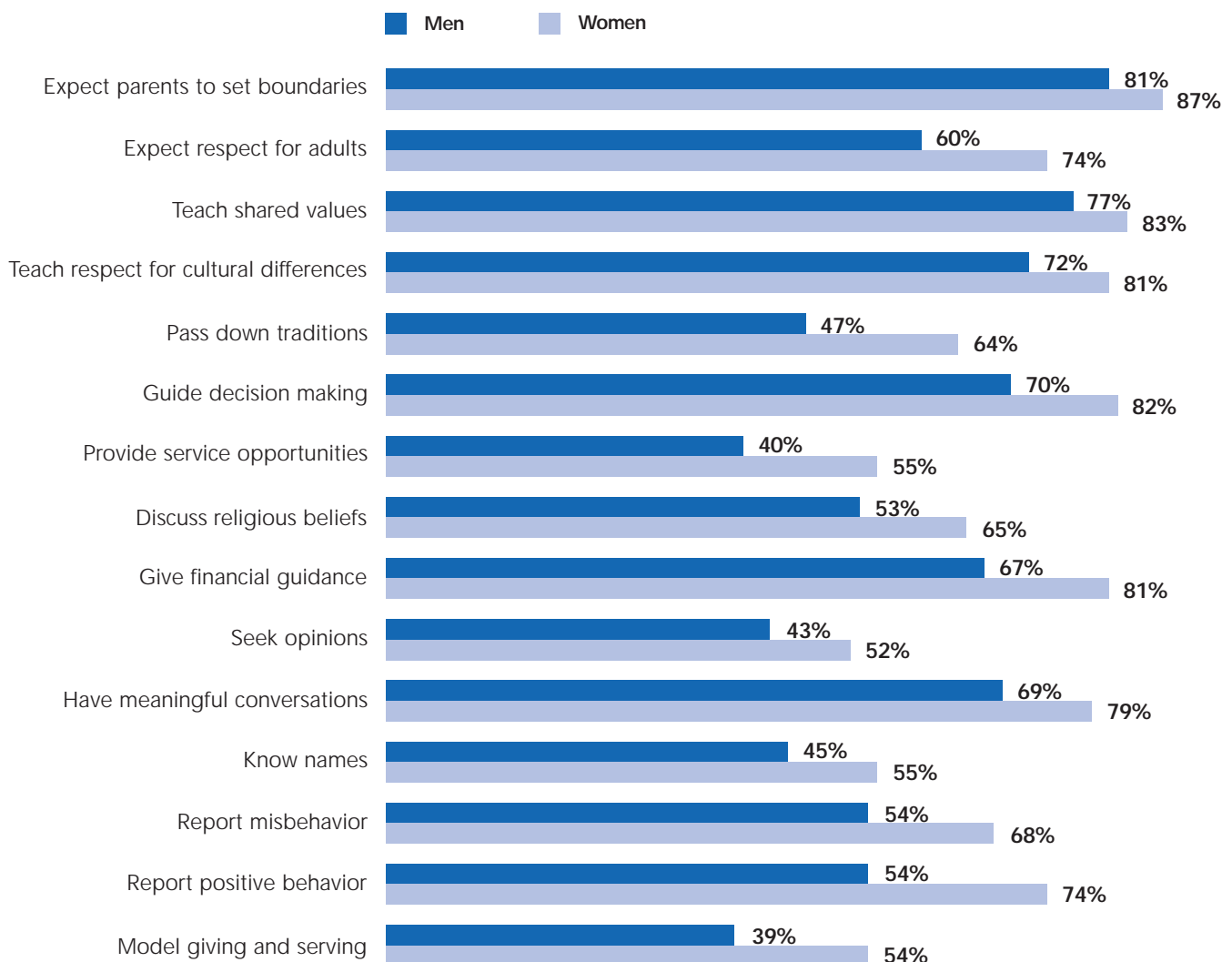
leadership, but to focus strategies for change.

In this section, we look at several subgroups within the sample of adults studied. We focus only on those actions where the differences among subgroups are meaningful.²⁰

Gender—The majority of both women and men believe most of the actions addressed in this survey are highly important. But women are consistently more likely than men to believe in the importance of these connections with children and teenagers. Men seem to regard these kinds of positive actions as reasonably important, but not as vitally important as do women. Indeed, women are more likely than men to believe that 15 of the 19 actions are highly important (Figure 4).²¹

When it comes to caring for others, differences in the perceptions and attitudes of men

FIGURE 4
Proportion of Men and Women Designating Action as “Most Important”



and women are well documented. For example, a current review of research studies concluded that women may react to stress not by the “fight or flight” responses more common among men, but by seeking personal support from and giving support to others—behaviors that are obviously more consistent with building children’s healthy development than either aggression or withdrawal.²² In addition, a *New York Times* poll found that women are more likely than men to believe that cheating and economic inequality are wrong. They are also more likely to believe that people should take care of their aging parents.²³

There may be some changes in these views among young adults, however. A recent survey by the Radcliffe Public Policy Center reported that nearly equal proportions of men (82 percent) and women (85 percent) ages 21 to 39 put family ahead of power, money, or prestige in importance.²⁴ It remains to be seen, of course, whether such views will be acted upon by these young adults, and whether the cultivation of family-first attitudes might increase the level of attentiveness to one’s own and, ultimately, the children of others. Since these attitudes seem to be “percolating” among today’s young men, one might expect to find greater numbers of men becoming actively engaged in the lives of children and teenagers.

Race/ethnicity—An oversampling of African American and Latino/Hispanic adults in this study allows for meaningful comparisons among African Americans, Latinos, and whites. Meaningful differences across these racial/ethnic groups are evident overall²⁵ and, specifically, on 12 of the asset-building actions (Figure 5). African American and Latino/Hispanic adults are more likely to strongly support these actions than white adults. In addition, African Americans are more likely to support several of the actions than Latino/Hispanic adults.

African American and Hispanic adults tend to value everyone’s role in contributing to the community more than do white adults. Those differences likely reflect what anthropologists have described as a difference between the value of “collectivism,” predominant in most non-European cultures, and the value of “individualism,” common in European American cultures.²⁶

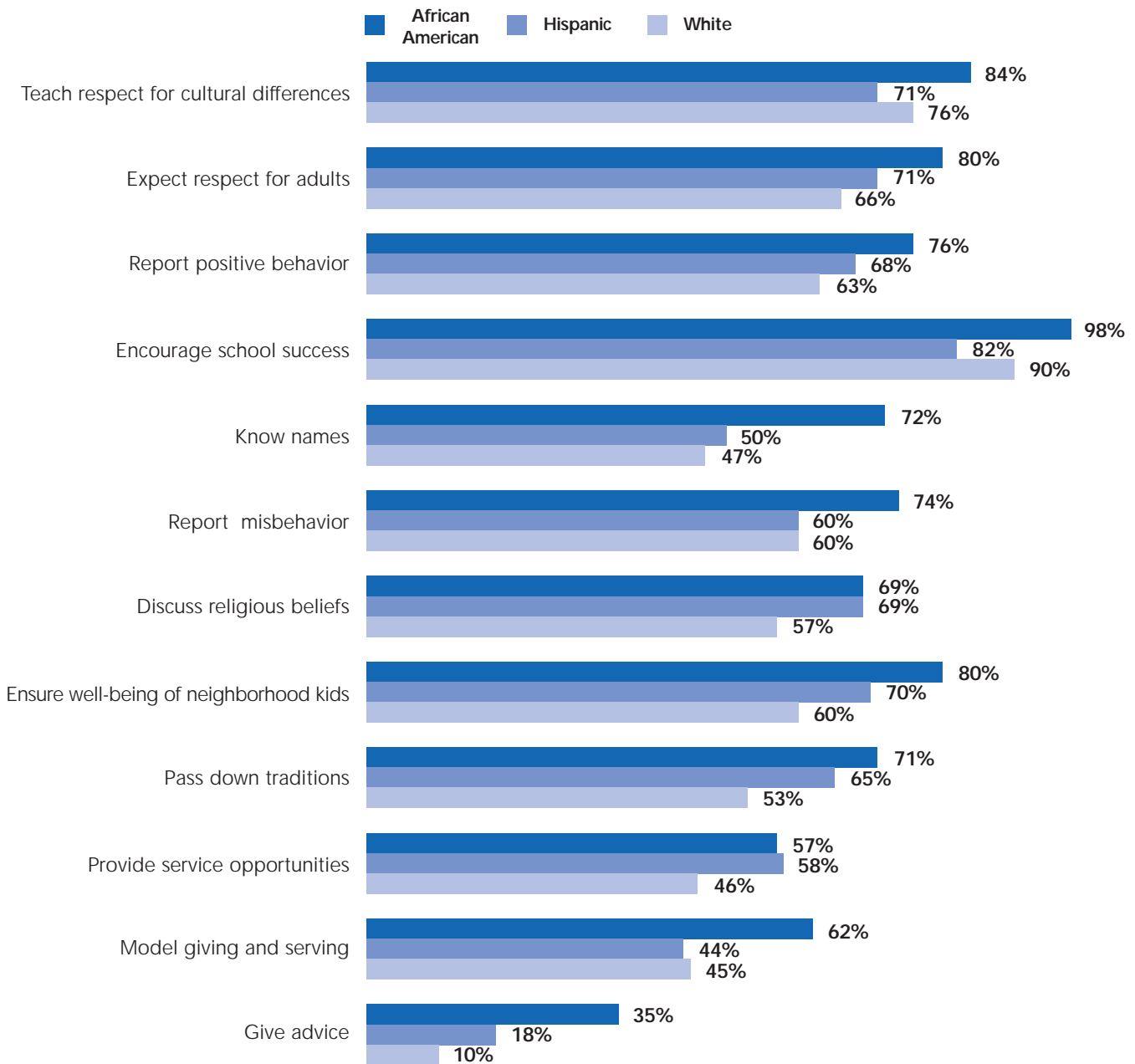
The importance that people of color place on these asset-building actions may reflect a greater sense of interdependence and shared norms among these cultural groups than is characteristic of white Americans. In addition, the people of color tend to say they are more distrustful of institutions and strangers. This may lead them to trust those within their own cultural groups and neighborhood more than they do outsiders.²⁷

We recognize that this analysis risks overgeneralizing the complexity and richness within both Latino cultures and African American cultures. Within the Latino community, for example, the Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and other specific cultures each have their unique cultural values, traditions, and norms regarding adults’ relationships with young people. At the same time, it is striking that there are, indeed, some cross-cultural similarities among many American-resident people of color that distinguish them from American-resident white adults. The differences strongly and consistently show that African American and Hispanic respondents find many asset-building actions to be more important than do white respondents.

Across the diverse African American and Hispanic cultures, there seem to be more

clearly defined roles for adults beyond parents in the raising of the youngest generations. Children and teenagers are expected to respect all adults as authority figures. All adults are expected to teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down their ethnic and religious traditions, feel a responsibility for ensuring the well-being of the kids in their neighborhood, and give advice to young people as needed.

FIGURE 5
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as “Most Important,” by Race/Ethnicity



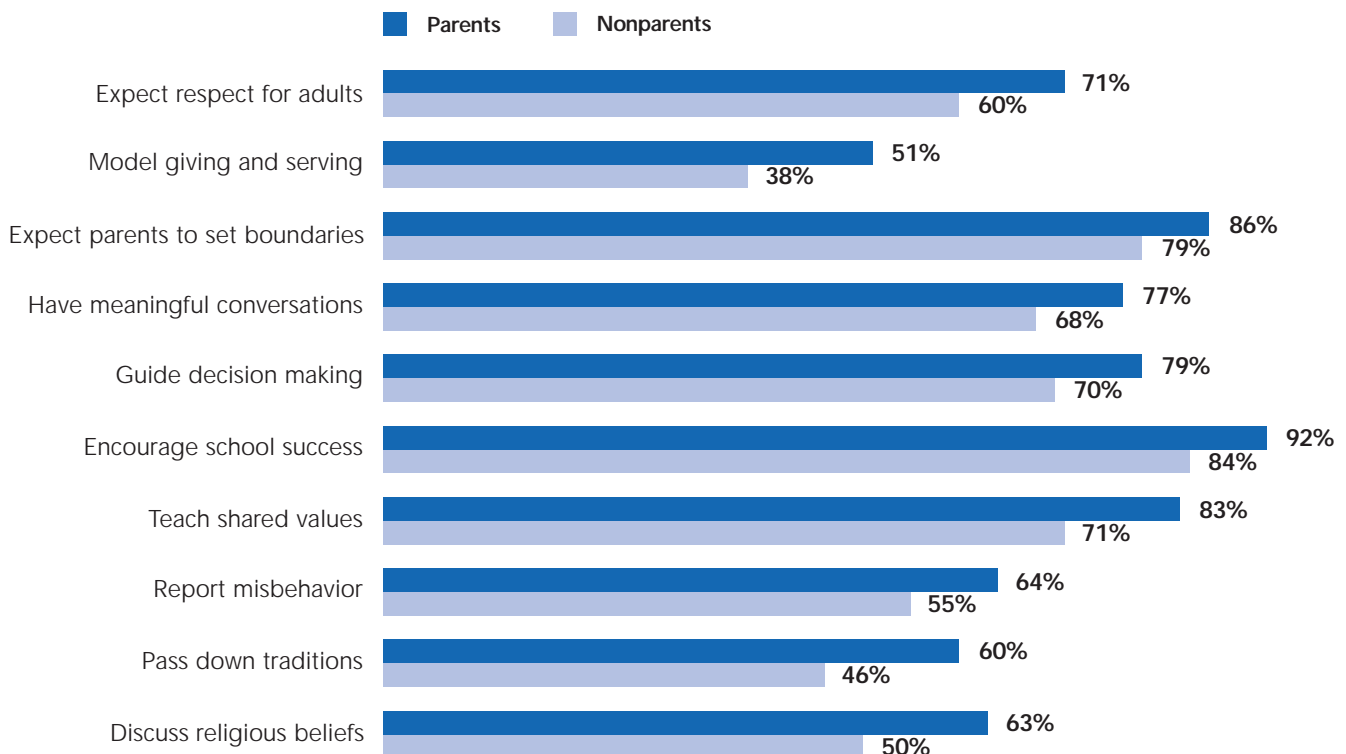
African American adults especially expected their neighbors to keep them informed about their children, both when children do something right as well as when they do something wrong. These expectations combine to define cultural communities in which the mutual and interdependent reinforcement brought to bear by family, school, congregation, and neighborhood gives rise to a collective strength that is less common among white Americans.

Parental status—Parents (including those whose youngest child is older than 18) are more likely than nonparents to rate the asset-building actions in this study as highly important.²⁸ They were particularly more likely to believe that the specific actions shown in Figure 6 are most important.

The fact that parents are *more likely* than nonparents to see the value of unrelated adults being involved in young people’s lives has important implications. The conventional wisdom has been that parents don’t want others to interfere with their children’s lives. In contrast, these findings suggest that parents may be open to—and even want—the involvement of other adults in supporting and guiding their children.

Another important finding is that parents whose youngest child is older than 18 were even more supportive of these actions than those whose youngest child is younger than 18. This pattern may suggest that parents with grown children could be important resources for

FIGURE 6
Proportion of Parents versus Nonparents Designating Action as “Most Important”



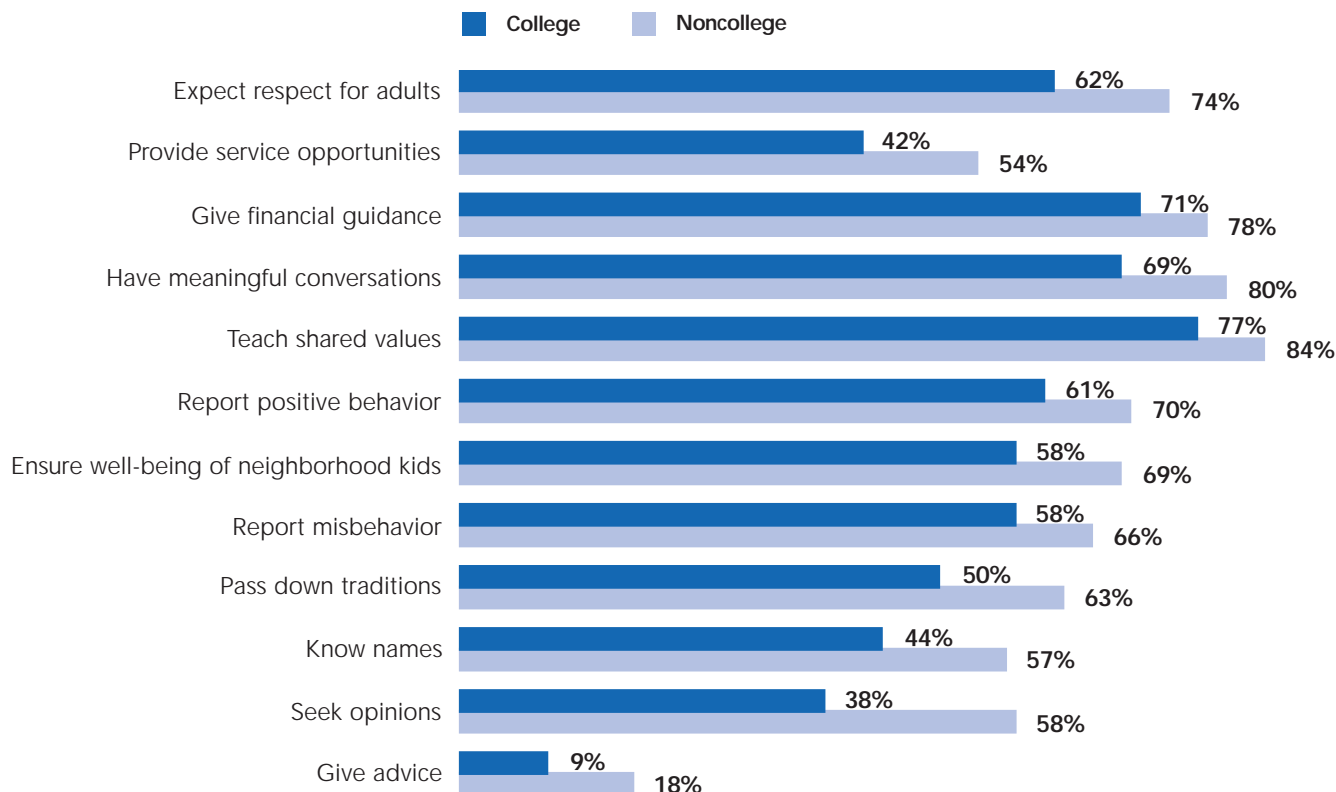
children and teenagers. They recognize—and have likely seen with their own children—the important roles unrelated adults can play in young people’s lives. As their parenting responsibilities become less intense, they may have new opportunities for engaging with other young people in more intentional and sustained ways.

Income and education—Looking at all the asset-building actions together, neither education nor household income made a large difference in whether adults thought these asset-building actions were important. When differences did appear on specific actions, they tended toward those with fewer years of formal education (no formal education past high school) and those who are less affluent (under \$60,000 annual income and, in a number of cases, under \$20,000) rating the actions to be more highly important.

Adults who have not attended college or had any post-high school education are more likely to support 12 of the actions than those who have attended college (Figure 7). The greatest difference comes in seeking young people’s opinions, with only 38 percent of college-educated adults believing it is most important, compared to 58 percent of those who have not attended college.

When we compare adults by income, we find six areas in which those with less income

FIGURE 7
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as “Most Important,”
by Level of Education



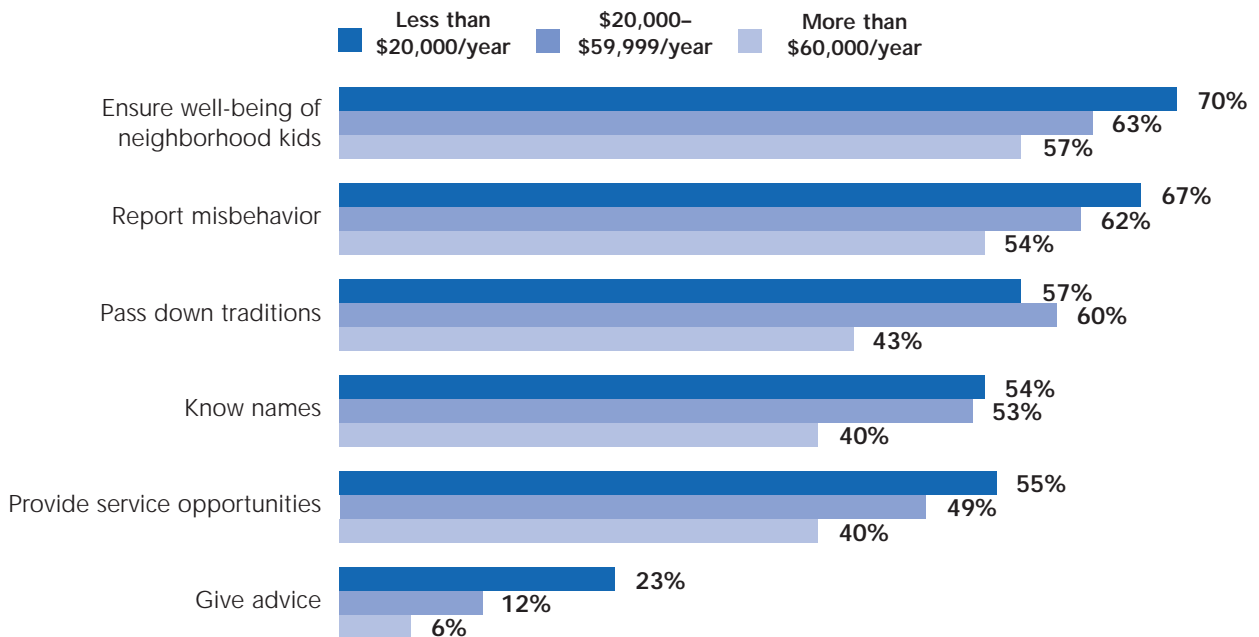
are more likely to say that these actions are most important (Figure 8). These results may suggest that adults with less formal schooling and lower income levels may hold a greater sense of interdependence and shared norms with their neighbors.²⁹

Religious involvement—People who are actively involved in a religious community (attending services weekly) are more likely than those who rarely or never attend to place importance on eight of the 19 asset-building actions, as shown in Figure 9.

