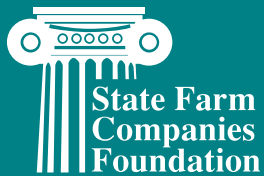
A close-up photograph of a young child with blonde hair, wearing an orange shirt, being held by a person wearing a green long-sleeved shirt. The child is looking down and has their hands clasped together. The background is dark, making the subjects stand out.

A Lot Easier Said *Than* *Done*

Parents Talk about
RAISING CHILDREN
in Today's America

A report prepared for
STATE FARM INSURANCE COMPANIES
by Public Agenda

Additional funding from the
FAMILY FRIENDLY PROGRAMMING FORUM



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RAISING CHILDREN
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A report from Public Agenda

by Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson
and Ann Duffett

with Leslie Wilson and Jackie Vine

ABOUT STATE FARM INSURANCE COMPANIES

Founded more than 80 years ago, State Farm has been the nation's largest insurer of cars since 1942 and the largest insurer of homes since 1964. It is also among the country's largest life insurers. State Farm Bank opened for business in 1999 and already has \$3 billion in deposits. State Farm began offering a family of mutual funds last year.

More than 27 million households have State Farm insurance policies. They are served by State Farm's 79,000 employees and 16,700 independent contractor agents, all of whom employ their own staffs.

Education, safety and community development are key components of State Farm's efforts to help build strong, safe and well-educated communities.

ABOUT THE FAMILY FRIENDLY PROGRAMMING FORUM

The Family Friendly Programming Forum is a group of over 40 major national advertisers, all members of the Association of National Advertisers, who are taking positive steps to increase family friendly programming choices on television. The Forum is proof that many influential national advertisers are deeply interested in family programming, and that these companies are ready to devote time, energy and financial resources to back their commitment to family programming.

The Forum pursues its goals through a number of different initiatives, including The Family Television Awards, which recognize outstanding family television; a script development fund; and a scholarship program for students who work on family friendly projects.

ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. secretary of state Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Our citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our Web site, Public Agenda Online, provides comprehensive information on a wide range of public opinion and public policy issues.

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And Public Agenda's president, Deborah Wadsworth, whose dedication to the issues and remarkable insight guide our organization.

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Introduction by Edward B. Rust, Jr., Chairman and CEO, State Farm Insurance Companies

In 1997, Public Agenda released a groundbreaking study, *Kids These Days*, which *Congressional Quarterly* named as one of the most important reports of that year. Having identified how people view youngsters in *Kids These Days*, it is now time to explore the parental side of the equation. We are pleased to sponsor this report, *A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk about Raising Children in Today's America*.

This report focuses on a particular aspect of parenting—the difficulty of raising children of integrity and character in America today. It's easy to understand why this issue resonates so deeply. The events of 9/11 reminded all of us of the importance of family. But at the same time, the qualities of life that the media spotlight are violence and greed, and it has become harder to find external messages that reflect the values parents say are most important.

So focusing attention on the tough job of parenting makes sense. Each generation of parents faces different challenges. Today's parents are finding they need to use different communication channels to reach their children effectively. The familiar “landmarks” and “rites of passage” that rang true in earlier generations are now impacted by technology and Internet connections that link the world in ways few of us ever envisioned and that can reach us in the time it takes to type a message on a keyboard.

State Farm's interest in this report relates to our mission of providing service to families. State Farm began in 1922 as a mutual company—neighbors looking out for one another. Our success still depends upon serving the communities where our associates live and work and supporting the values that parents say are most important.

Many of our agents and employees serve on local school boards or city councils. You'll often find someone from State Farm volunteering for a local charity or event. We are proud to be the leading business sponsor for National Youth Service Day and the National Service-Learning Conference. We're proud to sponsor the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. We're proud to be partners with the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia on a landmark study on child-passenger safety and to be working with Meharry Medical College on a study to help identify ways to increase seatbelt use by African American teenagers. All of this involvement is a direct result of our interest in, and commitment to, children and families.

This report explores parents' goals in raising their children today—what they do to attempt to reach their goals; what helps them to be better parents; and what interferes with parents' ability to do their best. There are interesting findings about parents' self-evaluation of the quality of the job they're doing, as well.

In many ways, the family is a microcosm of society at large. Knowing what parents value most gives us insights into what society values and what we can expect of future generations. State Farm is looking to our next generation of employees to build on a foundation of our shared values—quality service, family relationships, mutual trust and integrity.

One of the best ways to uncover the issues that impact parenting is to use a scientific survey. It allows for differing views and opinions but also helps indicate recurring issues and themes. Public Agenda has a track record as a reliable, independent investigator of the public's views and shares our interest in building on its earlier report by reflecting on the challenges now facing parents.

