

How are the Children?



Suburban Ramsey
Family Collaborative

Tips for Parents & Caring Adults:

Creating Caring Relationships with Children and Young People

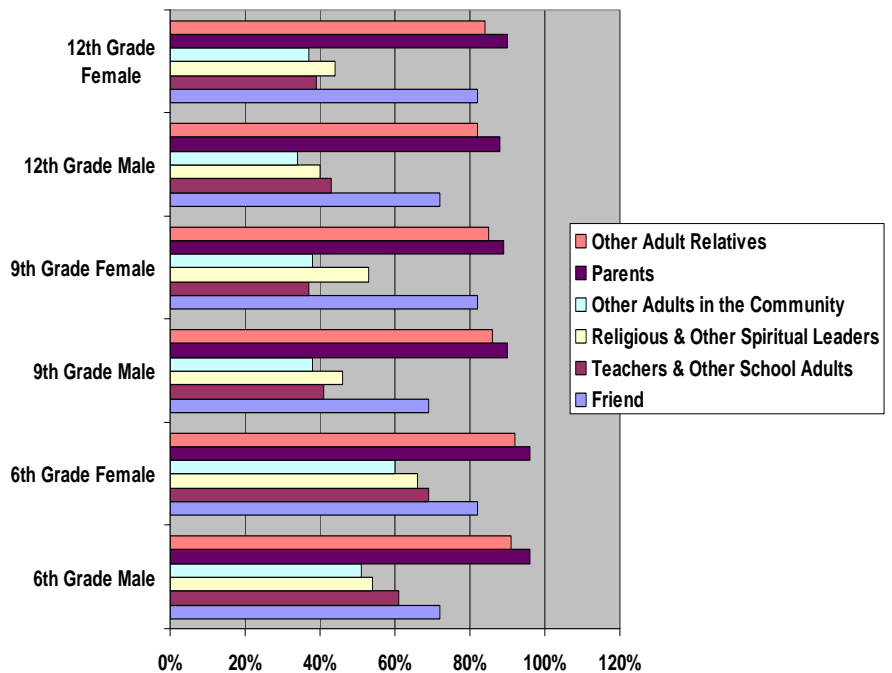
All children and young people need and want supportive connections with adults (both parents and non-parent adults) who model and support healthy development and well-being, at home, at school, and in the community. Youth who are “involved” with their school, their academics, their after-school programs, and the larger community are less likely to participate in risk-taking behaviors.

Research shows that young people who have three or more caring adults (besides parents or guardians) who support them feel happier and more hopeful, do better in school, and are less likely to rely on drinking, smoking, or drugs to feel good or fit in. Yet, only about four in ten young people, ages 11-18, report having three or more non-parent adults in their lives¹.

Other research confirms that young people want adults in their lives. Eighty-seven percent of kids said it is very important to have caring adults in their lives. And yet, forty-five percent said they need more adults they can go to when they have a problem². Data from the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS)³ gives us a measure of how cared about young people in Suburban Ramsey County feel.



Believe Care Quite a Bit or Very Much



Overall, as youth get older, they report lower levels of belief that people care about them. This means teens experience adults moving away from them at the same time they need adults in their lives who care about them and make them feel like they matter.

What Parents Can Do:

- **Ask children to identify five caring people in their lives.** How many adults did they identify? Help them think about other adults (teachers, neighbors, aunts or uncles, coaches, faith leaders, etc.) who could be good sources of support and encouragement. Brainstorm with them about how to deepen existing or build new relationships with caring adults.
- **Don't think you have to "do it all".** Start by connecting your child to adults who already know your teen—relatives, parents of their friends, employers, coaches, etc. Then, identify other caring adults you know who you could invite into your teen's life (your friends, co-workers, a neighbor, etc.)
- **Think of the other caring adults in your child's life as partners.** They may not be sure of how comfortable you are with them forming friendships with your teen, so openly discuss your comfort level.

What Other Caring Adults Can Do:

- **Think back to your own youth and the adults who made a difference in your life.** Think of ways you can be that supportive adult in the lives of children and teens you know.
- **Start with children and teens you already know.** Have meaningful conversations with them about their interests, values, beliefs, decision making, etc. Look for shared interests or activities you could do together. Encourage them. Make the effort to really get to know them.
- **Remind kids of their strengths.** Say "you're a good friend" or "I like the way you helped the other kids on your team" or "you are so funny". Ask them to teach you the words to a song, a new game, how to use your cell phone camera, etc.

Additional Resources:

Connect 5: Finding the Caring Adults You May Not Realize Your Teen Needs by Kathleen Kimball-Baker

Sparks: How Parents Can Help Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers by Peter L. Benson, PhD.

For downloadable resources, including discussion question for connecting with kids, visit <http://nmhicstore.samhsa.gov/15plus/pubs.aspx>.

For more information:

To learn what you can do to support the health, learning, safety and security of all Suburban Ramsey County children and young people, contact:

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Citations:

- 1: Search Institute
2. Voices Study: Research Findings, America's Promise-The Alliance for Youth, 2005
3. MSS Data for Suburban Ramsey County compiled by The Improve Group for SRFC

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