Several of these actions relate directly to religious beliefs and practices. For example, it is no surprise that people who are religious place more importance on discussing religious beliefs, passing down traditions, and discussing personal values than those who are not religious. Furthermore, the greater emphasis on service (in modeling giving and serving, and providing service opportunities) is consistent with other research showing higher levels of service involvement and volunteering among religious youth and adults.³⁰ The remaining actions (giving advice, helping to ensure well-being of neighborhood kids, and knowing names) may reflect an emphasis across many faith traditions of responsibility for the surrounding neighborhood and a sense of connectedness within the intergenerational community.

Other differences—As shown in Figure 10, fewer differences on the importance of asset-building actions were found among adults based on their age, number of years lived in the community, and attendance at community meetings. However, for each of the actions shown, those who are older, have lived in the community longer, and participate in neigh-

FIGURE 8
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as “Most Important,”
by Income



neighborhood or community meetings are more likely to support the asset-building actions. (The differences are not meaningful for actions that are not indicated in the figures.)

Overall patterns—With the exception of the widespread gender differences, almost all the variability across groups focuses on the actions beyond the nine about which there is a broad consensus. In fact, among the top nine, there were differences on only three actions:

- Teaching shared values (most strongly supported by parents and by people over age 35; Figures 6 and 10);
- Discussing personal values (most strongly supported by women, parents, and those who are religiously active; Figures 4, 6, and 9); and
- Expecting respect for adults (most strongly supported by women, African Americans, parents, those without a college education, and older adults; Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10).

Additional differences among subgroups emerge beyond the top nine actions. A closer examination of education, race/ethnicity, parental status, income, age, and years of residence in the community reveals meaningful differences regarding “passing down traditions.” These differences likely reflect differences in how cultural traditions are valued in our pluralistic society. They also likely reflect differences in how people balance their interest in preserving uniqueness with their interest in being identified as an “American” more than as a member of a distinctive cultural group.

FIGURE 9
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as “Most Important,”
by Religious Involvement

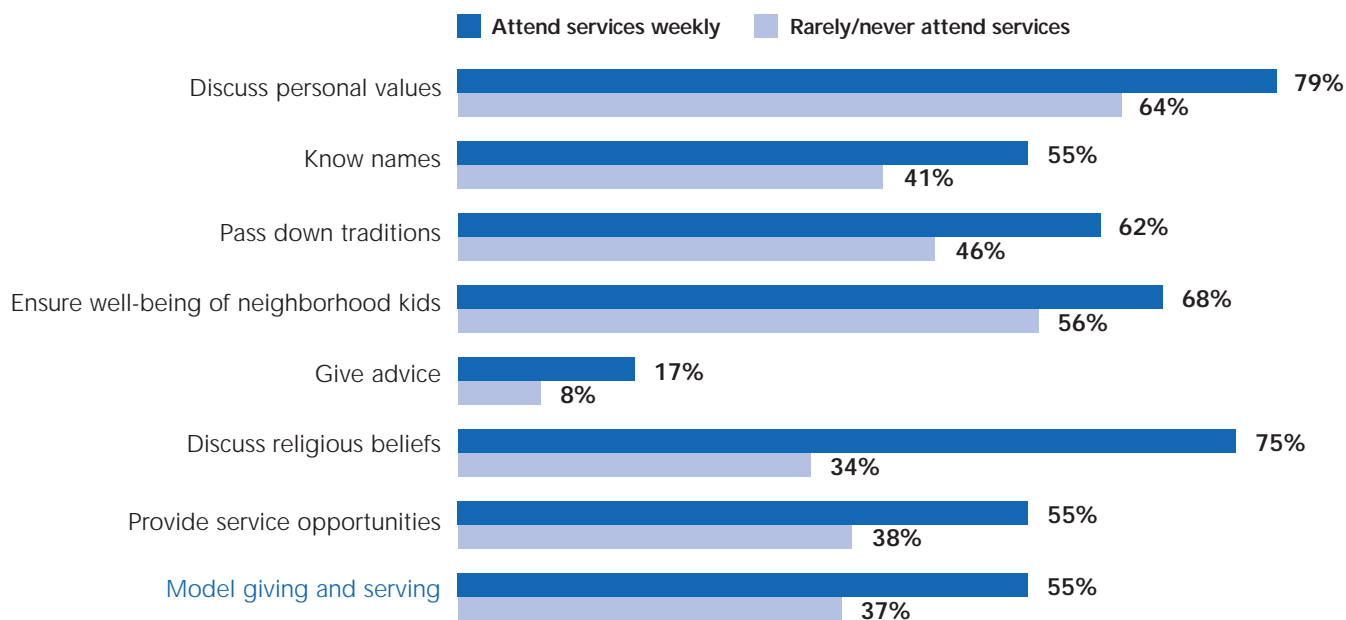
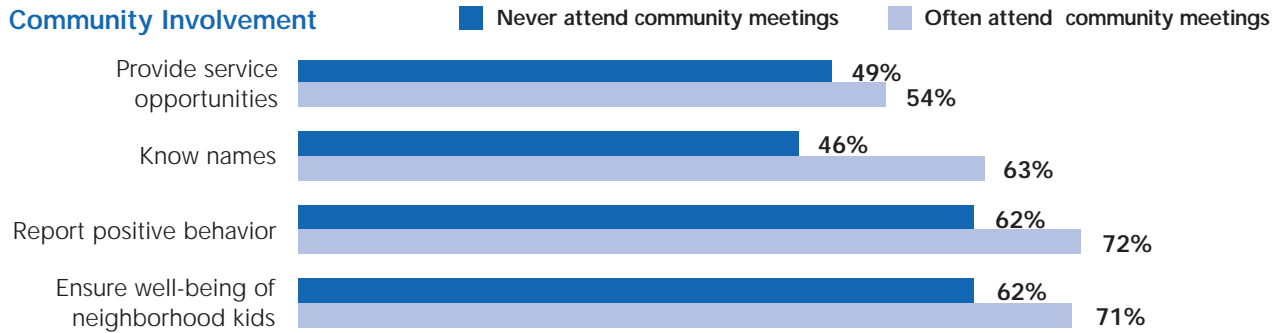
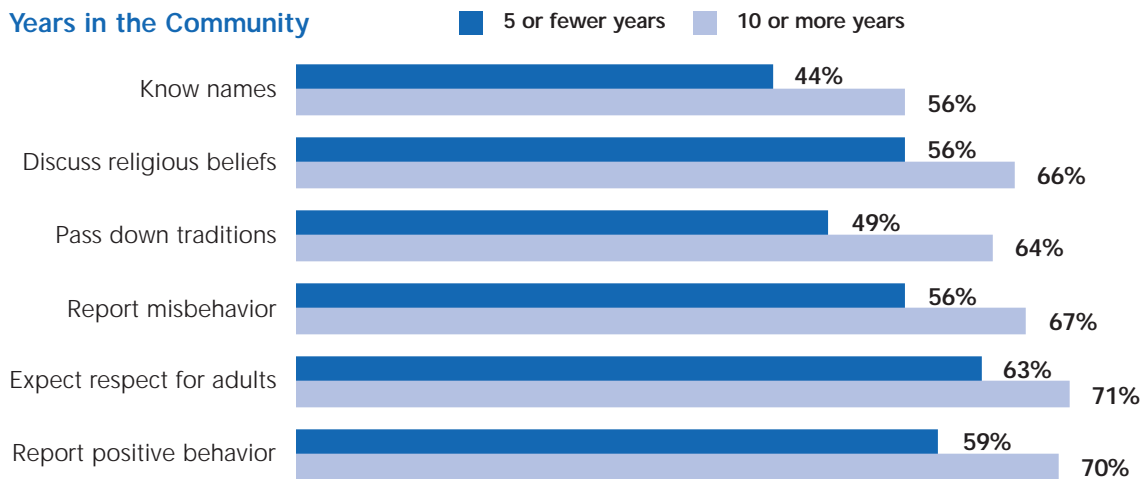


FIGURE 10
Proportion of Adults Designating Action as “Most Important,”
by Community Involvement, Years in the Community, and Age

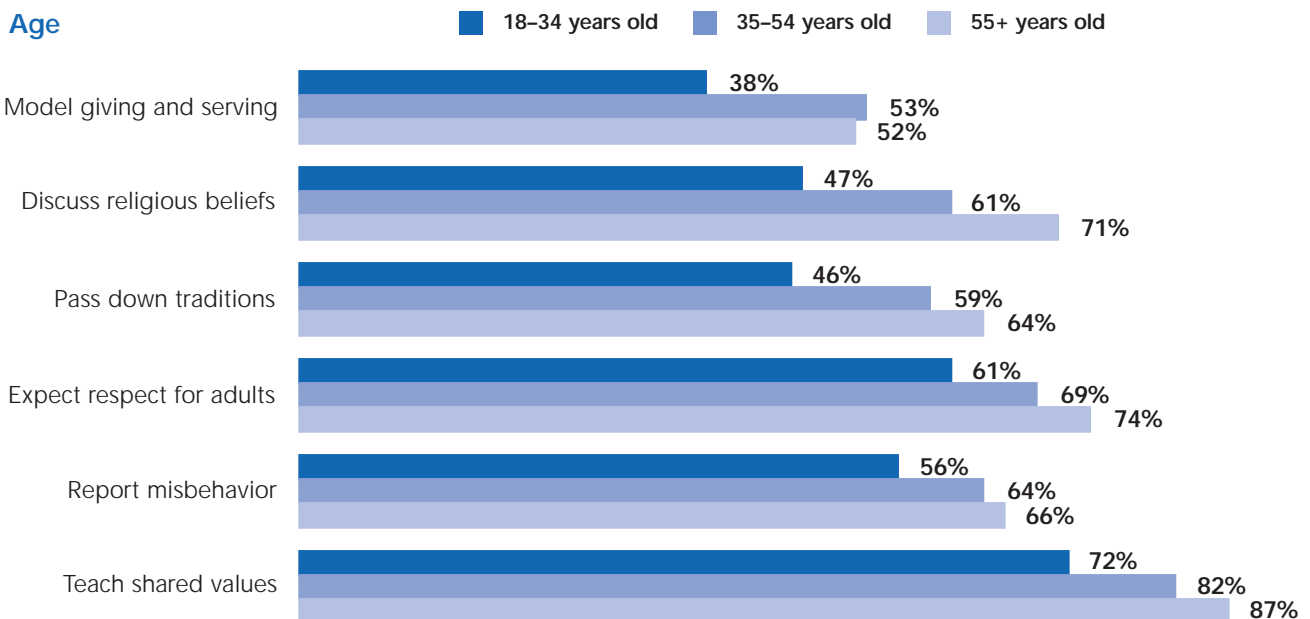
Community Involvement



Years in the Community



Age



Tapping Adults' Consensus to Generate Positive Action

While examining these relatively minor differences can help to deepen our understanding of the dynamics operating in our communities and in society as a whole, it is important not to lose sight of the overall pattern. As suggested by the top nine asset-building actions, adults consistently place a high value on a wide range of positive interactions between themselves and young people. This support cuts across traditional differences in race, religiosity, income, and education, as well as other differences.

The consensus on many asset-building actions is a hopeful sign, for several reasons. First, research has shown that an important factor in whether or not someone takes action is whether he or she believes the action is important.³¹ Thus, the consensus on many asset-building actions suggests a readiness among adults for positive engagement in young people's lives.

Second, people are also more likely to take action when there is social pressure to do so.³² This survey can be a tool to help people recognize that they "have permission" from their peers to take action. In other words, any concerns they have about getting negative reactions to their involvement with young people may prove to be unfounded. On the contrary, such involvement may well generate support and encouragement from other adults.

Finally, the broad consensus also reminds us that, despite our many differences, there are still some priorities and values that we share. We want young people to learn fundamental human values. We want to guide and nurture young people. Although we do not agree on everything, there are some areas in which people with diverse backgrounds and worldviews can focus attention and work together to improve the well-being of all children and teenagers.

CHAPTER 3

THE GAP BETWEEN BELIEFS AND ACTIONS

When it comes to raising our nation’s young people, there is a major gap between what we believe and what we do. American adults believe it is very important to be engaged in the lives of children and youth. Yet believing something is important does not mean that someone automatically takes action. Although a majority of American adults across a wide range of demographic differences agree that most of the asset-building actions examined in this study are very important, relatively few follow through with concrete engagement in the lives of children and youth. Simply put, adults’ real relationships with kids are much more limited and superficial than the vast majority of Americans think they ought to be.

Examining Adult Behavior

To measure the extent to which adults actually do the things they said were important, we asked them how many of the adults close to them actually practiced each of the 19 asset-building actions.¹ We took this approach (instead of asking whether they themselves took these actions) for three reasons:

- People tend to overstate *their own* involvement in things that they believe are socially desirable.
- People tend to be parts of networks that share beliefs and engage in similar behaviors.
- Extensive research has found that a key part of changing people’s behavior and social expectations is having role models, support, or even pressure from others around them to change or to live out a particular expectation.²

Thus, these “adults you know” responses are a less biased and more accurate measure of adults’ behaviors and involvement than asking adults about their own behavior.³ Throughout this discussion, then, when we report adults’ actual behaviors or actions, we are referring to their perception of what “adults you know” do.

What Adults Do (and Don’t Do)

When we looked at adults’ perceptions of the importance of the asset-building actions in Chapter 2, nine were viewed as “most important” (the highest rating) by at least seven out of 10 adults. Furthermore, another nine were seen as most important by at least a majority of adults.⁴ This high level of importance might suggest that adults are deeply committed to connecting with young people.

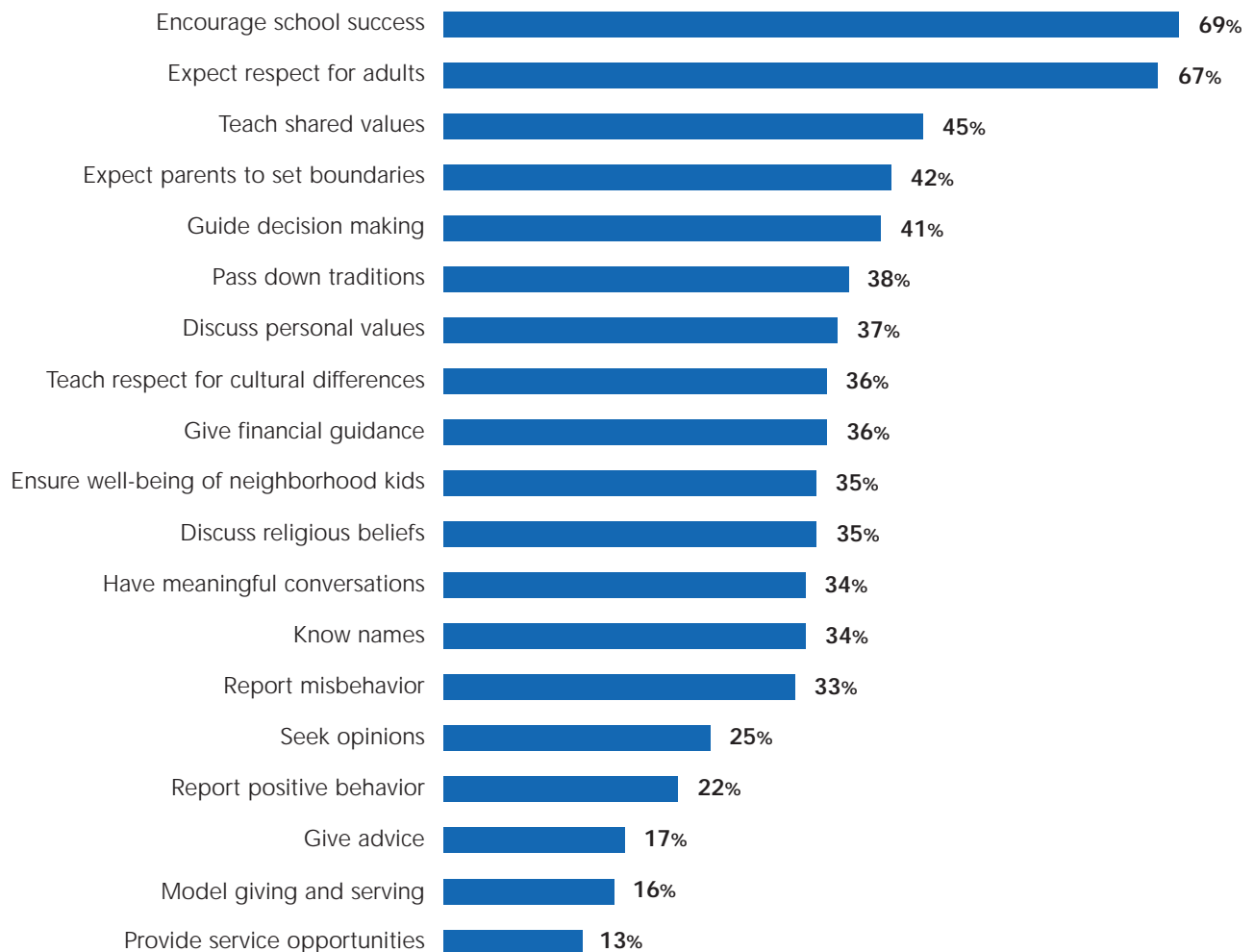
Yet, a very different picture emerges when we focus on how adults actually engage in the lives of children and adolescents outside their family. On average, most adults engage in only two of the 19 actions: encouraging success in school and expecting respect for adults (Figure 11). Moreover, two-thirds or more of adults do *not* engage in 12 of these 19 actions. Across the spectrum, then, most adults don’t do the very things they believe to be highly important for children and teenagers. Indeed, the two actions actually practiced by most adults focus more on what adults expect of children and teenagers than on their own responsibilities.

Thus, it appears that adults are less likely to take action that requires a greater level of involvement or commitment on their own part (such as having meaningful conversations with children or teenagers).

Youth Perspectives on Relationships with Adults

This study focuses on adults' perceptions of their relationships with children and teenagers. But how do young people view these relationships? Previous Search Institute research asked 6th- to 12th-grade youth about several dimensions of their relationships with adults outside their own families. Figure 12 reports some of their responses. Although these statements do not precisely parallel the adult survey, the comparison offers insights. Consider the following:

FIGURE 11
Adults' Actual Engagement with Children and Teenagers



This chart shows the proportion of adults saying that "almost all" or "a great majority" of the adults they know do these actions. This definition is used as a proxy measure for adults' own engagement.

- **Roughly half or fewer of the young people surveyed indicate that each form of interaction measured is part of their relationships with adults.**
- **In the same way that adults say they are more likely to encourage success in school, the most common thing young people experience from adults outside their family is having adults they know well encourage them. However, only half of the young people say they have three or more adults in their lives who do this whenever they see each other.**
- **Young people are more likely to report several forms of adult engagement (such as reporting misbehavior) than adults report doing, suggesting that even a little adult involvement is noticed by kids.**

FIGURE 12
Youth Perceptions of Relationships with Adults



SOURCE: Unpublished data from surveys of 99,462 6th- to 12th-grade youth in 213 communities during the 1996-97 school year. See Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1999). *A fragile foundation: The state of developmental assets among American youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

- Most young people don't think adults listen to them—a perception confirmed by the finding that few adults (25 percent) seek young people's opinions about things that affect them.
- In both the adult and youth surveys, adults are rarely perceived to model serving or to provide service opportunities for young people.

The relative consistency of the youth data with our results from adults suggests that adults are honestly and accurately reporting what young people perceive as a social reality: The vast majority of adults aren't involved much with kids outside of their family.

The Gap between Beliefs and Actions

Society has certain expectations about how adults interact with children and teenagers. If we focused only on what adults say is important in relationships with young people, there would be reason to celebrate. But something is not really expected (or a “norm”) unless it is both seen as important and lived out by the majority of people.⁵ Given this definition, only two of the 19 asset-building actions are *social norms*—things that are truly expected and practiced—in this culture (as shown in Figure 13).