Like most Public Agenda research, *A Lot Easier Said Than Done* grows out of a multilayered process that began with a review of existing survey work focusing on issues of parenting. The study also included 12 focus groups conducted in Connecticut, Texas, Virginia, Nashville, Alabama, Ohio and California. The centerpiece of the study, a random sample telephone survey of 1,607 parents of children between 5 and 17 years old, was conducted in July and August 2002. The methodology section of this report includes detailed information about how the study was conducted.

We hope you'll take the public's views from this report seriously. Raising a generation of children with integrity and character involves us all and will impact all of our futures. We hope that you'll learn from this report and that the information shared will shed some light on the challenges faced by parents today.

In many ways, the family is a microcosm of society at large. Knowing what parents value most gives us insights into what society values and what we can expect of future generations.



FINDING ONE:

Protecting Children from the World Outside

Parents say that today's America offers a difficult environment for raising children. They say our society barrages youngsters with harmful messages and, if parents are not very careful, even poses genuine physical dangers for kids. These hazards are a source of constant worry, posing an even tougher problem than household finances or lack of family time for many parents.

For a very large majority of today's parents, the world we live in presents a challenge. With a salacious popular culture and plague of drugs and violent crime, most parents believe that contemporary America can pose an inhospitable and even dangerous climate for raising children. They feel they must be on guard constantly to protect their youngsters from danger. They say they must counter a daily cascade of negative lessons seeping into their homes from the world outside. "It's basically exhausting," said one Connecticut mother interviewed for the study. "What's hard is...keeping the world at bay until you've formed these kids, so that they can learn to make their own decisions and live in the real world."

Kids These Days

The widespread sense among parents that they have to continually protect a child from the outside world and constantly counter its questionable messages is a motif that emerges repeatedly in *A Lot Easier Said Than Done*. Based on a detailed survey of 1,607 parents with children 5 to 17 years old, this study revisits themes from a series of earlier Public Agenda reports entitled *Kids These Days* that unearthed broad concern about the values and behavior of American youth, along with a concomitant belief that far too many parents fail to raise children of good character.¹

The original *Kids These Days* study, published in 1997, prompted extensive media and public response, and the findings generated more than a few questions. What are parents' goals in raising their children today? What do they do to attempt to reach their goals? What helps them be better parents, and what gets in the way of their doing their best? How good a job do parents think they are doing with their own children?

In the chapters that follow, Public Agenda attempts to answer these questions by looking closely at the attitudes

and concerns of parents as a whole and the views of particular groups, including low-income parents, single parents and parents of teenagers. Yet one message emerges clearly from the dozens of individual findings that are examined in the following pages: Whether they are affluent or struggling, whether they raise their child alone or with a spouse, whether they live in cities or suburbs, whether they are raising a young child or a teen, today's parents voice a gnawing unease about society's impact on their children. According to parents, there are just too many dangers, too many temptations and too many harmful influences for them to be able to relax.

A Pernicious Accumulation of Hazards

Almost 8 in 10 (79%) parents say they worry about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol, with more than half (55%) saying they worry about this a lot. Roughly three-quarters say they worry about the impact of negative images in the media (73%) or about negative influences from their child's peers (76%). A similar majority (76%) say they worry about an even more terrible prospect—the possibility that someone might actually harm or kidnap their child.

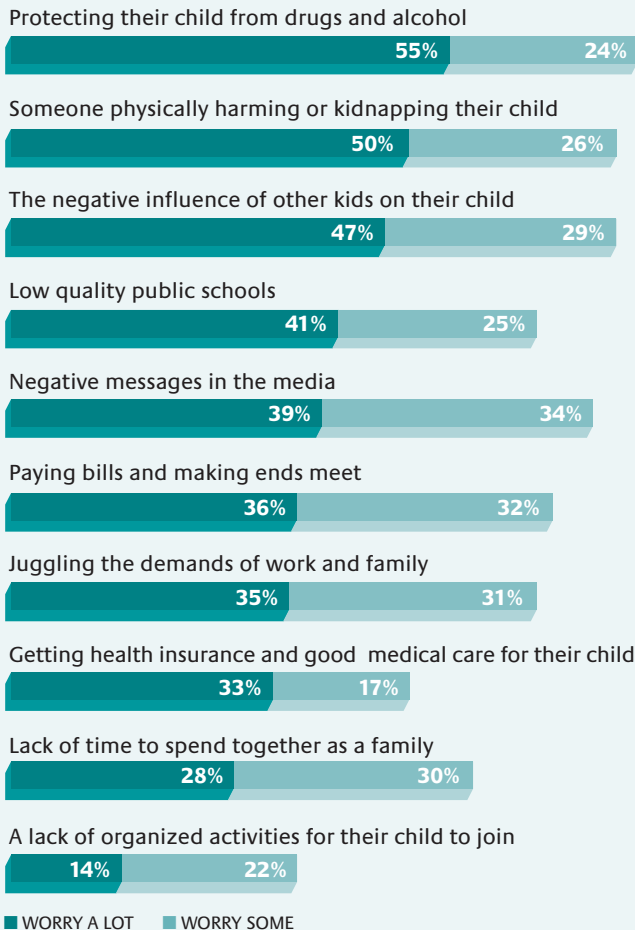
Some talked wistfully about their own childhoods and compared the freedoms they enjoyed to the more tightly controlled existence of children today.