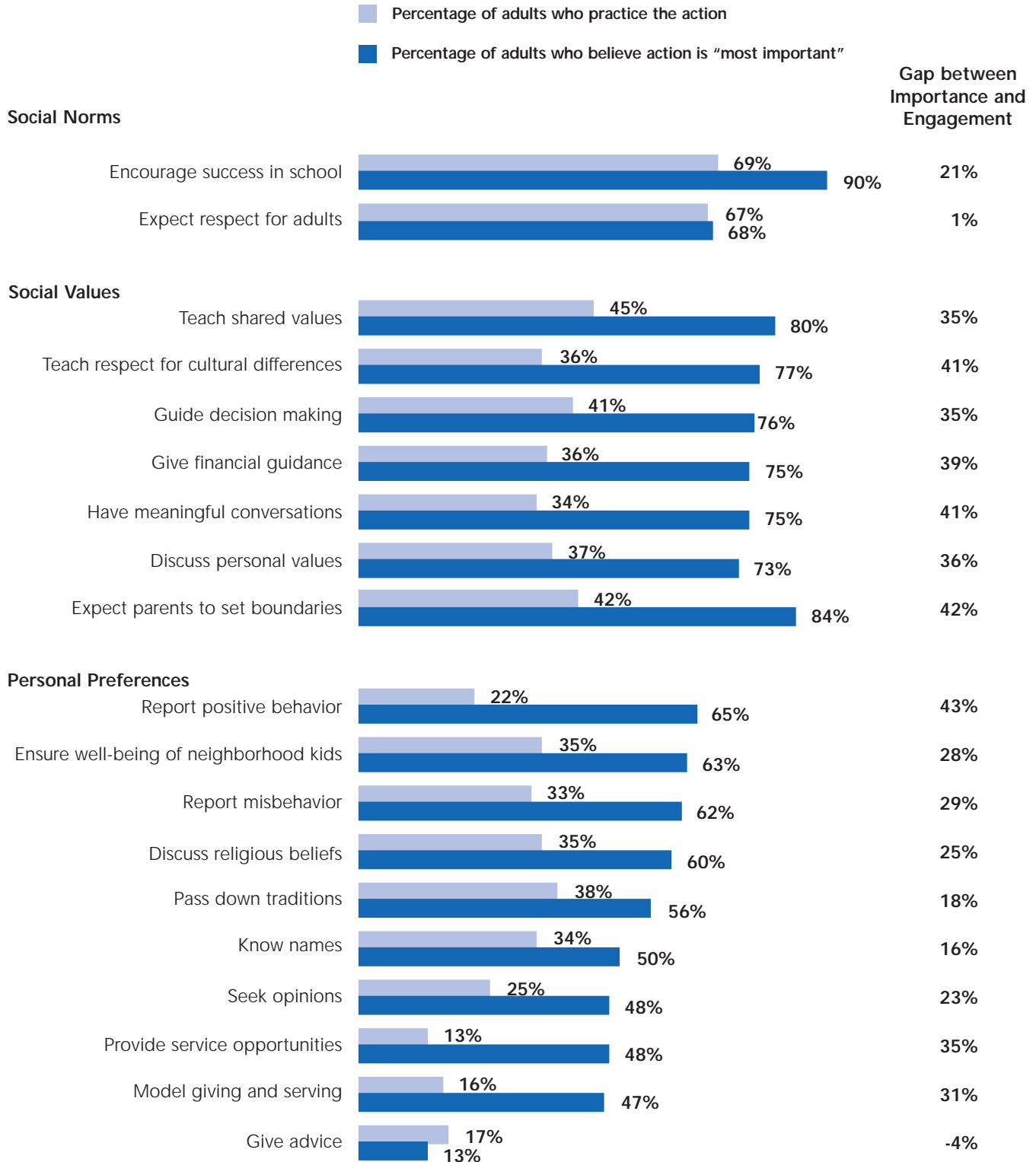
The other seven actions rated “most important” by at least 70 percent of adults could be considered *social values*, because the vast majority of adults believe them to be important, but a majority don't actually perform these actions. The remaining 10 actions might be considered *personal preferences*, because there is no consensus in society regarding the importance of these actions and only a minority of adults actually perform them.

Table 3 takes a slightly different look at the gap between *saying* an action is important and putting it into practice. It organizes the 19 actions in descending order by the gap between stated importance and actual involvement. The nine actions considered most important (the two social norms and seven social values) are shaded. Several important patterns become clear in this presentation:

- The two highly important actions with a narrow gap are the two items that we consider to be social norms (encourage success in school and expect parents to set boundaries), because the vast majority of people believe they are highly important and a majority of people perform them.
- The largest gap involves the action of reporting positive behavior. Sixty-five percent of adults believe this action is most important, yet only 22 percent of adults take this kind of positive, relatively simple action. (Adults think it's less important to report *misbehavior*, but they are more likely to do it.)
- In general, the largest gap between believing an action is important and taking the action can be found in the seven actions we categorize as social values. Indeed, the gap between importance and action is at least 35 percent for all of these actions.

While adults believe many of these actions are highly important, their behavior says otherwise. For the most part, they don't teach children shared values. They don't encourage respect for cultural differences. They don't help young people with decision making. They

FIGURE 13
Gap between Importance and Engagement



don't have meaningful conversations. They don't give financial guidance. Most people probably would think it irresponsible to choose not to do these things with children and youth. Yet, the vast majority of adults are failing to address these issues.

The gap between what people say is important and what they report people around them actually do is striking and troubling. Consider, for example, the fact that about two-thirds of adults indicated that it was highly important for adults to help ensure the well-being of children and teenagers in their neighborhood. Just over half that many (35 percent) said most people around them actually do this. One might argue that “helping to ensure well-being” could be a large, difficult task—something we shouldn't expect most people to do. And yet, as shown in Figure 14, adults are just as unlikely to report doing some of the simpler things that contribute to well-being: knowing young people's names, having meaningful conversations with them, reporting positive behavior, and reporting misbehavior.

TABLE 3. GAP BETWEEN IMPORTANCE AND INVOLVEMENT, IN DESCENDING ORDER OF GAP (IN %)

	Importance	Engagement	Gap
Report positive behavior	65	22	43
Expect parents to set boundaries	84	42	42
Teach respect for cultural differences	77	36	41
Have meaningful conversations	75	34	41
Give financial guidance	75	36	39
Discuss personal values	73	37	36
Teach shared values	80	45	35
Guide decision making	76	41	35
Provide service opportunities	48	13	35
Model giving and serving	47	16	31
Report misbehavior	62	33	29
Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	63	35	28
Discuss religious beliefs	60	35	25
Seek opinions	48	25	23
Encourage success in school	90	69	21
Pass down traditions	56	38	18
Know names	50	34	16
Expect respect for adults	68	67	1
Give advice	13	17	-4

Actions where there is broad consensus about importance.

Actions where there is not broad consensus about importance.

Inconsistency between attitudes and behaviors best describes how most adults relate to kids. This pattern was quite evident in both the national poll and the follow-up interviews with 100 survey respondents. These interviews revolved around how adults would respond in situations involving young people (explained in more detail in Appendix A). Three of the scenarios are particularly relevant on this point:

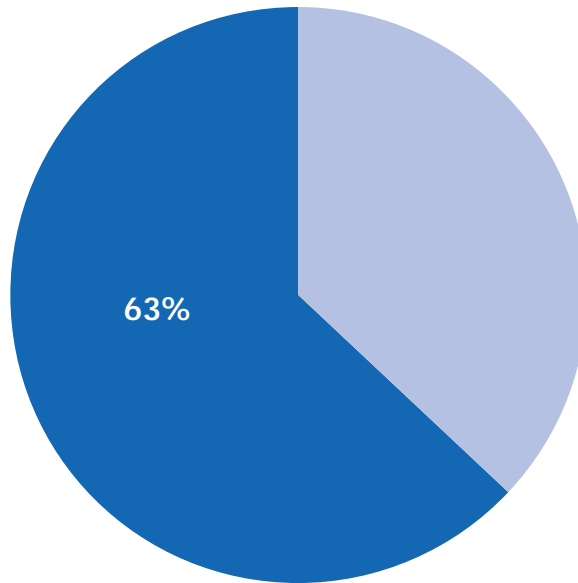
- Seeing students skipping school—Most interviewees felt a responsibility to do something if they saw young adolescents skipping school. Yet they thought it would be unusual for adults actually to do something—especially if they did not really know the young people or their parents. As one interviewee said: “If I knew them, I would stop and tell them to go to school. If I didn’t know them, I probably wouldn’t do anything.”
- Dealing with skateboarders in a business parking lot—Almost all respondents felt adults should do something if young skateboarders were using a local business’s parking lot. They worried that injury could result and that the young people’s activities would interfere with business. (Some also wanted to teach young people about respect and responsibility.) Yet 73 percent of respondents said adults’ main response would be to get rid of the skateboarders, not to try to listen to or consider the views of the young people in some positive way.
- Helping flood victims when asked by youth—Most interviewees would feel responsible for helping out in a flood relief effort if asked to do so by middle school girls. One said: “I believe most people are good-natured and caring and would participate.” Another added: “It’s a matter of self-worth. . . . You feel the need to participate.” However, 29 percent of interviewees said adults would be more likely to volunteer or donate *if someone else were watching* when help was requested.

Different Levels of Engagement

In the same way that different subgroups of adults place slightly different levels of importance on the various actions, there is also some variability in the actual involvement of different groups. While we examined several standard demographic and lifestyle variables, the only ones where we found meaningful differences are highlighted. Here are the major patterns identified in this study (with detailed information provided in Table C.2):

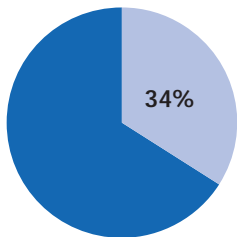
- Overall, there are only a few significant differences in actual engagement across racial/ethnic groups. However, African American and white adults were somewhat more likely than Hispanics to expect young people to respect adults.
- People who attended religious services weekly (and, somewhat less so, monthly) were only more likely than those who never attend (but not those who attend rarely) to take asset-building actions. People who attended at least weekly were more likely than those who never attend to discuss their religious or spiritual beliefs with young people (41 percent versus 26 percent). Weekly attenders were also more likely to feel responsible for ensuring the well-being of neighborhood kids (39 percent versus 24 percent). People who attended services *daily* were more likely than all other adults to model giving and serving, and to report positive behavior.

FIGURE 14
The Gap in Neighborhood Involvement

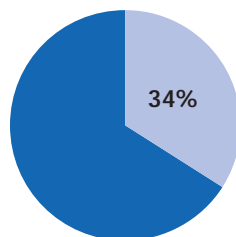


Most adults say they should feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of all kids in their neighborhood.

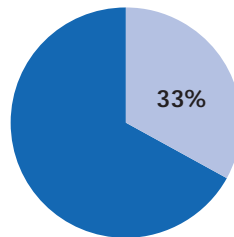
YET . . . Only one-third or fewer say most of the adults they know do even basic things to ensure that well-being.



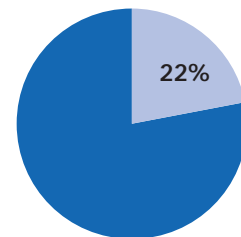
Percentage saying a majority of adults they know have meaningful conversations with kids.



Percentage who say a majority of adults know many neighborhood kids' names.



Percentage telling parents if child does something wrong.



Percentage telling parents if child does something right.

- Women are more likely to be involved in just one of the asset-building actions: discussing religious beliefs. Thirty-eight percent of women report this action, compared to 31 percent of men.
- As shown in Figure 15, adults aged 35 and older were more likely than younger adults to report positive behavior, offer service opportunities, and model giving and serving. However, younger adults (ages 18–34) were more likely to encourage success in school, and expect respect for adults and report misbehavior. These mixed results are a reminder that different generations have different perceived roles in relationship to children and teenagers.

There were almost no meaningful differences in actual involvement based on formal education or income level. Furthermore, parents were *not* more likely than nonparents to engage in these asset-building actions with young people outside their family. Indeed, the only two actions that parents were more likely to take than nonparents were to report positive behavior (24 percent versus 13 percent) and to give advice to neighborhood kids (20 percent versus 11 percent).

Understanding the Belief-Action Gap

Why is there such a large and consistent gap between people’s beliefs and actions? Perhaps some of the gap is inevitable. Time, ability, and conflicting priorities can all interfere with adults doing what they believe is important. In addition, important dynamics in relationships between adults and children and teenagers affect adults’ involvement. We hypothesize that the following dynamics may be at work.

Overreliance on overwhelmed parents—In theory, most Americans seem to think they share a responsibility for guiding the youngest generation. But in daily practice, nurturing kids seems to be left to parents. Americans generally hold parents responsible for their children’s moral character and behavior. In our survey, 78 percent of adults indicated that it was most or very important for parents to have *sole* responsibility for disciplining their children. As one interviewee put it when asked whether adults had a responsibility to get involved with young people: “They aren’t their children. They aren’t their responsibility, and they have their own lives to be concerned with.”

The irony, however, is that most adults have little confidence in parents’ effectiveness in guiding their children. In one study, for example, 49 percent of American adults blamed irresponsible parents who failed to do their job for the problems that children and teenagers faced.⁶ Furthermore, only 22 percent of adults indicated that it is “very common” for parents to be good role models and to teach their kids right from wrong.⁷

Society’s expectations for what parents “should” do are not matched by high support from others in the community or from society at large. The economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett argues that “our failure to invest either public resources or private time in raising children has left many families fragile and overburdened, unable to do a decent job in raising the next generation.”⁸ Furthermore, increased mobility and isolation, and a culture that prizes individualism, have taken away from families’ many sources of support, including extended

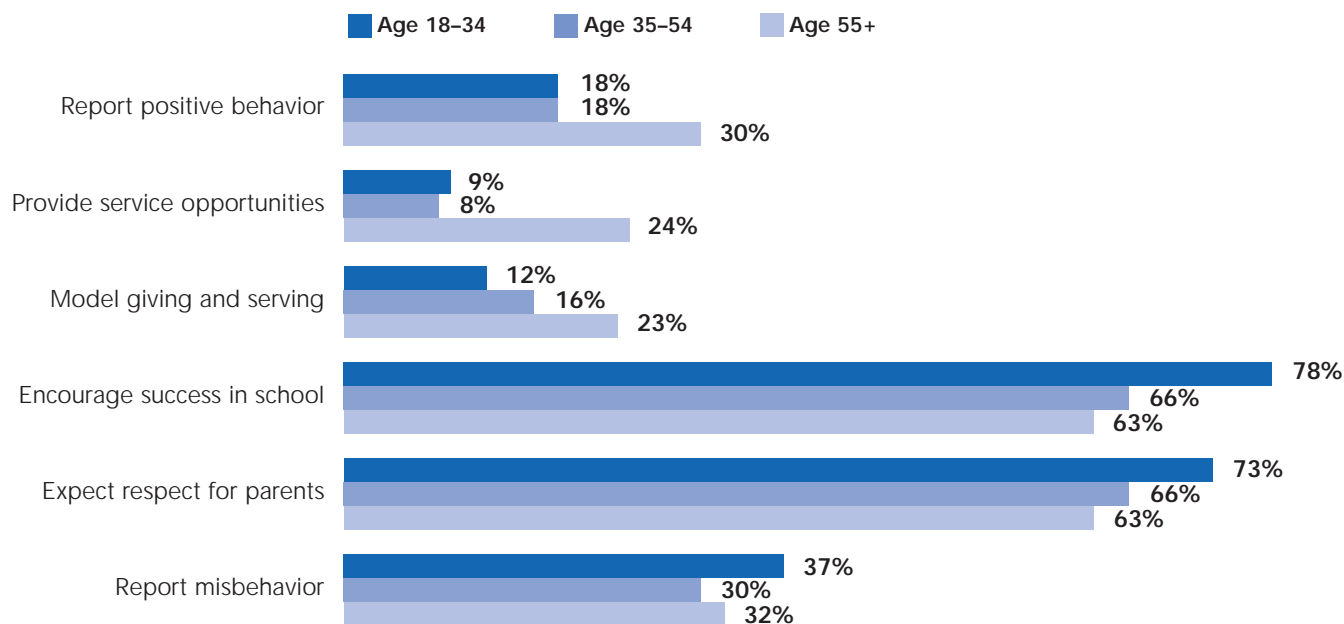
family, long-term relationships in neighborhoods, and lasting connections to community institutions. Public Agenda research found that four out of five adults believe that the job of parenting is tougher today than it has ever been before.⁹

These challenges underscore the importance of supporting and equipping parents and other primary caregivers to play their central role in kids’ healthy development. Their capacity to raise caring, responsible, and healthy children needs to be strengthened, reinforced, supported, and affirmed. But as essential as it is to strengthen the nuclear family, our kids and their parents also need more. They need other adults to share responsibility for actively engaging in young people’s healthy development.

What has been missing from the national dialogue are efforts to tap the energy and asset-building capacity that lie dormant within millions of American adults of all ages and from all walks of life. These people are young people’s neighbors, uncles, aunts, teachers, employers, grandparents, clergy, shopkeepers, hair stylists, dentists, and acquaintances. Some of these adults would be, and are, invaluable volunteers or mentors. Even more important, virtually all can nurture positive, informal relationships—some fleeting, some sustained—with the young people they know and see in their daily lives.

A permission gap—Adults face unclear expectations about whether and how they are responsible for nurturing other people’s children. Most believe they don’t have the support or permission to get involved in the lives of children and teenagers outside their own families. As a result, they are unlikely to do or say anything meaningful unless explicitly invited to do so by a parent. As Public Agenda’s Deborah Wadsworth writes: “Discomfort over

FIGURE 15
Age Differences in Involvement



intruding into someone else's life is the real action-stopper. Reserve and hesitancy have overwhelmed old-fashioned 'neighborliness.'"¹⁰

If a perceived lack of permission contributes to the belief-action gap, then parents may be able to play a particularly influential role in closing that gap. This study shows that, in general, parents support the involvement of unrelated adults more than nonparents do. Our survey suggests that parents are willing to give permission for adults to do more to help raise responsible and caring neighborhood children and youth. The challenge is for parents to articulate that permission without feeling that they have "failed" as parents for "needing help."

Lack of social pressure or expectation—A lack of perceived permission is one part of the challenge. This perception is reinforced by a lack of pressure or expectation by others (parents, friends, neighbors) that could nudge people into action or affirm and encourage their involvement. One interviewee pinpointed the issue: "It's okay for adults to do nothing. However, they should feel like they're a part of the community and they should help out when they can with the youth." In other words, adults should do something, but it's okay if they don't.

Lack of invitation to be involved—Closely related to the permission gap and lack of social pressure is the lack of a personal, concrete invitation for involvement. Part of the challenge may simply be that many adults have not been invited or encouraged to get involved. Research on youth and adult volunteers consistently shows that people are much more likely to volunteer if they receive a personal invitation to do so.¹¹

The good news is that there are many positive things that adults say they would be comfortable doing. According to Public Agenda's survey of adults, half or more say they would be very comfortable complimenting a neighborhood child, watching a child while a neighbor runs an errand, taking a child to a ball game or show, or having a serious conversation about a problem. They are less comfortable with commitments that involve volunteering in an organization, confronting negative behavior, and being proactive in asking if a neighborhood family needs help.¹²

Negative images of young people—Widespread negative images and perceptions of young people interfere with adults' interest in and desire to form meaningful relationships with them. A drug-use prevention advertisement illustrates this negative perception. It was headlined: "Smelly. Lethargic. Incoherent. It's hard to detect inhalant abuse in the average teenager." The statement about detecting inhalant abuse may literally be true. But the underlying message sent to millions of readers was that the average teenager is smelly, lethargic, and incoherent.¹³

Unfortunately, the media often reinforce pervasive negative stereotypes of youth—particularly teenagers—in this culture. Those negative stereotypes become significant barriers in encouraging informal relationships between adults and young people. Too many adults perceive young people only as problems to be fixed and threats to be avoided, not as potential friends, caring neighbors, and energetic contributors to community life.

When we asked the 100 respondents to specific situations what most adults would do if

they saw boys skipping school, four out of five indicated that it was *not* okay for adults to ignore the situation. Yet two in five (39 percent) imagined that most adults simply wouldn't want to get involved. An almost identical number (38 percent) said they wouldn't want to get involved because of fear of retaliation from the boys, especially if the boys involved were beyond middle school age.

A focus on the negative—In addition to holding negative perceptions of young people, American culture focuses much of its energy on problems and deficits. The University of Pennsylvania's Martin E. P. Seligman contends that ours has become an essentially pessimistic culture: "Pessimism escalated in the 1960s from just a fashion of seaboard intellectuals to become the required posture of educated Americans. The gloomy pronouncement, the cynical angle on noble deeds, and the view that the world was sliding downhill all became marks of urbanity and depth."¹⁴ This underlying pessimistic outlook—combined with psychological and medical paradigms that focus more on disease and pathology than on health and wellness—has resulted in attention and funding being directed to trying to combat a particular "youth problem" that is in the public consciousness.

While there are certainly pressing problems that need to be combated, this almost exclusive focus on problems leaves most adults feeling overwhelmed. They perceive that they have little to offer in dealing with complex issues such as school failure, violence, and substance abuse. As a result, they abdicate responsibility to "the professionals." In the end, then, the focus on problems minimizes the powerful role of everyday interactions and relationships in shaping young people's experiences and sense of self.

The positive actions identified in our study, along with the concrete, positive actions suggested by the framework of developmental assets, offer tangible ways to balance the focus on problems.

Declining community involvement—Much has been written in recent years about a decline in civic engagement among America adults, with people being less likely to vote or to be active in community life.¹⁵ A *New York Times* survey found that three of the top four values of adults were being responsible for your own actions, being able to stand up for yourself, and being able to communicate your feelings. Further down the list—ranked 13th out of 15 values—was being involved in one's community, which only 35 percent of adults thought was very important.¹⁶

While most American adults say children and youth issues should be high on the national agenda, they are much less likely to recognize their own capacity and responsibility for contributing to the solutions. A Knight Foundation study found that nearly three in 10 adults (28 percent) said that "too many unsupervised children and teenagers" was a "big problem" in their community. Tied for second place (with crime and drugs) was people not getting "involved in efforts to improve the community." And yet, fewer than 30 percent of adults said they personally had volunteered in the past 12 months in after-school programs or "youth development" programs such as "a day care center, scouts, or Little League."¹⁷

These dynamics likely affect whether adults place a priority on engaging positively with children and teenagers outside their own families. One of the reasons for getting involved is

that nurturing healthy children and teenagers not only helps those individual young people but, in the long run, can help to reweave a strong fabric of community life that benefits all residents. If adults do not see themselves as being responsible for strengthening community, they are less likely to engage with children and teenagers in more intentional ways.

Lack of neighborhood connections—When adults do know young people, those relationships are less and less likely to occur within a neighborhood. When people participate in schools, workplaces, commerce, congregations, leisure activities, civic life, or other activities, they often do so many miles from their home and neighborhood.

Instead of having a sense of neighborhood responsibility, adults may feel more of a responsibility to help ensure the well-being of the young people they know from their broader family and community activities. These may include young people in their extended families, congregations, sports leagues, places they work, their friends' children, or their own children's friends (many of whom may not live in the neighborhood or attend a nearby school). While these interactions contribute to the well-being of young people, they do little to create a community-wide expectation that adults are responsible for "all kids," not just those within their own family and social network.

Few connections with kids—Knowing a young person makes an important difference in whether adults act on their sense of responsibility. Yet we live in a society defined by age segregation in which adults and children go their separate ways. The architecture and design of communities and neighborhoods isolate families, and virtually every program and institution is organized to meet age-specific needs at the expense of the richness of intergenerational community. Public Agenda found that more than 38 percent of adults have little or no contact with teens, and another 27 percent have only some contact.¹⁸

People feel the most obligated toward those who are closest to them. This circle generally includes family and friends first. It also extends to those with whom we have a "shared allegiance," such as graduates of the same high school or those who share our religion, race, or ethnicity.¹⁹ Sometimes people feel a sense of allegiance toward those who live in their community or neighborhood.

In our in-depth interviews, about one in five people said they would be more likely to get involved with kids if they knew the young people or their parents. When asked whether to give advice to a young person about how to spend money earned raking lawns, one interviewee responded: "I think it's according to how close they were to the person. If this neighbor was a real close neighbor, they had known since they were younger, then that's different. But . . . if it was somebody they didn't know that well and they just did the work for them—that would be the difference of giving advice and not giving advice."

With increased mobility and a declining sense of allegiance to a particular community or neighborhood, it can be challenging to connect with others beyond our families and social circles. Unless adults have regular contact with children and teenagers, they are unlikely to engage in asset-building actions with them.

Mobility and other work-related pressures—A reality that may lie beneath both the lack of neighborhood connections and few connections with kids may be that many adults fre-

quently uproot themselves and move to new communities. Whether these moves are precipitated by corporate downsizing and lost jobs or by a continual quest to climb a career ladder or move to a better neighborhood, the result is the same: connections to community and neighborhood are fleeting. It becomes difficult for people to put down roots and develop a sense of community—much less to get involved with children and teenagers outside their own families.

Adding to the lack of connections fueled by high mobility may be a continual push by employers to increase productivity, leading to higher expectations and longer hours for management-level, professional, and technical staff. Workers with these kinds of on-the-job expectations may find it difficult to make time for their own children, let alone anyone else's. According to an analysis by the Harvard economist Juliet B. Schor, American adults were working an estimated 164 hours more per year in 1990 than they did in 1970—the equivalent of an extra month of work. Schor argues that this “shrinkage of leisure” not only interferes with relaxation and self-improvement, but also undermines civic participation and caring for both the old and the young.²⁰

Lack of confidence—A final factor that may play into the belief-action gap is that many adults may not feel they would be *effective* if they got involved. They might believe it is important and believe that others expect them to get involved. But they may lack confidence that they can be successful in contributing. Can they actually teach kids about respect for cultural differences or managing money wisely? Do they know how to tell a parent if a child does something wrong, without the parent feeling angry, hurt, or otherwise upset with them as neighbors? Will their efforts be rejected or ridiculed by young people?

Research consistently shows that confidence in one's ability to make a difference helps people change their behavior.²¹ Many adults may want to get more involved with children and youth, but lack the skills or confidence to do so. It may be insufficient to increase people's desire and social pressure, unless they also have a chance to increase their confidence and skills for building relationships with young people.

Creating New Expectations of Engagement

The vast majority of adults believe it's important to help young people grow up healthy. Yet relatively few adults actually do much to make this more likely. That is disturbing, but not surprising. Previous research has consistently shown that most young people don't feel very connected to adults outside of their family. Furthermore, the general assumption in this society is that people are to take care of themselves and their own, and then mind their own business.

There are, of course, exceptions. Some adults are much more active in young people's lives. What is different about these people and their experiences? What do they have to teach their friends and neighbors? How can they help point the way to creating new expectations, or norms, about how everyone in a community can contribute to raising healthy, caring, and responsible children and youth? These questions are the focus of the next chapter, which describes those adults who are most committed and involved in contributing to the healthy development of children and teenagers.

CHAPTER 4

TAPPING THE STRENGTHS OF ENGAGED ADULTS

As noted throughout this report, the vast majority of American adults believe it is highly important for adults to engage positively in the lives of children and teenagers. Yet most adults are not meaningfully engaged or connected.

There are exceptions, however. Within every community are people of all ages and from all walks of life who are actively involved in the lives of children and teenagers outside their family. Some are professionals and volunteers—teachers, youth workers, child-care providers, club sponsors—who connect with kids through schools, congregations, child-care and community centers, and other programs and institutions. Others are extended family members, neighbors, and other community members who make it a priority to spend time with kids.

These engaged adults are often an unrecognized and underutilized source of strength in communities. Not only are they making a difference in the lives of the young people they touch, they also can become role models, guides, and influencers to encourage others in the community to become active asset builders for kids.

Our survey data suggest which adults are most likely to be the *most* engaged in young people's lives. We emphasize the “most” engaged because no group of adults exemplifies consistent engagement with young people. Indeed, it is rare for a *majority* of people in *any* subgroup to be actively involved in promoting young people's healthy development.

While some adults from all demographic categories are engaged with young people, some are *more* deeply engaged. For example, women tend to be more committed and involved than men, but about 57 percent of men say these asset-building actions are most important on average, compared to 65 percent of women. That is a statistically significant difference, but, clearly, men are not missing from the picture, only less prominent.

Identifying the Engaged Adults

To gain a sense of what types of people are most likely to be the most engaged with children and teenagers, we gave each survey respondent a score based on her or his responses to the questions about what actions are important and what adults around them actually do. (See Table 4.) Those with the highest scores (at least 30 out of a possible 40 points) are people whom we consider likely to be actively engaged in promoting young people's healthy development.

Using this formula, we find that only 5 percent of adults are likely to be consistently engaged with young people (Figure 16). Another 34 percent are concerned about kids, but are likely inconsistent in what they see as priorities and in actually connecting with young people. Another 51 percent seem to be aware of the need to engage positively with young people in some ways, but their commitment and involvement are likely minimal. The remaining 10 percent are relatively unlikely to be involved with kids.

While these distinctions may be somewhat arbitrary and do not capture the full range of people's interests and involvement, they likely reflect people's basic orientation or outlook.

Whether or not these judgments are completely fair, it is clear that not all American adults consider it highly important to be involved with others' kids, and only a minority of adults consistently and actively contribute to young people's well-being.

These results are both heartening and discomfoting. About two out of five American adults (39 percent) are at least concerned about young people. They consider it highly important to relate to young people in these positive ways. These favorable personal attitudes can provide the internal motivation to actively contribute to young people's well-being when opportunities arise.

TABLE 4. IDENTIFYING LEVELS OF ADULT ENGAGEMENT

To identify the people in our survey who are most involved with children and teenagers, each adult's responses were analyzed to determine both her or his commitment to and involvement with children and teenagers. For each of 20 statements,* survey respondents were scored as follows:

- If they said the action was most important *and* that most adults around them were involved in that action: 2 points
- If they said the action was most important *or* that most adults around them were involved in that action: 1 point
- If they said *neither* that the action was important *nor* that most adults around them were involved in that action: 0 points

Thus, an individual's score could range from 0 to 40 points. Then we divided the sample into four categories (quartiles) as follows:

Label	Score (Out of 40)	Description
Engaged adults	31-40 points	Adults who consistently see most of the asset-building actions as important and say most adults around them are actively involved with young people, suggesting a high level of engagement with young people in the community.
Concerned adults	21-30 points	Adults who are inconsistent in their commitment to or sense of involvement with young people by adults they know, suggesting a moderate level of connections to young people, but not a deep consciousness and engagement.
Aware adults	11-20 points	Adults who are mildly committed to or surrounded by adults involved with young people, suggesting a basic level of awareness, but not a strong commitment.
Uninvolved adults	0-10 points	Adults who do not see most of the actions as important and are not involved in asset-building actions.

* This scale included the 19 asset-building actions plus a question on parents as sole discipliners. On this additional question, the scoring was reversed, so that those who said it was "least" important *and* that most of the adults around them did *not* believe in parents having the sole right to discipline their children received two points.

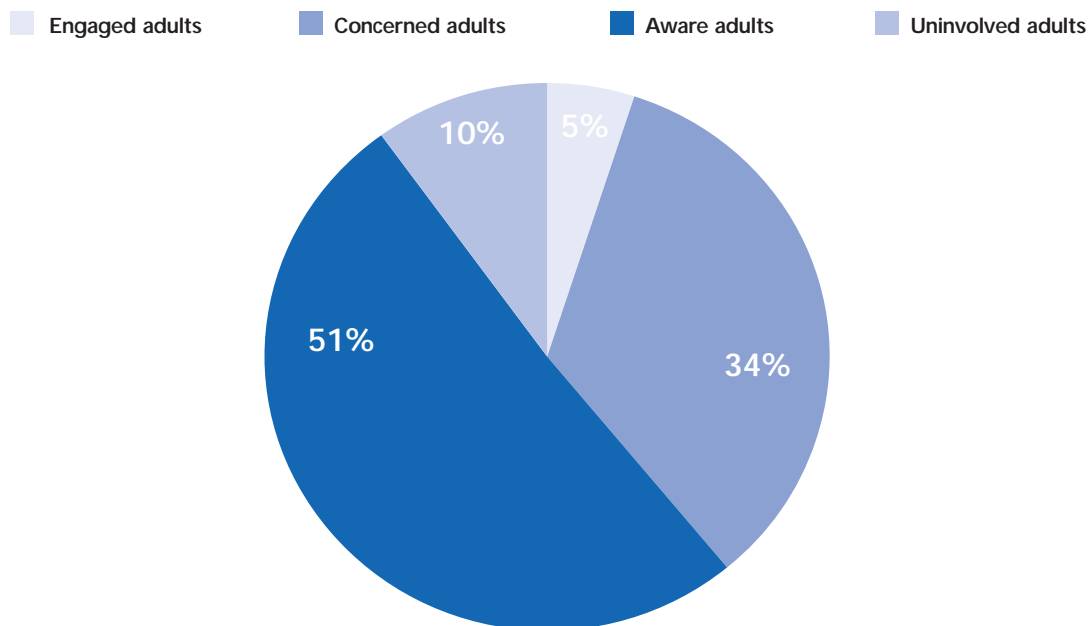
Despite “talking a good game,” three out of five American adults (61 percent) have little or no motivation to engage positively in young people’s lives. These adults probably connect with young people only in specific situations or circumstances, not as part of everyday life or as a general commitment.

Which Adults Are Most Likely to Be Committed and Involved?

Which people are most likely to be or become engaged in contributing to young people’s well-being? Additional analyses show that the following groups are more likely than others to be committed and involved with children and teenagers (in descending order): ¹

- women
- adults over age 35
- those with a high school education or less
- married and widowed adults
- those who volunteer at least monthly
- longtime community residents (at least 10 years)
- those who have regular contact with at least one or two children or teenagers
- those who often attend community meetings
- African Americans and Hispanics
- those who attend religious services weekly
- those who make less than \$60,000 per year and, in some cases, less than \$20,000 per year
- parents²

FIGURE 16
Levels of Engagement with Children and Teenagers



Many of these results are consistent both with Search Institute's previous research with a statewide sample of adults in Colorado³ and with other research. For example, women, parents, people of color, people with lower levels of formal education, those with lower income levels, and longer-time community residents all were found in the Colorado study to report more engagement with young people than did men, adults who were not parents, white adults, adults with incomes of more than \$50,000 per year, and newcomers to the community.

This analysis suggests sources of strength in communities that, too often, have not been adequately recognized or tapped. The following interpretations are offered, not as definitive, but as a starting point for reflection and dialogue within communities:

- It is not a surprise that women are more likely to be engaged than men. This pattern reflects deep cultural assumptions about the different roles of men and women in caring for the young. However, it does raise important questions about how changes in economic roles (as more women have entered the workforce) may affect asset-building actions and how those changes might be balanced by a greater involvement of men in promoting young people's healthy development.
- People who are active in their communities (attending meetings, volunteering, attending religious services, maintaining a long-term residency) are also important resources for young people. Their commitment to their communities likely carries over to an understanding that nurturing young people is an integral part of community life and the community's future. If, as some have argued,⁴ community involvement is in decline, then there is some danger that this reservoir of strength for kids could be depleted.
- People whose lives are more connected to young people (including parents and those who regularly see kids) may be more likely to be involved in asset-building actions simply because they have more opportunities. Parents, for example, often have opportunities to spend time with their children's friends and, in the process, be resources to them.
- The strengths that many people of color (in this case, Hispanics/Latinos and African Americans) bring to communities may grow, in part, out of diverse cultural traditions that emphasize a shared responsibility for the young. Communal caring for the young may be seen as particularly important in the face of a broader society that has too often marginalized these adults and their children.

The findings also challenge common myths and assumptions about the strengths of communities for kids. For example, the fact that people with lower incomes and less formal education are more likely to be connected to kids serves as a reminder that economic and educational success are not prerequisites for adults being valuable resources for young people.

Similarly, the strong showing of adults over age 35 essentially debunks the myth that you have to be young to build a positive relationship with young people. Young adults may be more focused on shaping their own lives and careers, and therefore may not be as concerned about future generations. Or the demands of work or having young children may leave them with less time to engage with children and teenagers in sustained relationships. Furthermore,

the insights of middle-aged and older adults can help children and teenagers gain new perspectives on themselves and the world.

Avoiding Overinterpretation

These distinctions merit additional analysis and dialogue. They have important implications for how communities focus their energies in seeking to engage more adults in promoting the well-being of children and teenagers. They suggest both sources of strength and potentially more challenging populations to reach.

But these differences should not be overinterpreted. These demographic factors explain only a small proportion of the variations in how people relate with kids.⁵ Many other factors (not measured in this study) may also play a role in how much people are involved with children and teenagers. These may include type of community, personality type, self-perception, childhood experiences, and many other beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and attributes. Indeed, the simple demographic variables measured in this study may be much less important than some of these other factors.

As noted earlier, no group of adults is consistently engaged with young people. It is rare for a *majority* of people in *any* subgroup to be actively involved. For example, women were the most consistently likely to rate it highly important for adults to engage in the asset-building actions. Yet in only one area (expecting respect for adults) did a majority of women say most of the adults around them actually performed this action. Thus, while there is certainly strength to tap, there is also much room for progress, even within these groups.

It should not be assumed that only people in these groups are (or could be) strong asset builders. Within every subgroup of American adults, there are at least a few individuals who are actively involved with young people. These people can be tapped to become ambassadors to encourage their peers to move from awareness to concern to commitment and involvement. Furthermore, these individuals remind us that all adults—whether or not they are “most likely” to get involved—have the potential and capacity to contribute to young people’s well-being.

Tapping and Building Strengths

If this report were actually giving grades to grown-ups, only about one in 20 adults would get an A, based on making it a priority to be actively engaged in the lives of children and teenagers. Many more adults might receive a B or C, based on the high importance they place on many asset-building actions. But the vast majority of American adults would receive lower—even failing—grades because they simply are not engaged in young people’s lives.

The good news is that every community has a small group of adults who are doing their part to ensure that young people grow up caring, competent, and responsible. There is no evidence to suggest that they are necessarily visible community leaders or prominent, influential citizens. And they aren’t necessarily those individuals who have formal roles as either professionals or volunteers with young people. They’re likely average folks who—for many reasons and in many ways—have made it a priority to contribute to kids’ healthy development.

The efforts of this group of engaged adults need to be recognized and celebrated. In

addition, these adults have much to teach us as a nation about the potential for changing the norms and expectations about how adults relate to children and teenagers. These individuals may not see themselves as trailblazers, role models, or asset-building champions. But tapping their experiences, stories, passion, and wisdom should be a key strategy for helping all adults—regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, income, parental status, or other differences—to recognize and act upon a new, clear expectation to do their part to help all kids succeed.

CHAPTER 5

CULTIVATING A DEVELOPMENTALLY ATTENTIVE CULTURE

We're letting our kids down. We agree that there are things—guidance, care, modeling—that they need from us. Yet, with few exceptions, we don't provide those things. We're not engaged or connected with the young people around us. There appears to be an unspoken assumption that adults who are not parents or who don't “work” with kids don't *really* have a responsibility to them and don't *really* have any need to spend time with them.

Recent decades have seen numerous important studies that have focused on important economic, programmatic, health-care, and safety factors that provide an essential foundation for raising healthy young people. Each of these factors can be advanced by enlightened policy and civic leadership, healthy families and family supports, and strong socializing institutions (such as schools, child care, and congregations).

Grading Grown-Ups has focused on another (often overlooked and neglected) source of needed energy. We call it “connectedness.” To grow up healthy, young people need to be surrounded, supported, and guided within a sustained network of adults in addition to their parents who choose to know, name, support, affirm, acknowledge, guide, and include children and adolescents in their lives.

As this study shows, such a culture is very different from what currently exists in most American communities. Moving in that direction will require millions of individuals making different personal choices. It will also involve fundamental shifts in the expectations or “social norms” that shape how adults relate to children and adolescents.

We conducted an extensive review of the research on how social norms operate and change (see the sidebar on page 50). We also examined reports on strategies for changing individual behaviors. This information suggests a number of strategies for engaging in systematic, long-term efforts to reshape social norms regarding adults' relationships with children and adolescents. This approach can begin to address the consistent gap between what American adults believe to be important in raising healthy youth and what they actually do. In this chapter, we propose several strategies for change (see the sidebar on page 51).

Additional sidebars interspersed throughout this chapter offer specific practical suggestions for responding to this study's findings as an individual (adults, parents and guardians, young people), as a community, or as part of an organization (schools, congregations, youth-serving organizations, businesses, and the media).

Customize Approaches to Address Specific People and Realities

While the *Grading Grown-Ups* survey found consistently high support for the importance of involvement with young people, it did not dig beneath those attitudes to understand their source. Nor did it delve into what motivates specific groups of people to be—or not be—involved with young people. For example, are people uninvolved because of fear, apathy, paralysis, lack of opportunity, a sense that involvement will have little impact, or some other

factor? The answer to this question and others is critical to shaping strategies and messages for changing people's behavior. Here are suggestions for shaping strategies to address the dynamics within a particular community.

Learn about the needs, interests, concerns, and attitudes of the youth and adults—While this chapter proposes a wide range of strategies, their selection, priority, and utility in a given community or setting can be judged only by learning about the needs, interests, concerns, and attitudes of young people and adults in that setting. Only then can people begin to connect the core messages to their own backgrounds, values, capacities, lifestyles, and motivations.¹

Focus first on actions with broadest consensus—The study findings and past research do offer some guidance about where to start the exploration. They suggest, for example, a broad consensus across differences on the top nine asset-building actions. Most people are likely to be receptive to messages related to those actions. Around the nine top asset-building actions, the problem is not caring but acting. Communications that focus on those nine actions might best concentrate on helping people move from supportive attitudes to action.

In areas of less consensus, focus on “making the case” for engagement—More care

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL NORMS

Undergirding the research in *Grading Grown-Ups* is the concept of “social norms.” Social norms are the standards or rules that people follow in a given group or society. Thus, norms define what is “socially acceptable” behavior in a society or a particular group. Though rarely stated explicitly, norms reflect what's normal to do and what's not. Researchers have found that social norms have two important features:

- 1. They are shared.** For an expectation to function as a norm, it must be shared by a sufficient number of people who can exert the influence needed to adopt the norm. In this sense, norms are a form of peer pressure, either positive or negative.
- 2. They have consequences.** Those consequences may be positive if the norm is maintained and/or negative if the norm is violated. Positive consequences might be feeling included, while negative consequences might include feeling ostracized or scorned.

When a norm becomes embedded in a society (or in a particular subculture), it becomes an internalized rule that the individual obeys even in the apparent absence of external pressure to do so. In part this occurs because the thought of disobeying a norm triggers feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, shame, and guilt. This emotional, subconscious response points to the power of unspoken norms for shaping people's behavior.

For a more complete discussion of how social norms operate, see Jon Elster (1989). *The cement of society: A study of social order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

may need to be taken with actions about which there is less consensus to make the case for the importance of these actions, expanding and intensifying adults' commitment to these behaviors. For example, the relative lack of support for the actions related to youth empowerment may suggest that more work needs to be done to build a consensus about the roles that all adults can play in helping young people be valued and respected in the community.