The *A Lot Easier Said Than Done* survey was fielded in summer 2002, during a period filled with intense media coverage of events that could only unnerve parents: the disappearance of 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart and the molestation and murders of 7-year-old Danielle Van Dam and 5-year-old Samantha Runnion, for example, as well as incidents of sexual abuse of children by Roman Catholic priests. With half of parents (50%) saying that they worry a lot about the possibility of their child being kidnapped or harmed, it is certainly plausible that news coverage heightened their anxieties and brought them to the fore.

Yet previous research by Public Agenda suggests that these kinds of parental fears—the sense that something truly

Potential Hazards

Parents who say they worry “a lot” or “some” about each of the following:



NOTE: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Complete Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

horrible might happen to their own child—are not new, nor are they confined to fears of strangers striking out of the blue. In focus groups conducted well before this survey, parents spontaneously brought up fears that their children might be the victims of serious crimes. Public Agenda research conducted in summer 2000—two years ago—showed that more than 6 in 10 parents of young children (63%) are very concerned that children might “suffer physical or sexual abuse” in day care.²

Fear and Consequences

Experts often point out that the statistical likelihood of any of these events—a child murder or kidnapping or abuse by a teacher or child care provider—is minuscule, but for parents the fears are real, and they seem to have a palpable impact on family life. Parents in the focus groups habitually said that danger was a continual undercurrent in their thinking.

In Cleveland, a mother told us: “We never once in our lives ever hired a baby-sitter...Because of things that go on these days, you would worry. There’s baby-sitters that are raping your kids, murdering your kids.” A parent in a nice neighborhood in the suburbs of San Francisco said about her young kids: “They’re not allowed to go outside by themselves and play because I’m deathly scared of someone taking them or of them hurting themselves without me watching them.” In another focus group in Cleveland, one dad spoke about how when he was a kid, the “screen door would just fly open and we could just go up to the corner drugstore...Our parents didn’t even care...But they didn’t think of abduction, rape or any of that.” When the moderator asked if he thinks about these things now, his immediate response was: “I don’t let her [my daughter] out of my sight.”

It may not be surprising that today’s parents worry about the impact of the media, exposure to drugs and alcohol or the possibility of crime, even crimes as serious as kidnapping, rape or murder. The prevalence of these problems in America has been debated and discussed for decades. What is more notable, perhaps, is the breadth of these fears. One might assume, for instance, that drugs and alcohol are fairly distant worries for parents of young children or that families in rural or suburban areas would be less bothered by these kinds of anxieties.

Yet the findings here show that parents of younger children (5 to 9 years old) worry just as much about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol as parents of teens do, and that parents in the country and the suburbs voice almost as much unease as their counterparts in cities. There are a handful of substantive demographic differences: as we shall see in later findings, single parents and low-income parents, for example, are more likely to say they worry a lot about drugs and alcohol, and parents of younger children are more likely than parents of teens to worry a lot that their child might be kidnapped or harmed.

More Worrying than Paying the Bills

One striking measure of how troubling social dangers are for parents emerges when they are asked to compare these worries to the other stresses and strains of family life. Even in a rocky economy, nearly half (47%) of parents say they worry more about protecting their child from negative social influences than about paying the bills (23%) or finding family time together (27%). And by a 49% to 23% margin, parents say they worry more about raising a child who is well behaved and has good values than about providing for their child’s physical needs, although 25% say they worry about both equally.

Few would deny that low-income parents who typically have lower-paying, less secure jobs face enormous pressure. Yet even with the daunting money and time challenges these families

typically face, 42% of low-income parents say their biggest challenge is trying to protect their child from negative social influences, compared to 29% who say it is paying the bills and 25% who say it is trying to squeeze in family time. As we discuss in Finding Six, low-income parents, who may be less able to move their children out of troubled neighborhoods or schools, are in some ways even more apprehensive about the influences and dangers society poses for their children.