Identify groups that are most ready for action—This study also suggests that some groups of people may be more open and ready for action than others. For example, early success to begin shifting community norms may be possible by focusing energy on those adults

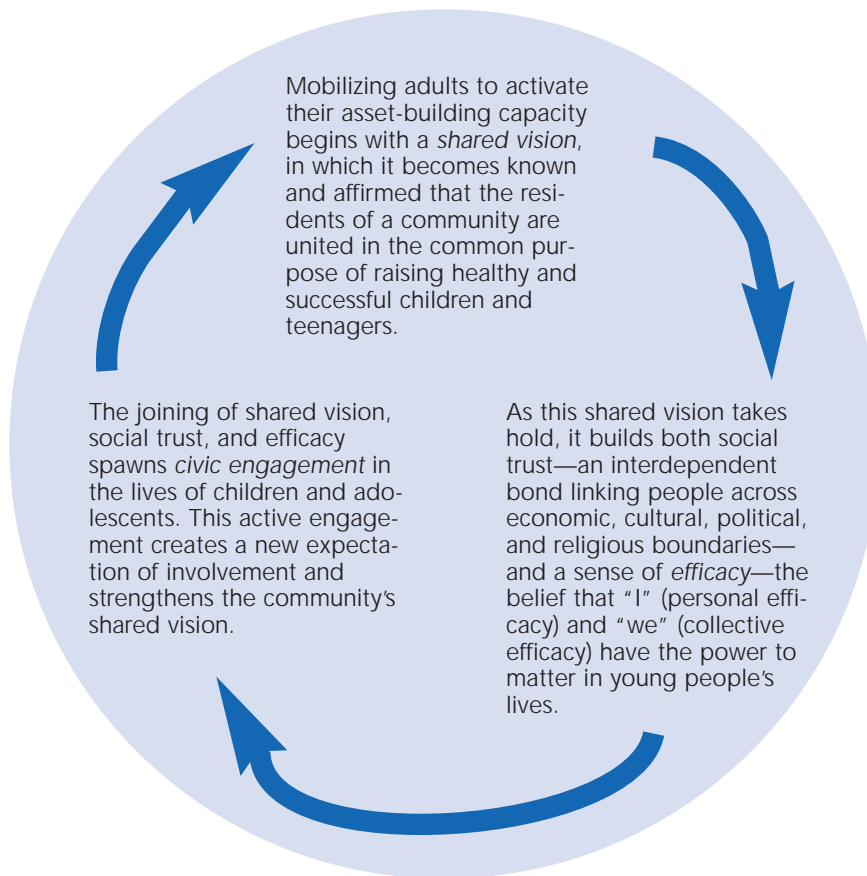
SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING ADULT ENGAGEMENT WITH KIDS

1. **Customize approaches to address specific people and realities.**
 - Learn about the needs, interests, concerns, and attitudes of the youth and adults.
 - Focus first on actions with broadest consensus.
 - In areas of less consensus, focus on “making the case” for engagement.
 - Tap into groups that are most ready for action.
2. **Cultivate a widespread, strong expectation for engagement.**
 - Highlight the widespread commitment to kids.
 - Unite around a shared vision for adult engagement.
 - Challenge assumptions that interfere with engagement.
 - Highlight the possibility for impact and success.
 - Address the consequences of engagement.
 - Have parents “give permission” for engagement.
3. **Rebuild neighborhood connections, engagement, and trust.**
 - Encourage residents to get to know and trust their neighbors.
 - Cultivate civic engagement.
4. **Identify and cultivate role models, opinion leaders, and champions.**
 - Communicate first with key opinion leaders in the community or organization.
 - Rely on word of mouth from these opinion leaders to generate social support for action.
 - Engage young people as champions and allies.
5. **Strengthen people's capacity for engagement.**
 - Encourage small steps.
 - Clarify roles adults can play in nurturing healthy development.
 - Provide safe, easy opportunities for interaction.
 - Offer reminders or “triggers.”
 - Increase the perceived short-term benefits.
 - Articulate dimensions of meaningful intergenerational relationships.
 - Provide ongoing support.

FIGURE 17
Mobilizing a Web of Connections

This study focuses on creating a culture and communities in which young people are surrounded with a sustained network of caring adults who are committed to asset building. These adults choose to know, name, support, affirm, acknowledge, guide, teach, and include children and adolescents as part of their daily lives. Over time, hundreds or thousands of small gestures of support and care are woven into a pattern, a way of life, in a community. They create a web of connection crucial for healthy development.

This process is complex. At the core, however, we suggest that the mobilization of these webs of connection can be understood as follows:



The utility of this model can be seen in recent studies of Chicago neighborhoods. In those neighborhoods marked by shared commitment to the welfare of children, citizens are more likely to believe that “we” have the power to affect change. Consequently, those neighborhoods most marked by social cohesion (social trust and engagement) are the most effective at reducing neighborhood violence.* This research suggests the enormous potential of uniting around the healthy development of young people and building social trust and engagement in order to change the fundamental ways that adults interact with children and adolescents.

* Ralph J. Sampson, S. W. Raudenbusch, & Felton Earls (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science*, 277, 918-924.

who are already actively involved in community efforts or working in low-income neighborhoods, where there appears to be more receptiveness to personal involvement with young people outside of the family. However, before investing heavily in a particular local strategy based on a national study, effort should be made to identify motivations, barriers, and other underlying issues at the community or organizational level.

Cultivate a Widespread, Strong Expectation for Engagement

An important strategy to bring about change is to create positive social pressure to encourage involvement and discourage disinterest. People's actions are shaped, in part, by whether they believe other people—particularly people influential to them—will approve or disapprove of their involvement. Yet our culture does not have a consistent expectation that people should be engaged positively with kids—or that positive engagement will be approved of or appreciated. Several approaches have potential for creating this positive pressure.

Tap into individual commitment to kids—This study found that American adults affirm the importance of multiple, positive interactions with young people. But that message is rarely heard amid the calls for greater involvement or the focus on preventing problems among young people. Lisbeth Shorr has argued that it is “futile” simply to tell American adults that “they should care more about children.”² Adults need to be reminded that they do care about young people. They also need to hear that most of their friends and neighbors also care.

Telling people that they already are “the kind of person who does this sort of thing” has been found to be more effective in promoting action than persuasive appeals that try to make people feel guilty or ridiculed. For example, one study looked at efforts to get adults to be more energy conscious,³ and another focused on encouraging children to be more careful about not littering.⁴ In each case, the most effective messages were those that asserted that these were adults who *already* cared about conserving energy, and that these were children who already were ecology minded, especially about littering.

Efforts to promote adult asset building might be more effective if they employ the “kind of person we think you *already* are” approach. Rather than criticizing adults for how little they appear to be involved with children and youth, it would likely be more effective to communicate that adults already are caring and supportive, that they already want to do more for kids, and offer some easy ways to act upon that commitment.

Unite around a shared vision for adult engagement—One of the most important findings of this study is the profound national consensus across differences of race, religion, education, and income on how adults ought to engage in the lives of children and teenagers. This finding suggests the clear possibility of a *shared vision* for adult engagement in the lives of children and adolescents. This shared vision can promote *social trust* and *collective efficacy* (see Figure 17).

These findings offer the possibility of closing the gap between values and action. Such an approach might involve focusing first on engaging a small core of individuals in a neighborhood, school, congregation, or other network in shaping and communicating a shared vision, and encouraging actions that can make that vision a reality. Over time, this circle of

influence and shared vision can be expanded by inviting other groups to do the same, joining together to engage people throughout the community. It might lead to the creation of an “adult charter” that would articulate for adults the behavior toward children and youth that other adults expect of them.⁵ Such a shared vision could be powerful at a neighborhood level or within a school, congregation, or other organization. Or it could be a tool for building a shared vision across a whole town or city, a state, or, eventually, the nation.

Challenge assumptions that interfere with engagement—Several popular, but false, assumptions represent formidable obstacles to adult engagement with young people outside of their family. These include:

- Parents have sole responsibility for how their children are raised. Other adults may be involved because they choose to (as volunteers) or because it’s their job (as teachers, child-care providers, or youth workers). But, by and large, unrelated adults outside the family are not accountable for contributing to young people’s well-being.
- Young people, particularly teenagers, are “aliens” from a different generation who can’t relate to adults. They don’t want to connect with adults, and adults don’t want to connect with them.
- Adolescence is, by definition, a turbulent, conflict-ridden time, and it’s inevitable that adolescents will engage in negative, dangerous behavior.
- Because kids have so many problems, it takes lots of time and professional expertise to make a difference in their lives.

Challenging these false assumptions begins to reduce the barriers to getting involved. If, for example, an initiative focused on countering the widespread negative images of teenagers, then adults would be more likely to be open to building a relationship with young people, knowing that they, like everyone, have their strengths and are not perfect.

Other commonly held assumptions that initiatives can challenge include those concerning the need for lots of time and expertise to be helpful to young people. This can be done by highlighting some things people can do—things that may not require much time or expertise—that can make a difference. It is important also to emphasize that young people need, first and foremost, relationships with caring adults, not specific expertise. (Young people who face particularly difficult physical, mental, or behavioral challenges do, of course, need the expertise of professionals as well as these informal relationships.)

Stress the possibility for impact and success—One reason adults do not get involved with children and teenagers is that they have become overwhelmed by the headlines about the problems and challenges young people face. The Coalition for America’s Children focus group report concludes that the public needs to see some success stories so that they understand that there are solutions for problems that appear to be overwhelming.⁶

Hundreds of examples of people looking for solutions have emerged from Search Institute’s Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative, which is sponsored by Lutheran Brotherhood. As thousands of students returned to school in the fall in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, for example, hundreds of residents chose to greet them as they entered their schools.

The goal of the effort was to have each student addressed by name by at least one community adult.

Such stories remind people that change is possible and that they can make a difference. And when such gestures—even though small—become an expected way of life, these molecules of “developmental attentiveness” begin to create a web of connection crucial for healthy development. In the process, they reshape the norms and expectations within the community.

Address the consequences of engagement—A significant barrier to engagement may be the perceived consequences of getting—or not getting—involved. Without clear benefits, too many adults simply conclude, albeit unconsciously, that involvement simply isn’t worth the trouble.

Many adults likely believe that the negative consequences of getting involved are greater than the benefits of involvement. These consequences range from discomfort and embarrassment to suffering physical harm or lawsuits, or simply feeling that helping out would be a waste of time because it wouldn’t be effective or even appreciated.⁷ Our focus groups with adults in Minneapolis found that a major barrier to involvement was fear of rejection by young people—a fear that grows out of the assumption that young people don’t want to connect with adults.

Adults’ negative perceptions of young people also influence their perceptions of the consequences of getting involved. When asked about the possible consequences of getting involved in setting boundaries, one adult said adults would hold back out of “fear that those children or those young teens would come and try to wreck their home or something—take the air out of their tires. I know that kids have done things like that.”

While adults clearly see risks in getting involved, there appear to be few if any negative consequences to the adult for not being involved. For example, if an adult fails to volunteer in programs for children, or simply avoids making eye contact with kids when walking by, it is unlikely that the person could expect any social disapproval. The challenge, then, is to shift the equation so that the benefits of involvement outweigh the perceived risks.

The framework of developmental assets has been useful in mobilizing adults in a community to connect with young people. The research shows clear connections between various forms of adult involvement and the life choices of adolescents. It suggests that these actions do make a difference in the long term. Adults need to be reminded of other personal, short-term, and tangible benefits (such as having a new, interesting, caring friend with shared interests) that can accrue from getting involved. Finally, it’s important to address and, if possible, defuse the negative consequences of involvement. One way of doing that is reflected in the next suggestion, which focuses on parents’ expectations.

Encourage parents to “give permission” for engagement—Parents play important roles in shaping community (and national) expectations for meaningful engagement in the lives of children and teenagers. The widespread assumption that nurturing young people’s development is primarily—if not exclusively—the parents’ job fosters the perception that it’s not other people’s job. Some adults worry that parents would disapprove if they got involved

with their children. As one interviewee put it, “Parents may get upset and think they’re trying to tell the kid what to do, or raise their kid for them.”

Yet this study found that parents are *more likely* than other adults to believe it is important for unrelated adults to be involved in positive, meaningful ways. Thus, an important role parents can play is to offer explicit permission—even an invitation—to neighbors or other adults to get involved with their children. This invitation might involve identifying the kinds of issues or circumstances around which they would not only not mind but would actually welcome the support and involvement of neighbors. For example, a parent might encourage a larger group of neighbors to tell her or him when they see her or his child doing something positive or misbehaving, or invite a neighbor to come play with her or his child on the playground.

Rebuild Neighborhood Connections, Engagement, and Trust

In highlighting the specific relationships between adults and kids outside of their family, this study notes the relative absence of meaningful connections across generations. This gap is a symptom of a much more pervasive societal issue: the widespread disconnection of neighbor from neighbor and the declining involvement of residents in community life.

These realities must be taken into account in formulating strategies to reshape relationships between adults and young people. If, as a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation study found,⁸ people don’t really know their neighbors, how likely are they to engage with a

IDEAS FOR ACTION BY INDIVIDUAL ADULTS

- Identify one opportunity you have in the next week to be more engaged with children or teenagers around you, based on the asset-building actions explored in this study.
- If you don’t know the names of young people who live around you, be bold and introduce yourself to them. (Then write down their names to help you remember.)
- Talk to parents about your interest in getting to know their children and being a positive influence. Discuss what’s comfortable for everyone, and take small steps at first.
- Find out what the kids in your extended family, neighborhood, or social network really like, then find opportunities to connect with them around shared interests or things that make you think of them. (For example, send them a newspaper or magazine article about their favorite sport or music group.)
- Send cards to young people you know to mark holidays, birthdays, and other milestones.
- Tell the parent when you see their child doing something responsible or generous. Try to find opportunities to do this more often than you report misbehavior.
- Ask your friends and neighbors about how they are engaged with children. Affirm what they’re doing. Encourage them to get connected if they’re not. (Offer to do something together the first time.)

neighbor's child—or want a neighbor engaged with their child? Unless people know and trust each other, they are unlikely to be comfortable getting involved—or giving others permission to get involved.

Reengaging people in community life in general can have powerful, positive effects for young people. Two basic approaches should be considered.

Encourage residents to get to know and trust their neighbors—People will not be comfortable with connecting with neighborhood kids—or with letting neighbors connect with their kids—unless there is a basic level of trust and relationship. A study of inner-city Philadelphia found, for example, that a lack of trust among neighbors caused parents to restrict their own and their children's involvement with other families, making community building difficult.⁹

Many formal and informal methods can be used to foster relationships in neighborhoods. A Search Institute study of two economically distressed neighborhoods suggests, as a start, “finding and supporting neighborhood leaders who are willing and able to be catalysts for neighborhood-based activities—whether focused on recreation, seasonal or holiday celebration, neighborhood improvement efforts, or parent-to-parent support. These events can serve as the sparks that, given enough time and fuel, may well become the warming fire that re-creates community and turns neighbors from strangers to supporters.”¹⁰

Cultivate civic engagement—One of the major differences between people who are more and less actively involved with kids is how frequently those who are more actively

IDEAS FOR ACTION BY PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

- Discuss the research results with your child or children. Do they feel that the quality of their relationships with adults is higher or lower than this study suggests?
- Encourage the adults in your child's life to engage with your child in significant ways. Offer specific invitations for involvement, based on mutual interests.
- Reflect on how you interact with your child's friends as well as other kids in your neighborhood. Are you doing what you can to build their assets? Ask them about what's happening in their lives, too.
- Encourage your child to seek other adults' advice about important decisions such as a job, higher education, faith, or financial choices.
- Take advantage of or create opportunities to get to know your neighbors, such as block parties. Plan events in ways that include and connect all generations.
- Tell the parents of your child's friends about the positive things their children do. Also report misbehavior.
- Keep your child safe by asking about her or his adult friends. Be sure you are comfortable with how they treat your child, their values, and how they spend time together.
- Mentor and encourage young parents in their responsibilities.

involved also participate in neighborhood or community meetings that address common concerns. Such meetings provide opportunities to get to know one's neighbors and fellow residents. Moreover, because these gatherings bring together people who are already engaged in strengthening community, they provide a powerful forum for addressing common interests in enhancing the healthy development of kids.

In their work on strengthening neighborhoods, John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight note that many formal and informal associations at a neighborhood level (such as block clubs, hobby clubs, religious groups, and book groups) are overlooked in community organizing. "These associations," they write, "are the vehicles through which citizens in the U.S. assemble to solve problems or to share common interests and activities."¹¹ While these groups may have a specific focus such as cultural heritage, religious activity, recreation, or other purposes, they also can be tapped to play a vital role in connecting individuals to each other and in uniting neighbors around a common vision and strategy.

Identify and Cultivate Role Models, Opinion Leaders, and Champions

One of the most common ways that new norms or expectations gain attention in a society is when individuals, groups, or organizations actively set out to persuade others to change their behavior. Even a small number of "norm entrepreneurs,"¹² opinion leaders,¹³ or what we sometimes call "asset champions" can have, over time, a profound impact on reshaping attitudes and actions within a group or community. This reality suggests important strategies.

Communicate first with key opinion leaders in the community or organization—According to Malcolm Gladwell, three kinds of people play vital roles in helping new ideas spread and become part of a culture:

IDEAS FOR ACTION BY YOUNG PEOPLE

- Talk to the adults in your life about this study's findings. How does your experience reflect (or not reflect) the overall findings in this study?
- Write a thank-you letter or e-mail to one or two adults who have been significant sources of guidance and support for you. Tell them what their support means to you.
- Strengthen your skills in communicating with adults.
- Ask adults about their life story and experiences. Tell them your story.
- When you're facing an important decision or challenge, seek advice from one or two adults you trust who might offer particular insight.
- Expect respect from adults in the same way that they should expect respect from you. If an adult ever seeks to take advantage of you, immediately tell a parent or other trusted adult.
- Speak up when adults don't listen to young people or when they use negative stereotypes of children and adolescents. Offer an alternate perspective.
- Turn service projects and recreation activities into intergenerational connecting points by inviting adults to participate with you.

- *Connectors* are those who, by nature, connect with many other individuals, often across many different parts of the community.
- *Mavens* are the data banks of an idea, fad, or trend, and have the knowledge and an innate need to spread it.
- *Salespeople* quickly can gain the trust of others, overcome objections to commitment, and infuse others with their energy for the idea.¹⁴

Sometimes these people have formal leadership roles—business leaders, clergy, school principals, and elected or appointed officials. Just as often, they are informal leaders—shopkeepers, retired seniors, barbers, and just plain friendly people—who, by their nature, connect with young people and influence others in informal, everyday interactions.

Effective social marketing efforts that seek to change behavior in a community often have a two-step strategy, according to Georgetown University’s Alan R. Andreasen. “The campaigns first communicate their messages to key individuals in communities called opinion leaders, and these individuals then pass on this information to target customers through word of mouth.” In some cases, these individuals serve as silent sources of information by simply being role models of the desired behavior.¹⁵

Rely on word of mouth from these opinion leaders to generate social support for action—Once opinion leaders have been inspired to action and actually begin to engage positively with kids, they often spread the word through their relationships and networks. As Everett M. Rogers writes, “An opinion leader’s interpersonal network allows him or her to serve as a social model whose innovative behavior is imitated by many other members of the system.”¹⁶ Thus, opinion leaders’ buy-in, advocacy, and modeling can play a powerful role in convincing other community members to engage with young people as well.

Engage young people as champions and allies—In the process of identifying and cultivating champions, it is important to consider young people as prime candidates to play significant roles. Young people have been influential in numerous social movements, from environmentalism to antismoking and civil rights.

The possibility of adults being led by young people into more active involvement is reinforced by findings from a previous Lutheran Brotherhood–sponsored survey of 1,000 adults. Twice as many adults (63 percent) said they would say yes to being a volunteer in a youth program if a youth or friend asked them to volunteer as said they would volunteer if recruited through a TV program or advertisement.¹⁷

Strengthen People’s Capacity for Engagement

In the long term, the goal is for people to engage positively with young people as a part of their sense of personal identity. Building assets then becomes “just what I do because of who I am.”

Yet, with rare exceptions, people don’t make major lifestyle changes overnight. Most often, change is incremental and cyclical. As the psychologist James O. Prochaska and his colleagues note, “Linear progression [through the change process] is a possible but relatively rare phenomenon.”¹⁸ They write that most people who quit smoking seriously try three or four

times before they succeed. Similarly, New Year's resolutions are typically made for at least five consecutive years before reaching a goal.¹⁹ Thus, seeking to change adults' behaviors and relationships with children and teenagers requires crafting strategies that connect with people's current realities and, over time, encourage, support, and equip them to make positive change.

Many factors play into whether people take a particular action or change their behavior. In his theory of planned behavior, Icek Azjen argued that people are more likely to perform a behavior "if their personal evaluations of it are favorable, if they think that important others would approve of it, and if they believe that the requisite resources and opportunities will be available."²⁰ This theory suggests that adults would be more likely to engage with young people if they believed that:

- **Doing so would lead to positive outcomes, instead of thinking it will make no difference;**
- **Most of the important people in their lives would approve of and even expect them to be positively involved with children and teenagers; and**

IDEAS FOR ACTION BY COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Reflect on the study results with other leaders, parents, youth, and others in your community. How is your community like or unlike what was found in the national research?
- Make young people key participants in community-wide awareness raising and planning about asset building and intergenerational relationships. Remember that adults are more likely to get involved if invited by young people.
- Plan community-wide intergenerational service days to coincide with national service days such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January), National Youth Service Day (April), Join Hands Day (June), Make a Difference Day (October), and National Family Volunteer Day (November). For information, visit www.pointsoflight.org.
- Develop a strategy and communications plan to highlight the importance that adults place on engaging positively with kids, along with ideas for practical steps people can take to get more connected and engaged.
- Plan community events and celebrations that are intentionally intergenerational.
- Use speaking engagements, meetings, and other public settings to affirm adults' support for engaging with young people, to challenge them to get more involved, and to highlight the strengths and resources that young people bring to your community.
- Develop concrete strategies for strengthening relationships and trust in neighborhoods. Emphasize relationship and community building during National Night Out (August). For information, visit www.nationaltownwatch.org.
- Offer workshops that help community members strengthen their skills and comfort level in building relationships with young people.

- They have the skills, resources, and opportunities to do what's expected.

Several of these dimensions have been addressed in the discussions earlier in this report related to shaping public attitudes, clarifying benefits, reducing barriers, and tapping a network of champions. Those strategies need to be complemented with strategies that focus first on encouraging simple actions while equipping individuals to become increasingly effective, more confident, and successful in connecting with kids in meaningful ways.

Encourage small steps—In the 1960s, researchers conducted classic experiments in which they found that people who had agreed to a small request were subsequently more likely to agree to a much more demanding request. In one case, people who agreed to answer an eight-question survey on cleaning products were then more likely to allow a half-dozen men to find and classify the products in their homes. Similarly, people who agreed to put up a small yard sign about either driving carefully or keeping California beautiful were much more likely to agree to put up a very large sign—even if it wasn't about the same issue. Once a person agrees to a small request, the researchers concluded, “he may become, in his own eyes, the kind of person who does this sort of thing, who agrees to requests made by strangers, who takes action on things he believes in, who cooperates with good causes.”²¹

Some asset-building actions require greater risk and commitment than others. That may explain, for example, why two of the actions (encouraging success in school and expecting respect for adults) are actually practiced by a majority of adults, while other more challenging tasks (such as offering young people financial guidance) are not. A key strategy may be to identify those actions for which there is broad support (thus, actions that are less risky) and then to encourage people to do something small that connects to that particular priority.

A study of young adults' civic involvement by the Ad Council and MTV: Music Television reinforces the wisdom of encouraging small steps. The study tested a variety of messages designed to encourage young adults to get involved in their communities. The message that resonated most strongly with the focus group participants was: “By getting involved in a social cause, I know that I can't change the world, but I might be able to make a small difference in someone else's life.”²² Similarly, Search Institute focus groups with parents in low-income communities found that the most effective message was “some small things can make a big difference in the lives of kids.”²³

Clarify roles adults can play in nurturing healthy development—Adults seem to be unclear about what roles they ought to play in young people's lives and on their behalf. In summarizing research on adults' engagement in children's issues, Susan Nall Bales writes: “Even when the public is able to prioritize an issue, it doesn't know what to do. Especially for children's issues, there is little understanding of the link between the problem and how to support a solution. Children's advocates will have to work very hard to promulgate the news that there are things you can do and ways to work through your existing networks to help kids.”²⁴

Some practical things that adults can do are implied in the nine asset-building actions that most adults in this study agreed were highly important. For example, a variety of actions

may be possible as part of offering young people financial guidance. These may include teaching a young person financial skills (budgeting, creating a savings plan), examining values regarding money, or teaching a young person how to be a responsible contributor to a religious or other nonprofit organization.

It's important that "getting involved" not be limited to "volunteering." The Ad Council/MTV focus groups with young adults found that most young adults think of volunteering as more of a commitment than they can make.²⁵ An asset-building perspective that emphasizes healthy relationships in the midst of existing, everyday activities and relationships can provide new ways for people to think about how they can get involved with young people in informal relationships. Once their comfort level grows in these informal relationships, they may also be more prepared to take on more intensive commitments such as volunteering in organizations or programs serving children or teenagers.

Provide safe, easy opportunities for interaction—A key to helping adults take the first step in building relationships with young people is to help them identify small things they can do. Often, this can involve providing low-risk, structured opportunities for adults, teenagers, and children to spend time together in conversation or shared experiences (such as joint projects, celebrations, or sports). These experiences can address some of the barriers

IDEAS FOR ACTION IN SCHOOLS

- Introduce the study's findings to school administrators, teachers, and other staff. Brainstorm how they can connect more with the young people in the school.
- Ask relevant high school classes (such as health, psychology, sociology, or civics) to conduct an informal survey of youth or adults in your community, asking them about relationships between adults and young people. Share and discuss the results at a community or parent-teacher organization meeting.
- Partner with students to develop plans for how to strengthen relationships between students and adults in the school and community.
- Offer staff training in forming intergenerational relationships as part of their everyday responsibilities in the school.
- Encourage teachers, administrators, support staff, and other personnel to get to know the names of many students and to take the time to greet students by name.
- Honor teachers, administrators, and other school staff who make special efforts to build positive relationships with students.
- Actively recruit community adults (not just parents) to volunteer in the school. Also invite them to attend school games, plays, musical programs, and other events.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to form relationships with students, not just to perform their assigned tasks.
- Sponsor intergenerational activities (such as dances or service projects) and invite community members to participate with the young people.

ers to involvement, such as not having convenient opportunities to get to know kids, not knowing how to start a conversation, not knowing about any shared interests, or not having the time or motivation to be proactive in planning to spend time together.

When people take the first step, however simple, they are much more likely to be willing to get involved on a more consistent, ongoing basis. Whereas changing attitudes can help change behavior, the opposite is also true: Adults' attitudes toward young people (and vice versa) may be easiest to change by first giving them safe opportunities to get to know each other. In that process, their experiences can affect and perhaps even reshape their attitudes.

Offer reminders or "triggers"—One of the common barriers to changing our behavior is that we lose the urgency of engagement in the fray of daily life. In writing about public health campaigns, Georgetown University's Alan R. Andreasen notes that "an extremely important technique for social marketing programs to overcome forgetting is the provision of cues and reminders for action—preferably at the point where the customer might be able to undertake the necessary behavior."²⁶

In terms of changing adults' behaviors and relationships with kids, this strategy would involve identifying the times and places when interaction would be most likely, then providing appropriate prompts (posters, buttons, billboards, etc.) that remind adults to do something that they might otherwise forget to do. The reminders can also come through personal conversations or specific, on-the-spot invitations for involvement and connection (such as personally introducing an adult to a young person with a shared interest).

Increase the perceived short-term benefits—Ideally, adults will engage in asset building with young people for its intrinsic value to them, the young people, and the community. However, sometimes the perceived risks are too high and the perceived benefits are not strong enough to move people to action.

One important strategy, then, is to help people recognize and celebrate the intrinsic benefits that they might otherwise overlook. These benefits may be most easily made concrete by encouraging adults to talk with each other about their own positive experiences with children and teenagers. Such a process can also help in managing people's expectations so that they don't expect too much, too soon.

Another strategy for increasing the perceived benefits would be to add incentives (recognition, prizes, other services, etc.). These extrinsic rewards can give the extra boost that encourages people to break out of old patterns and take the first step. Or the rewards can reinforce their action (particularly if the intrinsic benefits are less evident or more long term) in ways that help solidify their commitment.

There are a number of important cautions to consider regarding incentives—particularly when the rewards are not integrally related to the behaviors being promoted. From a practical perspective, there is a danger that people will carry out the action simply to get the extrinsic reward. In these cases, the hoped-for action is unlikely to be repeated, thus defeating the purpose. Furthermore, offering the same reward repeatedly can quickly cause it to lose appeal. In addition, from an ethical perspective, the incentive must encourage

someone to do something that he or she is already somewhat motivated to do. Otherwise, it can become manipulative and harmful.²⁷

If thoughtfully selected and used, however, incentives can be effective in helping adults take the kinds of asset-building actions that they already believe are important. Incentives can also help reinforce positive behaviors when some of the intrinsic rewards (such as having an appreciative young adult send a thank-you letter) may not be realized for many months or years.

Articulate dimensions of meaningful intergenerational relationships—Once adults have begun to engage in simple positive actions with children and teenagers, they will likely

IDEAS FOR ACTION IN CONGREGATIONS

- Provide opportunities for adult congregants to reflect together on their own relationships with kids. Identify their priorities for and interests in making connections.
- Offer simple, one-time opportunities for adults and young people to get to know each other. These may include social events, service projects, or educational experiences. Make a concerted effort to invite people from all generations to plan and participate in the activities.
- Examine your congregation's activities—from worship to religious education to social events—to determine if they are welcoming to all generations. Explore whether these activities offer opportunities for more relationship building across generations.
- Invite adults who do not have children in religious education to serve as teachers and sponsors.
- Organize adult-youth service activities in conjunction with Join Hands Day (www.join-handsday.org).
- Form informal mentoring relationships between adults and young people as part of religious education or important rites of passage (such as confirmation or bar/bat mitzvah).
- Encourage adults of all ages to share their faith journey, beliefs, and values with young people. Invite young people to share their stories, too.
- Link young people with adults in the congregation who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the particular young person, such as money management, dating relationships, and vocational choices.
- Through worship services, newsletters, adult education, and other settings, urge all adults in the congregation to form meaningful relationships with young people in all areas of their life, including neighborhood, workplace, and social activities—not just in the congregation.
- Take advantage of educational opportunities related to specific asset-building actions. For example, Lutheran Brotherhood offers free workshops for youth and parents on money management titled “Parents, Kids, and Money.”

be more open to forming meaningful relationships. To do this, they not only need to know the roles they can play and the activities they might do together, they also need a sense of the kind of relationship that is appropriate and helpful—and what’s not appropriate or healthy. Some adults may already have a deep understanding of how to relate to young people. But many may not, particularly if they have not had direct experience with young people.

In his book *The Moral Child*, Stanford University’s William Damon describes the kinds of relationships needed for socialization across generations as “respectful engagement.” These dimensions resonate with an asset-building perspective in which adults recognize their role as both guiding and empowering young people. Healthy adult-child relationships, Damon suggests, have the following elements:

- A dialogue or project of mutual interest to both the child and the adult;

IDEAS FOR ACTION IN YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- Bring adults and young people together to talk about the study and intergenerational relationships in your organization and community. Explore the particular strengths of your organization to contribute to closing the gap between beliefs and actions.
- Affirm and honor the adults who are involved with your youth programming for their commitment to and engagement with young people.
- Train staff and volunteers in asset building, emphasizing the importance of positive relationships. Provide them with tools that help to strengthen relationships.
- Examine how your programming can strengthen intergenerational relationships and how the adults in your organization can consciously address some of the asset-building actions in this study (such as guiding decision making, teaching respect for diverse traditions, or offering financial advice) through their existing relationships and activities with kids.
- Assess the level of skills that staff and volunteers have in forming positive relationships with young people. Create opportunities to strengthen those skills when needed.
- Recruit volunteers of all ages in the community. Help potential volunteers connect your invitation to their commitment to young people’s healthy development.
- Recognize that your staff and volunteers are important resources and role models for the community. Find opportunities for them to share with others in the community their experiences and expertise in forming relationships with children and teenagers.
- In making appeals in the community for volunteers or support, avoid the trap of sensationalizing young people’s problems. Instead, focus on adults’ widespread support for asset-building actions and the ways in which they can actually contribute to positive change through and with your organization.

- **The introduction of the adult’s intellectual or moral agenda to the child;**
- **Encouragement for the child to freely express her or his beliefs and participate in the dialogue; and**
- **Expression of the adult’s perspective in ways the child can comprehend.²⁸**

These elements clearly suggest that adults’ role in promoting healthy development is more than “just being nice” or “telling kids what you know.” It is a reciprocal relationship in which both the young person and the adult learn and grow. It also recognizes that adults have particular roles to play in socializing young people and passing on to them the traditions, values, and expectations of this society.

Provide ongoing support—As people move from concern to action, their efforts will be greatly enhanced if they have opportunities to continue to reflect on their experiences, have support and encouragement from others, and can get help in developing new skills that they may need as their involvement increases. Perhaps a relationship hasn’t worked out; people need to debrief to see what happened and why that failure doesn’t mean future relationships will fail, too. Perhaps a person is struggling with how to deal with a particularly difficult issue in the relationship. In each case, these adults need places or people to turn to who can offer guidance, support, and encouragement.

The role of intentional support mechanisms is evident in many different spheres. For example, a key to effective volunteer programs is to provide ongoing systems for support so that volunteers have opportunities to address concerns, be reinforced in their commitments, and avoid burning out. Similarly, behavior-change systems such as Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous rely on the support of a group of peers as an integral part of maintaining

IDEAS FOR ACTION IN BUSINESSES

- Provide employees and customers with information about how they can connect with young people outside their own families.
- Form partnerships with local schools to encourage employees (whether or not they are parents) to get involved in the school and, in the process, develop positive relationships with young people.
- When you sponsor sports teams, musical groups, drama, or other school activities, don’t just send a check. Provide opportunities for employees to get to know some of the young people involved.
- Participate in job shadowing, mentoring, and other school-to-work programs that provide opportunities for employees to be positive role models for young people.
- If young people are customers of your business, ask them to tell you how you can make your operation more youth-friendly.
- If you employ teenagers, train supervisors in asset building so that they recognize their role in contributing to a young person’s healthy development.
- Participate in a Join Hands Day project (www.joinhandsday.org).

the desired change and lifestyle.²⁹

Similarly, communities, organizations, and networks can find formal and informal ways to provide support, allow for personal reflection and growth, solve problems, and affirm and reinforce active involvement with young people. At first, these systems of support may need to be somewhat programmatic until the culture in the organization or community shifts to reinforce the involvement. Until that time, intentional (sometimes artificial) efforts to encourage and support engagement can help to counterbalance the norm of disengagement.

Working toward Long-Term Social Change

The strategies outlined in this chapter highlight the inherent tension between changing individuals and changing larger systems, such as communities. On one level, relationships form one by one, a fact that emphasizes the importance of engaging each adult individually. On another level, though, each individual is guided and motivated, to a large degree, by social expectations to be involved (or to be disengaged), available opportunities, and the kind of reinforcement he or she experiences.

Approximately 600 communities of all sizes throughout the United States have launched initiatives to strengthen the asset foundation for children and adolescents. Thousands more communities and organizations have vision, strategies, and plans to nurture the healthy development of children and adolescents based on the asset framework, as well as other complementary models and approaches.

This study offers both a challenge and an opportunity for these efforts. It confirms the challenge communities face in creating a community-wide commitment to active adult

IDEAS FOR ACTION BY THE MEDIA

- Highlight the widespread consensus among adults on ways that adults need to engage in young people's lives. Interview youth and adults to see if the national statistics ring true in your own community. Report the results and ask readers, viewers, or listeners to respond with ideas for strengthening intergenerational connections.
- Look for and tell stories of adults who are actively contributing to young people's healthy development through personal, meaningful relationships.
- Seek to balance the stories about "youth problems" with stories of young people and adults who are finding creative, positive solutions.
- Avoid broadcasting or printing stories and reports that stereotype young people in negative terms. Put stories about negative and dangerous behaviors in a broader context.
- Solicit youth perspectives on community life, relationships with adults, and current issues either by regularly interviewing them for stories or by mentoring them as aspiring writers or producers.
- Provide ongoing, practical information for adults interested in enhancing their relationships with children and teenagers.

involvement in the lives of children and adolescents. While there is certainly a widespread belief that adults “ought” to engage more with young people, actual engagement is relatively rare. Adding to the challenge, such relationships are needed not just through formal programs and organizations, but also in the informal relationships that occur, or could occur, in everyday life.

For such engagement to become widespread, it will require changing the fundamental expectations and social norms about how adults connect with young people. Building ongoing, meaningful relationships with young people needs to become an integral, natural part of life for the vast majority of adults in every rural area, town, suburb, and city. A cultural transformation of this magnitude can seem overwhelming and complex. Moreover, it is certainly a long-term vision, not a task to be accomplished before the next election cycle.

The good news is that the vast majority of adults already believe that this kind of engagement is important. The challenge is to tap that attitude and move more people to more active engagement and action in more places throughout our communities, states, and nation. This reality offers a challenge to leaders at all levels of society and in all types of organizations and systems to imagine the roles that they and the systems they influence can play in reshaping the culture to be more developmentally attentive.

But it also reminds us that each person has the opportunity—and the responsibility—to contribute to that change in small or large ways. Such personal engagement recognizes that, over time, true cultural change is rooted in the passion and action of individuals who are discontented with the status quo and work together for positive change on behalf of all children and teenagers.

POSTSCRIPT

In this report we take the pulse of American society, assessing how well and to what extent adults use their natural and inherent power to promote healthy child and adolescent development. By so doing, we seek to resurrect a historical and cross-cultural truth: that children and adolescents benefit from living in communities steeped in developmental attentiveness. In doing so, we ensure that all children and adolescents are upheld by a fabric of relationships, both formal and informal, through which they experience a constant flow of affirmation, connection, checks and balances, support, and guidance. We cannot overestimate the importance of this network of relationships for the development of competence and character.

Many research studies tell us that this fabric of relationships is uncommon for many American children and adolescents, and perhaps for the majority of our young. Chapter 4 of this report reminds us of many complex cultural dynamics that interfere with the ability of adults to activate their natural and inherent asset-building power.

A developmentally attentive culture confronts these obstacles and intentionally brings many resources to child-rearing endeavors. In the ideal, these include:

- Enlightened public policies;
- An aggressive attack on forces that undermine healthy development (e.g., poverty, racism, child abuse, violent environments);
- Support systems for families;
- Access to the best of schools and after-school programs;
- Investment in high-quality and affordable child care; and
- The deployment of effective and well-funded services to respond when trouble brews.

All of these investments are crucial, and all become fodder for policy advocacy during political conventions and election campaigns (only to be neglected, too often, when policy is actually developed). We stand on the side of any and all voices and actors who can advance these causes. This agenda requires the kind of political will, at both the federal and state levels, that the United States has historically had difficulty mobilizing.

At the same time, this study holds up a different kind of power also needed in a developmentally attentive society: the power of engagement, connection, being named, known, watched out for, and included in the daily life of community. Less about money, policy, rules, mandates, and top-down change, this dimension thrives on relationships driven by a social will, by personal choice, by a personal and shared recognition that positive human development requires webs of people who know and affirm and guide one across a span of many years. It's a human energy, a relational energy. *Grading Grown-Ups* reminds us that in this country there is a deep reservoir of value and belief that favors this civic engagement in the lives of our young. But in contemporary America, we find clear evidence that this power of engagement too often lies dormant.

Forming meaningful relationships across generations needs to become an expected part of everyday life. All adults need to see being engaged with kids as part of their responsibility as part of their community and this society. Children and youth need to be able to count on adults for support, guidance, and modeling.

That kind of change won't happen by decree or mandate or law. It happens as each person decides to act upon what's already important to them—and then actually does something. As it grows and spreads, this personal engagement can also generate the kind of grassroots support and advocacy that demand the significant public investment that our young people need and deserve.

APPENDIX A

STUDY BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

This study sought to obtain valid and reliable information from a nationally representative sample of American adults regarding social norms that affect how adults think about and relate with children and youth. The overall research process involved extensive literature searches and expert feedback to shape the conceptualization and measurement of hypothesized norms. Then, two telephone polls were conducted by the Gallup Organization: first, a nationally representative survey of 1,425 U.S. adults, and, second, follow-up, situation-based telephone interviews with 100 of the participants in the nationally representative survey.¹

Two instruments were created for this study, a forced-choice telephone poll averaging 16 minutes in duration, for use with the nationally representative sample of U.S. adults, and a 25-minute, situation-based interview for use with a subset of the larger sample.

Nationally Representative Survey

Along with 12 background or demographic items, the nationally representative survey included a forced-choice poll containing 20 substantive statements about adult-youth relationships (19 positive, asset-building actions and one considered inconsistent with an asset-building approach, Table A1) Respondents were asked two questions about each of the 20 statements:

1. How important is this for adults to do or believe? (5 = most important, 1 = least important)
2. How many of the adults you know² actually do or believe this? (5 = almost all, 4 = a large majority, 3 = about half, 2 = some, 1 = very few)

Thus, two different dimensions of statements were examined: the *importance or worthiness* of the statement as a normative expectation (personal support for the action), and the *degree of conformity* to the normative expectation that adults in the respondent's world of regular contacts are believed to exercise. The latter dimension may be considered a measure of environmental support or implied social pressure for the respondent to live these actions. The actions that adults say are both important and performed by the majority of adults they know may be considered to function as core social norms—they are among the key unwritten expectations or rules for how American adults should relate with children and youth.

The 20 importance questions and the 20 conformity questions were combined into a Norm Importance scale and a Norm Conformity scale. Scale scores were created by summing the individual item scores. The scores for parents disciplining their children without interference were reversed, as it was considered more desirable for adults *not* to believe strongly that this was highly important and not to be surrounded by adults who strongly believed in parental exclusivity over discipline. Alpha reliabilities were computed, showing

TABLE A1. ADULT ACTIONS EXAMINED IN THE NATIONAL SURVEY

1. **Encourage success in school**—Encourage children and youth to take school seriously and do well in school.
2. **Expect respect for adults**—Expect children and youth to respect adults and elders as authority figures.
3. **Teach shared values**—Teach children and youth the same core values as other adults do, such as equality, honesty, and responsibility.
4. **Teach respect for cultural differences**—Teach children and youth to respect the values and beliefs of different races and cultures, even when those values and beliefs conflict with their own.
5. **Guide decision making**—Help children and youth think through the possible good and bad consequences of their decisions.
6. **Have meaningful conversations**—Have conversations with young people that help adults and young people “really get to know one another.”
7. **Give financial guidance**—Offer young people guidance on responsibly saving, sharing, and spending money.
8. **Discuss personal values**—Openly discuss their own values with children and youth.
9. **Expect parents to set boundaries**—Expect parents to enforce clear and consistent rules and boundaries.
10. **Report positive behavior**—Tell parent(s) if they see a child or teenager doing something right.
11. **Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids**—Feel responsible to help ensure the well-being of the young people in their neighborhood.
12. **Report misbehavior**—Tell parent(s) if they see the child or teenager doing something wrong.
13. **Pass down traditions**—Actively teach young people to preserve, protect, and pass down the traditions and values of their ethnic and/or religious culture.
14. **Discuss religious beliefs**—Openly discuss their own religious or spiritual beliefs with children and youth.
15. **Know names**—Know the names of many children and teenagers in the neighborhood.
16. **Provide service opportunities**—Give young people lots of opportunities to make their communities better places.
17. **Seek opinions**—Seek young people’s opinions when making decisions that affect them.
18. **Model giving and serving**—Volunteer time or donate money to show young people the importance of helping others.
19. **Give advice**—Give advice to young people who are not members of the family.
20. **See parents as sole discipliners**—Believe that parents should discipline their children without interference from others.*

* This action is not considered consistent with asset building and is reversed in the scales. See text for explanation.

good internal consistency reliability for both scales (Norm Importance scale = .82; Norm Conformity scale = .85).

One of the 20 items has not been included in our discussion of the individual asset-building actions, namely, the item that assessed whether adults believe parents should discipline their children without interference from others. This attitude, which we believe is inconsistent with asset building, may reflect many respondents defining “discipline” to focus on setting and carrying out punishment for misbehavior, such as withdrawal of privileges or use of corporal punishment. An asset-building perspective, in contrast, calls for all adults to share in the responsibility for setting and enforcing a variety of rules and boundaries. However, despite extensive review and pretesting, this survey item did not explicitly capture this intended perspective, and thus could have been interpreted quite differently from various cultural and ideological perspectives. The item is included in the overall scales with reversed scoring.

The Sample

A national cross-section of households was systematically selected from all telephone-owning households in the continental United States. A random-digit dialing technique was used to

TABLE A2. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL SAMPLE

		Actual Respondents		Weighted
		Number of	Percent of	Correction*
		Respondents	Total Sample	(in %)
Total Sample		1,425	100	
Gender	Female	894	63	54
	Male	531	37	46
Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	310	22	10
	African American	307	22	11
	All other**	808	57	80
Age	Ages 18 to 34	471	33	31
	Ages 35 to 54	585	41	40
	Ages 55+	350	25	27
Marital Status	Single, never married	430	30	25
	Married	691	49	53
	Separated, divorced, or widowed	291	21	22
Parental Status	Parent***	1,060	74	73
	Nonparent	354	25	26
Education	No college	573	40	48
	Some college****	838	59	51
Annual Household Income	Less than \$20,000	329	23	21
	\$20,000-\$59,999	649	46	46
	\$60,000 or more	314	22	23

* All results reported in this report are weighted, and are not distorted by a group representation in the sample. Percentages may not sum to 100 percent due to missing data and rounding.

** Overwhelmingly non-Hispanic whites.

*** Includes parents whose youngest child is age 19 or older.

**** Includes any post-high school education.

ensure the inclusion of households with both listed and unlisted telephone numbers. Within each household one person, 18 years of age or older, was interviewed. A total of 1,425 interviews were completed from March 7 through April 26, 2000. Within the total sample Hispanic and African American households were oversampled to obtain a minimum of 300 respondents in each group. In addition, a split sample format was used; half the respondents were asked about children (defined as ages 5–10 or grades K–5) and the other half about youth (defined as ages 11–18 or grades 6–12).

Approximately 65 percent of all phone numbers called up to three times resulted in contact with an eligible adult. Of that group, approximately 92 percent agreed to participate in the poll. (According to Gallup researchers, those figures are typical for Gallup polls.) Intentional oversampling and differential contact and refusal rates produced a sample that, in some respects, differed from a representative sample. Thus, Gallup applied weighting procedures to correct results for distributional errors (see Table A2).

Percentages reported for the total sample have a margin of error of +/- 2 to 4 percentage

TABLE A3. HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS FOR THE SITUATION-BASED INTERVIEWS

Interviewees were asked to imagine themselves in each of four hypothetical situations, whether or not these situations had ever happened to them. Then they were asked a series of follow-up questions about how they would react, how they thought others should or do react, the consequences of acting or not acting, whether the age or gender of the young people involved would affect their responses, and other related topics. If they had been in a similar situation, they were asked how they handled it.

1. Imagine there has been a devastating flood in a neighboring county, which has been well documented for several days. Two neighborhood middle school girls appear at your door, representing a local congregation that is not your own. They ask if you would participate with youth in a cleanup day they are sponsoring and if you can donate cleaning supplies and drinking water. What would you do? Why?
2. Imagine you see a group of middle school boys you know who should be in school, but are obviously just hanging out on the street corner. What would you do? Why?
3. Imagine a 12-year-old boy from your neighborhood has agreed to rake your yard on a regular basis. The youth intends to spend all the money earned on some CDs. Should you counsel the boy to consider other uses for the money, such as saving it, or donating part or all of it to charity? Why?
4. Imagine skateboarders hang out around a local business (restaurant, grocery store, or doctor's office) on a regular basis because of the ramps and inclines available in the parking lot. The business owner gets complaints from customers about the disruption and inconvenience. If you were the owner of the store, how would you react to the skateboarders? What would you tell the customers? Why?

points at the 95 percent confidence interval. That is, in 95 out of 100 similar samples, the true result would lie within 2 to 4 percentage points of the reported results. Margins of error for subgroups (e.g., comparing males to females, making comparisons across different racial/ethnic groups) vary from +/- 4 percentage points to +/- 11 percentage points, with the range dependent upon the size of the subgroup samples involved as well as the size of the percentage responses reported.

Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed in several ways. First, we examined *percentage responses* to each item, for the whole sample and across demographic subgroups. We also examined differences in *means* on the individual items and the Norm Importance and Norm Conformity scales.

Where two groups were compared, we computed a two-group Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the weighted data (p level of .05) because the SAS statistical package used could not use t -tests with weighted data. In this case, the F value for the ANOVA is simply the square of the t -statistic. As would be the case in conducting multiple t -tests, when multiple two-group ANOVAs were conducted in the same analysis, a Bonferroni correction was applied. Where more than two groups were compared, we conducted analyses of variance with Scheffe multiple comparisons on all ANOVAs with significant overall F values. For these analyses, individual item responses were recoded so that there were only two responses: either respondents rated a norm “most important,” or they did not, and either they said the majority of adults around them lived the norm, or they did not. The means created by that binary recoding were used in the analyses of variance.

In cases where variables were likely to be moderately or strongly correlated, we conducted multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to assess simultaneous main and interaction effects on norm importance and conformity. Finally, in order to get an overall picture of which adults were most likely to rate the actions important and be surrounded by adults who engage in the actions, we combined the importance and conformity ratings to yield a “consistency of motivation score.” We then conducted canonical discriminant analysis to determine which variables discriminated among adults experiencing high, medium, and low degrees of consistency in their personal and environmental motivation for engaging in asset-building actions with young people.

The Situation-Based Interview

To complement the quantitative data, a subsample of 100 adults who had participated in the forced-choice poll³ was asked to react to a set of four hypothetical situations (Table A3). Their open-ended responses offered a more detailed understanding of how and why adults decide to relate to children and youth. The situations were designed to deepen understanding of the affective and cognitive processes adults use to make regular, everyday choices about getting involved with children and youth. They reflected several key categories of norms; two situations emphasized positive images of young people, and two emphasized neutral or negative images.

After posing the situation, interviewers asked respondents if they had ever been in a

situation like this, and, if so, what did they do, or what they would imagine doing if this situation had ever happened to them. Subsequent questions included asking if the respondent felt or would feel that it was their responsibility to do something in this situation, how many adults they knew who would do the same, what happened or what they thought would happen when they reacted the way they did, what positive or negative consequences they experienced or would imagine occurring, and what difference it would make if the situation involved a child instead of a teenager.

Most situations stated that youth were middle school age, and subsequent questions asked what difference it would make in the adult's reaction if the youth were younger children or older teenagers. The genders of youth in the situations were made clear in three of the four situations, and the fourth, about skateboarders, had a strong gender-linked stereotype. Subsequent questions asked what difference it would make if the youth were of different genders. Throughout the interview, respondents were asked the reasons for their responses to various questions.

Codes were developed from 20 transcripts drawn at random from the 100 completed. All the transcripts were then coded by two people. They sought to categorize the response to each question into one category, if possible, rather than decompose the answer into many categories. (In some cases, it was not possible to limit the answer to one category.) Codes were also added where the original did not fit and, in some instances, codes were combined when all the transcripts were examined and only one response fell into a particular code. (Many respondents provided answers that did not reflect the question. Most "other" responses were not relevant to the topic.)

APPENDIX B

SEARCH INSTITUTE'S FRAMEWORK OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

In an effort to draw together many elements that contribute to the healthy development of adolescents, Search Institute constructed the framework of developmental assets. These 40 assets, which are listed and defined in Table B1 and outlined in Chapter 1, have roots in child and adolescent development research, resiliency research, and prevention research. Although originally focused specifically on adolescence, the framework has also been extended to address the developmental needs of children in the first decade of life.

The Power of Developmental Assets

The level of developmental assets youth experience matters. Developmental assets are powerful influences on young people's behavior across all cultural and socioeconomic groups. They serve as *protective* factors, inhibiting, for example, alcohol and other drug abuse, violence, sexual activity, and school failure. They also serve as *enhancement* factors, promoting positive developmental outcomes.

Research with more than 1 million 6th- to 12th-grade youth across the past decade has consistently shown that the more assets youth report in their lives, the less they engage in various kinds of high-risk behaviors,¹ and the more they show evidence of developmental thriving, such as doing well in school, valuing racial diversity, helping others, and overcoming adversity.² (See Table B2.) Although comparable data do not yet exist for children in grades K-5, there is reason to believe that similar, age-appropriate trends would be found: The research clearly suggests that younger children require similar developmental experiences to promote positive growth.³

Gaps in Experiences of Developmental Assets

While the developmental assets are powerful influences in young people's lives, far too few youth experience enough of these assets. Young people report having, on average, 18 of the 40 assets. Although we see some variation across communities and in different subgroups of youth, the vast majority of youth—regardless of age, gender, race/ethnicity, family composition, family income level, and community size—experience roughly equivalent levels of assets.

TABLE B1. SEARCH INSTITUTE'S FRAMEWORK OF 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. The following definitions relate specifically to the experiences of middle and high school youth (the original framework). For the definitions of the assets for younger children, visit www.search-institute.org/assets.

EXTERNAL ASSETS

Support

1. **Family support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive family communication**—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek parent(s) advice and counsel.
3. **Other adult relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults.
4. **Caring neighborhood**—Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring school climate**—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent involvement in schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community values youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as resources**—Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to others**—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety**—Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries and Expectations

11. **Family boundaries**—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult role models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive peer influence**—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High expectations**—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
19. **Religious community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at home**—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

INTERNAL ASSETS

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement motivation**—Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School engagement**—Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. **Homework**—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. **Bonding to school**—Young person cares about her or his school.
25. **Reading for pleasure**—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Positive Values

26. **Caring**—Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. **Equality and social justice**—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. **Integrity**—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. **Honesty**—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
30. **Responsibility**—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. **Restraint**—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Social Competencies

32. **Planning and decision making**—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. **Interpersonal competence**—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. **Cultural competence**—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
35. **Resistance skills**—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. **Peaceful conflict resolution**—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. **Personal power**—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”
38. **Self-esteem**—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
39. **Sense of purpose**—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”
40. **Positive view of personal future**—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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TABLE B2. THE POWER OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

This table illustrates that the more developmental assets young people experience, the less likely they are to engage in many different high-risk behavior patterns and the more likely they are to exhibit indicators of thriving. (Based on a sample of 99,462 6th- to 12th-grade youth in 213 communities in 25 states who were surveyed during the 1996-97 school year.)

Thriving Behavior	Definition	0-10 Assets	11-20 Assets	21-30 Assets	31-40 Assets
Succeeds in School	Gets mostly A's on report card	7%	19%	35%	53%
Values Diversity	Places high importance on getting to know people of other racial/ethnic groups	34%	53%	69%	87%
Helps Others	Helps friends or neighbors one or more hours per week	69%	83%	91%	97%
Exhibits Leadership	Has been a leader of a group or organization in the past 12 months	48%	67%	78%	87%
Risk Behavior Pattern	Definition	0-10 Assets	11-20 Assets	21-30 Assets	31-40 Assets
Problem Alcohol Use	Has used alcohol three or more times in the past 30 days or got drunk once or more in the past two weeks	53%	30%	11%	3%
Illicit Drug Use	Used illicit drugs (cocaine, LSD, PCP or angel dust, heroin, and amphetamines) three or more times in the past 12 months	42%	19%	6%	1%
Sexual Activity	Has had sexual intercourse three or more times in lifetime	33%	21%	10%	3%
Violence	Has engaged in three or more acts of fighting, hitting, injuring a person, carrying a weapon, or threatening physical harm in the past 12 months	61%	35%	16%	6%

From Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1999). *A fragile foundation: The state of developmental assets among American youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

For More Information on Developmental Assets

The following sources examine the research that undergirds the framework of developmental assets:

Peter L. Benson (1997). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1999). *A fragile foundation: The state of developmental assets among American youth.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Peter L. Benson, Nancy Leffert, Peter C. Scales, & Dale A. Blyth (1998). Beyond the “village” rhetoric: Creating healthy communities for children and adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 2, 138-159.

Nancy Leffert, Peter L. Benson, & Jolene L. Roehlkepartain (1997). *Starting out right: Developmental assets for children.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Nancy Leffert, Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Anu Sharma, Dyanne Drake, & Dale A. Blyth (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 2, 209-230.

Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, Nancy Leffert, & Dale A. Blyth (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 27-46.

Peter C. Scales & Nancy Leffert (1999). *Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

For information on tools for nonscientific readers, visit Search Institute’s Web site: www.search-institute.org.

APPENDIX C

DETAILED FINDINGS FROM THE NATIONAL STUDY

TABLE C1. PERCENTAGES OF U.S. ADULTS WHO RATE EACH ACTION AS “MOST IMPORTANT,” BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Here are the percentages of U.S. adults who rate each statement as “most important” (five on a five-point scale), based on a nationally representative sample of 1,425 adults. Proportions should be compared cautiously. Without analyzing subsample sizes and sampling tolerances, differences that appear to be meaningful may not be statistically significant. (See Appendix A.)

Statements	All	Gender		Age			Marital Status			Education	
		Men	Women	18-34	35-54	55+	Married	Single	Sep./Div./Wid.	College	Non-College
Social Norms*											
1. Encourage success in school	90	88	92	88	91	92	91	87	91	89	91
2. Expect respect for adults	68	60	74	61	69	74	70	60	71	62	74
Social Values**											
3. Teach shared values	80	77	83	72	82	87	83	71	83	77	84
4. Teach respect for cultural differences	77	72	81	78	78	73	77	77	77	78	75
5. Guide decision making	76	70	82	72	80	77	78	71	79	77	76
6. Have meaningful conversations	75	69	79	72	74	77	73	75	76	69	80
7. Give financial guidance	75	67	81	71	77	76	72	76	78	71	78
8. Discuss personal values	73	70	75	69	72	76	73	69	75	74	71
9. Expect parents to set boundaries	84	81	87	81	86	85	86	77	87	84	85
Personal Preferences***											
10. Report positive behavior	65	54	74	60	64	72	67	60	66	61	70
11. Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	63	60	66	61	65	65	62	62	69	58	69
12. Report misbehavior	62	54	68	56	64	66	61	57	69	58	66
13. Pass down traditions	56	47	64	46	59	64	56	48	65	50	63
14. Discuss religious beliefs	60	53	65	47	61	71	61	51	65	57	62
15. Know names	50	45	55	47	54	51	51	49	52	44	57
16. Provide service opportunities	48	40	55	46	46	54	50	44	50	42	54
17. Seek opinions	48	43	52	48	44	53	47	45	53	38	58
18. Model giving and serving	47	39	54	38	53	52	49	42	50	45	49
19. Give advice	13	13	14	11	13	18	11	15	17	9	18

TABLE C1. CONTINUED

Statements	Income			Religious Involvement			Parental Status		Race/Ethnicity		
	More than \$60K	\$20K-\$59,999	Less than \$20K	Weekly or more	Some-times	Rarely or never	Parent	Non-parent	Hispanic	Black	White
Social Norms*											
1. Encourage success in school	89	93	85	91	91	88	92	84	82	98	90
2. Expect respect for adults	63	69	70	71	62	66	71	60	71	80	66
Social Values**											
3. Teach shared values	76	86	72	83	76	77	83	71	78	83	80
4. Teach respect for cultural differences	70	83	74	80	73	74	77	74	71	84	76
5. Guide decision making	74	79	71	79	72	76	79	70	73	81	76
6. Have meaningful conversations	69	76	80	77	72	71	77	68	71	79	74
7. Give financial guidance	72	74	77	79	68	72	75	72	72	79	74
8. Discuss personal values	70	74	68	79	68	64	74	67	73	71	73
9. Expect parents to set boundaries	84	87	77	87	80	83	86	79	80	89	84
Personal Preferences***											
10. Report positive behavior	57	68	68	71	58	59	67	59	68	76	63
11. Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	57	63	70	68	62	56	66	57	70	80	60
12. Report misbehavior	54	62	67	67	54	59	64	55	60	74	60
13. Pass down traditions	43	60	57	62	54	46	60	46	65	71	53
14. Discuss religious beliefs	53	62	60	75	54	34	63	50	68	69	57
15. Know names	40	53	54	55	51	41	52	46	50	72	47
16. Provide service opportunities	40	48	55	55	45	38	49	45	58	57	46
17. Seek opinions	41	50	52	49	44	47	49	44	54	54	46
18. Model giving and serving	41	49	51	55	41	37	51	38	44	62	45
19. Give advice	6	11	23	17	11	8	13	15	18	35	10

* Social norms: Interactions with children and youth that virtually everyone agrees are "most important" for adults to do and that most adults actually do.

** Social values: Interactions with children and youth that at least 70 percent of adults say are "most important" for adults to do, but that most adults do not actually do.

*** Personal preferences: Interactions with children and youth that fewer than 70 percent of adults say are "most important" for adults to do and that most adults do not do.

TABLE C2. PERCENTAGES OF U.S. ADULTS WHO ENGAGE POSITIVELY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Here are the percentages of U.S. adults who say that “almost all” or “a large majority” of the adults they know actually relate to young people in these ways (four or five on a five-point scale), based on a nationally representative sample of 1,425 adults. These percentages serve as a proxy for adults’ own behavior.† Proportions should be compared cautiously. Without analyzing subsample sizes and sampling tolerances, differences that appear to be meaningful may not be statistically significant. (See Appendix A.)

Statements	All	Gender		Age			Marital Status			Education	
		Men	Women	18-34	35-54	55+	Married	Single	Sep./Div./Wid.	College	Non-College
Social Norms*											
1. Encourage success in school	69	68	70	78	66	63	71	72	61	71	67
2. Expect respect for adults	67	64	69	73	66	63	68	72	60	68	66
Social Values**											
3. Teach shared values	45	41	48	42	44	48	47	40	44	45	44
4. Teach respect for cultural differences	36	36	36	34	33	41	34	40	35	34	37
5. Guide decision making	41	39	43	46	40	40	43	44	38	42	42
6. Have meaningful conversations	34	31	37	31	34	39	36	32	34	33	35
7. Give financial guidance	36	33	38	41	31	36	36	37	32	35	36
8. Discuss personal values	37	36	38	39	37	35	39	37	32	40	33
9. Expect parents to set boundaries	42	40	44	46	42	38	41	48	39	41	44
Personal Preferences***											
10. Report positive behavior	22	19	23	18	18	30	23	18	19	20	22
11. Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	35	33	37	31	36	41	36	34	37	34	37
12. Report misbehavior	33	30	35	37	30	32	33	33	32	31	35
13. Pass down traditions	38	35	41	39	34	42	38	36	40	39	37
14. Discuss religious beliefs	35	31	38	38	32	37	35	37	34	38	32
15. Know names	34	33	33	33	35	34	36	34	28	34	34
16. Provide service opportunities	13	12	13	9	8	24	13	8	17	10	16
17. Seek opinions	25	23	27	25	24	28	28	22	22	23	28
18. Model giving and serving	16	13	19	12	16	23	17	13	16	17	15
19. Give advice	17	15	19	14	16	24	18	14	21	17	18

TABLE C2. CONTINUED

Statements	Income			Religious Involvement			Parental Status		Race/Ethnicity		
	More than \$60K	\$20K-\$59,999	Less than \$20K	Weekly or more	Some-times	Rarely or never	Parent	Non-parent	Hispanic	Black	White
Social Norms*											
1. Encourage success in school	72	64	66	65	74	72	70	67	66	74	69
2. Expect respect for adults	71	68	66	67	70	64	66	70	56	70	68
Social Values**											
3. Teach shared values	43	48	40	45	47	41	46	39	50	40	44
4. Teach respect for cultural differences	31	38	37	39	31	34	36	34	29	32	37
5. Guide decision making	44	40	43	41	47	38	42	41	46	39	41
6. Have meaningful conversations	31	37	31	35	39	29	35	31	32	36	34
7. Give financial guidance	37	33	38	36	34	37	34	39	38	31	36
8. Discuss personal values	41	37	34	38	39	34	37	37	36	30	38
9. Expect parents to set boundaries	43	44	38	44	43	39	40	49	48	46	41
Personal Preferences***											
10. Report positive behavior	19	23	22	26	20	14	24	13	20	23	21
11. Ensure well-being of neighborhood kids	35	32	41	39	41	24	37	32	34	34	36
12. Report misbehavior	29	34	36	32	34	32	33	33	26	29	34
13. Pass down traditions	35	37	40	41	35	35	38	38	41	42	37
14. Discuss religious beliefs	37	34	37	41	32	26	35	36	41	33	34
15. Know names	35	31	36	35	34	31	34	33	23	36	34
16. Provide service opportunities	6	13	19	16	11	9	14	9	16	9	13
17. Seek opinions	23	26	30	25	27	25	26	24	29	25	25
18. Model giving and serving	15	16	18	19	16	12	17	14	12	15	17
19. Give advice	16	17	20	19	17	16	20	11	17	14	18

* Social norms: Interactions with children and youth that virtually everyone agrees are “most important” for adults to do and that most adults actually do.

** Social values: Interactions with children and youth that at least 70 percent of adults say are “most important” for adults to do, but that most adults do not actually do.

*** Personal preferences: Interactions with children and youth that fewer than 70 percent of adults say are “most important” for adults to do and that most adults do not do.

† Asking adults directly what they personally did could have increased the chances of getting socially desirable responses. Since the people adults “know” from among their families, friends, neighborhood, and community activities are inclined to be much like themselves, in important ways, we reasoned that those who said most of the adults they knew were involved with kids would themselves, as part of a network of adults who were engaged with kids, also be likely to be involved. The fact that on almost all items most adults said they were not involved with young people, a response in line with adolescents’ own reports (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999), indicates that this strategy successfully reduced the incidence of biased responses. Had we asked the more direct questions, a higher proportion of adults probably would have said they were personally involved, simply because that is the more socially desirable response.

NOTES

Chapter 1. Examining Adults' Relationships with Children and Teenagers

¹Kalisha Davis (2000). Booming Georgetown focuses on youth development. *Assets: The Magazine of Ideas for Healthy Communities & Healthy Youth*, 5(3), 4-5.

²Patricia Hersch (1998). *A tribe apart: A journey into the heart of American adolescence*. New York: Ballantine, 14.

³For more on the research behind the assets, see Appendix B, which also lists additional sources.

⁴Peter L. Benson (1997). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 37.

⁵Over the course of one-and-one-half years, we took several steps to develop the list of 19 asset-building actions for the national survey. We conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on social norms, and drew on hundreds of studies on child and adolescent development to identify actions that seemed important for building young people's developmental assets. An initial list of 131 possible actions was ultimately collapsed to the final 19 through conversations with experts, ratings supplied by staff, focus groups held in several cities with adults from different communities of color, mailings to community leaders involved in community asset-building initiatives, and responses to a request for feedback placed on an electronic listserv for community leaders maintained by Search Institute. In all, more than 125 community initiative practitioners, adolescent development experts, Search Institute and Lutheran Brotherhood staff, and representatives of the public provided suggestions that helped shape the final list of asset-building actions on which the national survey was based.

⁶To gather this information, respondents were asked whether most of the adults they know believe or do a particular thing. Asking adults directly what they personally did could have increased the chances of getting socially desirable responses. Since the people adults "know" from among their families, friends, neighborhood, and community activities are inclined to be much like themselves in important ways, we reasoned that those who said most of the adults they knew were involved with kids would themselves, as part of a network of adults who were engaged with kids, also be likely to be involved. Had we asked the more direct question, a higher proportion of adults probably would have said they were personally involved, simply because that is the more socially desirable response. ("Of course I'm involved with kids; what kind of person wouldn't be?")

Chapter 2. What Is Important in Adults' Relationships with Children and Teenagers?

¹Steve Farkas & Jean Johnson (1997). *Kids these days: What Americans really think of the next generation*. New York: Public Agenda, 8.

²Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000). *Democracy in America*. New York: Bantam; Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, & Steven M. Tipton (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Francis Fukuyama (1999). *The great disruption: Human nature and the reconstitution of social order*. New York: Free Press.

³Fukuyama, *The great disruption*, 58.

⁴See, for example Public Education Network (2000). *All for all: Strengthening community involvement for all students*. Washington, DC: Public Education Network.

⁵This support for parental boundary setting must be limited to approaches that do not cross the line into abuse or neglect.

⁶Because the survey used the word *discipline*, survey participants may have responded according to a narrow view of discipline as setting and carrying out punishment—including physical punishment—for misbehavior, not a broader understanding of guidance and boundary setting. Such a perspective may have skewed responses to this item, which we have not included in the list of positive asset-building actions.

⁷John W. Gardner (1991). *Building Community*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 14-15.

⁸Francis A. J. Ianni (1989). *The search for structure: A report on American youth today*. New York: Free Press, 262.

⁹Nancy Leffert, Peter L. Benson, & Jolene L. Roehlkepartain (1997). *Starting out right: Developmental assets for children*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 74; see also Lawrence A. Hirschfield (1995). Do children have a theory of race? *Cognition*, 54, 209-252.

¹⁰Peter C. Scales & Nancy Leffert (1999). *Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development*. Minneapolis: Search Institute, 36.

¹¹Robert Wuthnow (1994). *God and Mammon in America*. New York: Free Press, 139.

¹²*Ibid.*, 139.

¹³Unpublished data from surveys of 99,462 6th- to 12th-grade youth in 213 communities during the 1996-97 school

year. See Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Nancy Leffert, & Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1999). *A fragile foundation: The state of developmental assets among American youth*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

¹⁴A Public Agenda poll found that only 12 percent of adults said that teenagers treat people with respect. Farkas & Johnson, *Kids these days*, 37.

¹⁵Farkas & Johnson. *Kids these days*, 41.

¹⁶See, for example, Ann Duffet, Jean Johnson, & Steve Farkas (1999). *Kids these days 1999: What Americans really think of the next generation*. New York: Public Agenda.

¹⁷Farkas & Johnson, *Kids these days*.

¹⁸Frances E. Aboud (1988). *Children and prejudice*. New York: Basil Blackwell. Also see Robert Coles (1997). *The moral intelligence of children*. New York: Random House.

¹⁹Virginia A. Hodgkinson & Murray S. Weitzman (1997). *Volunteering and giving among teenagers 12 to 17 years of age: Findings from a national survey, 1996 edition*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.

²⁰"Meaningful" means that the differences in overall means between the two groups were statistically significant and that differences in percentages of respondents who said an action was "most important" were within the sampling tolerances or margins of error for that particular comparison. We present the percentages on all the actions for selected subgroups in Appendix C. However, the information in the appendix should be interpreted with great caution, since differences that may seem meaningful may not be statistically significant.

²¹In addition, women score higher than men when the items are combined into the Norm Importance scale [$F(1, 1356) = 74.23, p < .0001$].

²²Shelley E. Taylor, Laura Cousino Klein, Brian P. Lewis, Tara L. Gruenewald Regan, A.R. Gurung, & John A. Updegraff (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not flight-or-fight. *Psychological Review*, 107(3), 411-429.

²³Alan Wolfe (2000, May 7). The pursuit of autonomy. *New York Times Magazine*, 53-56.

²⁴Radcliffe Public Policy Center study finds a new generation of young men focusing on family first (2000, May 3). Press Release. Cambridge, MA: Radcliffe Public Policy Center. (http://www.radcliffe.edu/news/pr/ooo503ppc_harris.html).

²⁵An analysis of variance result of $F(2, 1356) = 9.72, p < .0001$ on the Norm Importance scale

²⁶Jean S. Phinney, Anthony Ong, & Tanya Madden (2000). Cultural values and intergenerational value discrepancies in immigrant and non-immigrant families. *Child Development*, 71, 528-539.

²⁷See, for example, James P. Comer & Alvin F. Poussaint (1992). *Raising black children*. New York: Plume/New American Library; James W. Green (1999). *Cultural awareness in the human services: A multi-ethnic approach (3rd edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon; Nina Boyd Krebs (1999). *Edgewalkers: Diffusing cultural boundaries on the new global frontier*. Far Hills, NJ: New Horizons; Gloria G. Rodríguez (1999). *Raising nuestros niños: Bringing up Latino children in a bicultural world*. New York: Fireside; and Derald W. Sue & David Sue (1990). *Counseling the culturally different: Theory and practice (2nd edition)*. New York: John Wiley.

²⁸An analysis of variance result of $F(1, 1354) = 18.13, p < .0001$ on the Norm Importance scale.

²⁹We ran MANOVAs that showed that race, income, and education were not confounded. Each has independent effects on adults' relationships with children and adolescents.

³⁰Virginia A. Hodgkinson & Murray S. Weitzman (1996). *Giving and volunteering in the United States: Findings from a national survey, 1996 edition* (Washington, DC: Independent Sector); and Hodgkinson and Weitzman, *Volunteering and giving among teenagers 12 to 17 years of age*.

³¹See Icek Azjen (1988). *Attitudes, personality, and behavior*. Chicago: Dorsey Press.

³²Ibid.

Chapter 3. The Gap between Beliefs and Actions

¹"Adults you know" was defined as "adults you know from your family, neighborhood, workplace, community activities you might be involved with, and so forth."

²See, for example, the following: Alan R. Andreasen (1995). *Marketing social change: Changing behaviors to promote health, social development, and the environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Thomas W. Britt (1999). Engaging the self in the field: Testing the triangle model of responsibility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 696-706; and Randall C. Picker (1997). Simple games in a complex world: A generative approach to the adoption of norms. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 64, 1225-1287.

³An extensive research tradition has described the role that similarity of background, interests, and values plays in both adult and adolescent friendships. For example, see Ellen Berscheid & Elaine H. Walster (1969). *Interpersonal attraction*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley; and Andrew F. Newcomb, William M. Bukowski, & Catherine L. Bagwell

(1999). Knowing the sounds: Friendships as developmental contexts. In W. Andrew Collins & Brett Laursen (Eds.), *Relationships as developmental contexts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 64-84.

It also has been observed for decades that people have a tendency to respond in socially desirable ways when they feel that there is, in today's term, a "politically correct" way to respond (Eugene J. Webb, Donald T. Campbell, Richard D. Schwartz, & Lee Sechrest [1972]. *Unobtrusive measures: Nonreactive research in the social sciences*. Chicago: Rand McNally). We were concerned that asking adults directly whether they personally were involved with kids in these ways might elicit socially desirable answers. Given that they probably are similar in many important attitudinal and value respects to other adults they "know from your family, neighborhood, workplace, community activities and so forth," asking adults about how many of those adults they "know" performed these actions seemed a reasonable proxy, and a less biased one, for reporting on their own behavior. The fact that so few adults said that the majority of the adults they knew performed these actions in their relationships with kids clearly suggested we were successful in obtaining responses that were not exaggerated in a positive direction.

⁴This includes three items slightly below 50 percent but within the margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points.

⁵See Jean Ensminger & Jack Knight (1997). Changing social norms: Common property, bridewealth, and clan exogamy. *Current Anthropology*, 38, 1-14; Ann Florini (1996). The evolution of international norms. *International Studies Quarterly*, 40, 363-389; and A. G. Johnson (Ed.) (1995). *The Blackwell dictionary of sociology: A user's guide to sociological language*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

⁶Ann Duffet, Jean Johnson, & Steve Farkas (1999). *Kids these days 1999: What Americans really think of the next generation*. New York: Public Agenda, 5.

⁷Steve Farkas & Jean Johnson (1997). *Kids these days: What Americans really think of the next generation*. New York: Public Agenda.

⁸Sylvia Ann Hewlett (1991). *When the bough breaks: The cost of neglecting our children*. New York: Basic Books, 15.

⁹Farkas & Johnson, *Kids these days*, 16.

¹⁰Deborah Wadsworth (1997). Afterword in Farkas & Johnson, 36.

¹¹Virginia A. Hodgkinson & Murray S. Weitzman (1996). *Giving and volunteering in the United States: Findings from a national survey, 1996 edition*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector; and Virginia A. Hodgkinson & Murray S. Weitzman (1997). *Volunteering and giving among teenagers 12 to 17 years of age: Findings from a national survey, 1996 edition*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.

¹²Farkas & Johnson, *Kids these days*, 43.

¹³*New York Times* (March 4, 2000), A12.

¹⁴Martin E. P. Seligman (1995). *The optimistic child*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 51.

¹⁵See, for example, Robert D. Putnam (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹⁶Andrew J. Cherlin (1999). I'm OK, you're selfish. *New York Times Magazine*, October 17 (<http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/millennium/m5/poll-cherlin.html>).

¹⁷*The Community Indicators Survey—National* (1999, Nov. 30). Princeton, NJ: Princeton Survey Research Associates, for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (<http://www.knightfdn.org/indicators>).

¹⁸Farkas & Johnson, *Kids these days*, 9.

¹⁹Phillip Selznick (2000). Reflections on responsibility: More than just following rules. *Responsive Community*, 10(2), 57-61.

²⁰Juliet B. Schor (1992). *The overworked American: The unexpected decline of leisure*. New York: Basic Books.

²¹See, for example, Albert Bandura (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W. H. Freeman.

Chapter 4. Tapping the Strengths of Engaged Adults

¹We conducted canonical discriminant analysis of the consistency scores across the various demographic variables. Dividing the consistency scores into quartiles produced relatively small subsamples (about 100 each) in either the high or low group, which would have biased the analysis. We instead adopted a more conservative approach by dividing the sample arbitrarily into thirds. The top third were considered to have relatively more consistent personal and environmental motivation to engage in these actions, the middle third were considered to have mild and inconsistent support, and the bottom third were considered to have low and inconsistent motivation.

The standardized canonical coefficients for the entire sample (with means standardized to zero and variance to one) are an unbiased rendering of the relative importance of each demographic variable in discriminating among those Americans who consistently said either (1) that they experienced consistent personal and environmental motivation to engage in these asset-building actions; (2) that they experienced some personal or environmental motiva-

tion, but inconsistently; or (3) that they experienced little personal or environmental motivation to relate to young people in these ways. The first canonical function had a moderate and significant (at $p < .0001$) correlation of .33 with the consistency of motivation scores, and a second function had a weak and only marginally significant correlation of .14. This suggests that the first canonical function and the variables in it had a much stronger linear relationship with consistency of motivation than did the second function.

²It should be noted that some of these variables had a relatively greater or lesser contribution to the discrimination of groups than would have been suggested by other analyses. For example, income, examined by itself, appeared to have a greater impact on these actions than did marital status. However, because the discriminant analysis is a multivariate procedure that takes into account all the variables and their interactions *simultaneously*, marital status (which is associated with several key variables, including income, education, parental status, attendance at religious services, and contact with kids among them) yielded a larger standardized canonical coefficient.

³Peter C. Scales, María Guajardo Lucero, & Holly Halvorson (1998). *Voices of hope—Building developmental assets for Colorado youth: Results of the Colorado adult and youth polls*. Denver: Assets for Colorado Youth.

⁴See, for example, Robert D. Putnam (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁵We conducted stepwise multiple regression analysis, with the consistency of motivation scale score as the dependent variable, and the demographic subgroups as independent variables. The demographic variables could explain just 11 percent of the consistency of motivation score. This is a similar level of explanation that demographic variables contribute to risk-taking behaviors and indicators of thriving among adolescents and suggests that, for both adults and adolescents, demographic factors alone do not provide much explanation for asset-building behavior. See Nancy Leffert, Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Anu Sharma, Dyanne Drake, & Dale A. Blyth (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 2, 209-230; and Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, Nancy Leffert, & Dale A. Blyth (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 27-46.

Chapter 5. Cultivating a Developmentally Attentive Culture

¹Alan R. Andreasen (1995). *Marketing social change: Changing behaviors to promote health, social development, and the environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

²Lisbeth Bamberger Schorr (1999, March). Turning voter will into successes for kids. *Next Generation Reports* (2-page insert). Santa Monica, CA: The Children's Partnership, 1.

³Chris T. Allen (1982). Self-perception based strategies for stimulating energy conservation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 8, 381-390.

⁴Richard L. Miller, Philip Brickman, & Diana Bolen (1975). Attribution versus persuasion as a means for modifying behavior. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 31, 430-441.

⁵This proposal is analogous to the call others have issued for communities to develop "youth charters" that describe for young people the behavior adults expect of them. See William Damon (1995). *Greater expectations: Overcoming the culture of indulgence in our homes and schools*. New York: Free Press; and Francis A. J. Ianni. (1989). *The search for structure: A report on American youth today*. New York: Free Press.

⁶Margaret Bostrom (1999). How people talk about children's issues: A focus group report. Coalition for America's Children. *Effective language for communicating children's issues*. Washington, DC: Benton Foundation, 27.

⁷Child Welfare League of America (1999). *Assessing public opinion and perceptions regarding child abuse in America*. Washington, DC: Author (final report from Liberman Research Worldwide); Steve Farkas & Jean Johnson (1997). *Kids these days: What Americans really think of the next generation*. New York: Public Agenda.

⁸*The Community Indicators Survey—National* (1999, Nov. 30). Princeton, NJ: Princeton Survey Research Associates, for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

⁹Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., Thomas D. Cook, Jacquelynne Eccles, Glen H. Elder Jr., & Arnold J. Sameroff (1999). *Managing to make it: Urban families and adolescent success*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁰Rebecca N. Saito, Theresa K. Sullivan, & Nicole R. Hintz (2000). *The possible dream: What families in distressed communities need to help youth thrive*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

¹¹John P. Kretzmann & John L. McKnight (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 6.

¹²Ann Florini (1996). The evolution of international norms. *International Studies Quarterly*, 40, 363-389.

¹³Everett M. Rogers (1995). *Diffusion of innovations (fourth edition)*. New York: Free Press.

¹⁴Malcolm Gladwell (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. Boston: Little, Brown.

¹⁵Andreasen (1995). *Marketing social change*, 158.

¹⁶Rogers, *Diffusion of innovation*, 27.

¹⁷Youth involvement (1998, August 27). *Lutheran Brotherhood Reports: A survey of American beliefs, attitudes, and practices*. Minneapolis: Lutheran Brotherhood.

¹⁸James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, & Carlo C. DiClemente (1994). *Changing for good*. New York: William Morrow.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Icek Azjen (1988). *Attitudes, personality, and behavior*. Chicago: Dorsey Press, 144.

²¹Jonathon L. Freedman & Scott C. Fraser (1966). Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 195-202.

²²Ad Council & MTV: Music Television (2000). *Engaging the next generation: How nonprofits can reach young adults*. New York: Authors. Downloaded from the Web at www.adcouncil.org.

²³Saito, Sullivan, & Hintz, *The possible dream*.

²⁴Susan Nall Bales (1999). Public opinion and the challenge of children's issues. Coalition for America's Children. *Effective language for communicating children's issues*. Washington, DC: Benton Foundation, 6.

²⁵Ad Council & MTV, *Engaging the next generation*.

²⁶Andreasen, *Marketing social change*, 280.

²⁷Ibid., 246-249.

²⁸William Damon (1988). *The moral child: Nurturing children's natural moral growth*. New York: Free Press.

²⁹Robert Wuthnow (1994). *Sharing the journey: Support groups and America's new quest for community*. New York: Free Press.

Appendix A. Study Background and Methodology

¹More detailed documentation of the research methods, literature review, and results will be available through journal articles and other publications.

²"Adults you know" was defined as "adults you know from your family, neighborhood, workplace, community activities you might be involved with, and so forth."

³As part of the national quantitative survey, all respondents were asked to give their consent for a second in-depth interview. Sixty-nine percent of those originally interviewed, 990, gave consent for a second interview. A total of 100 in-depth interviews were completed between May 15 and June 5, 2000. Interviews were taped, transcribed, and content-analyzed by the Gallup Organization.

Appendix B. Search Institute's Framework of Developmental Assets

¹Nancy Leffert, Petet L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, Anu Sharma, Dyanne Drake, & Dale A. Blyth (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 2, 209-230.

²Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, Nancy Leffert, & Dale A. Blyth (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 27-46.

³Nancy Leffert, Peter L. Benson, & Jolene L. Roehlkepartain (1997). *Starting out right: Developmental assets for children*. Minneapolis: Search Institute.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., senior fellow at Search Institute and principal investigator for this study, is a developmental psychologist widely recognized as a leading authority on adolescent development, family relationships, effective schools, and healthy communities. In addition to numerous scientific articles and chapters, Dr. Scales is author or coauthor of more than a dozen books and monographs, most recently including *Great Places to Learn: How Asset-Building Schools Help Students Succeed* (Search Institute), *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Search Institute), *Boxed In and Bored: How Middle Schools Continue to Fail Young Adolescents—and What Good Middle Schools Do Right* (Search Institute); and *A Portrait of Young Adolescents in the 1990s* (Search Institute/Center for Early Adolescence).

Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., president of Search Institute, is a social psychologist, author, and speaker who created the original framework of developmental assets and wrote *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth*, which first introduced the developmental assets in 1990. He has recently been named the visiting scholar at the William T. Grant Foundation in New York City. Among the books he has authored or coauthored are *All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents* (Jossey-Bass), *What Teens Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit), *What Kids Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit), *Starting Out Right: Developmental Assets for Children* (Search Institute), and *The Quicksilver Years: The Hopes and Fears of Young Adolescents* (Harper & Row).

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain is Search Institute's chief communication officer. Among the books and monographs he has authored or coauthored are *Growing Up Generous: Engaging Youth in Giving and Serving* (Alban Institute), *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide to Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy* (Search Institute), *Learning and Living: How Asset Building Can Unite a School's Mission* (Search Institute), *Parenting with a Purpose: A Positive Approach to Raising Confident, Caring Youth* (Search Institute), and *A Practical Guide for Developing Agency/School Partnerships for Service-Learning* (Points of Light Foundation).