Awful Things in the World

In conversations in focus groups, parents often described their attempts to insure their children’s safety and insulate them

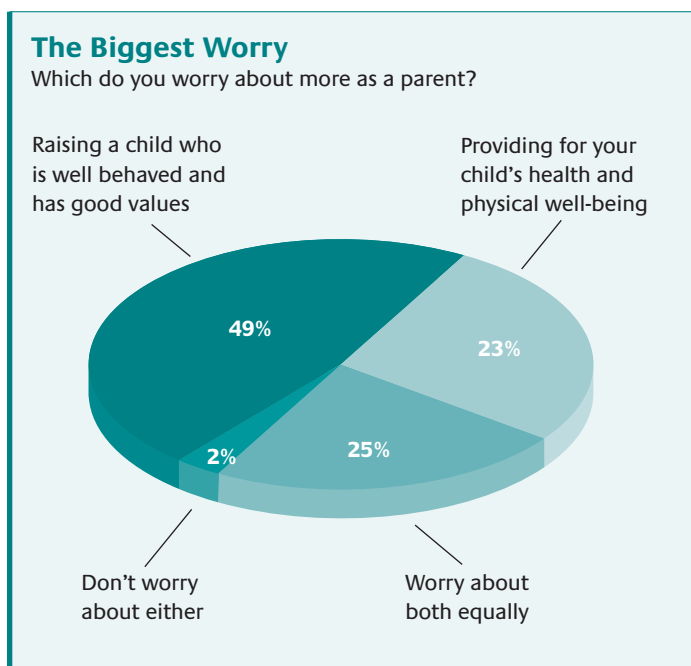
from dangers that could so easily pull them under. Some talked wistfully about their own childhoods and compared the freedoms they enjoyed to the more tightly controlled existence of children today. A mother from Sacramento described how her parents used to let her stay alone while they went night fishing or let her go with friends to a neighborhood carnival and return home after dark. “My mom used to leave me all the time...It was okay to do that [then]. Now, I think, well...it is too dark to send my daughter to the store because she just might not make it back...You can’t let your kids go out and stay out after dark...” A mother in Frisco, Texas, voiced the same concern: “You hope they’re alive at the end of the night. There are a lot of things that are awful in the world.”

“Nothing Is Safe”

But crime is not the only social threat parents talk about. Many in the focus groups seemed genuinely bewildered by the changing social mores they observe and are often shocked by the behavior they see in the media and among people around them. Over and over again, parents referred to what they see as the vulgarity of modern life, and they anguished over the lessons of irresponsibility and tastelessness and selfishness that seem to come from every direction.

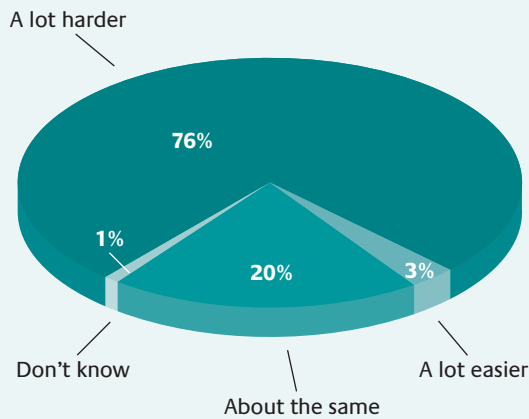
One mother in the focus groups talked about the onslaught from the media. “Nothing is safe. Look at the commercials. I worry more about the violence. I am concerned about the sex also, but [it is] the general violent attitude and immediate gratification...whether it’s sex, or you don’t get what you want so you shoot the other person. The video games and all that stuff encourages all that. Violence in a lot of the CDs and on the radio...[and there’s a] very disrespectful and angry attitude, like ‘Everybody else is garbage, and I’m going to do what I want.’” A mother in Frisco, Texas, complained that even the clean-cut world of high school cheerleading had changed since her teenage days: “In our day...you would at least have an assumption that they would be a good role model. We don’t have that in our high school. Cheerleaders are allowed to get pregnant [and still come to school]...The things they’re doing are almost obscene.”

Many parents described the turmoil they feel as they attempt to balance their desire to insulate their children from harmful influences and yet prepare them for a world that seems so different from the one they grew up in. A Texas father voiced his bewilderment and frustration about some of the youngsters he sees: “But these kids...I know every generation has said that for the last 4,000 years, but it’s staggering to me... I keep going, ‘Who is raising them?’ It’s very startling to me to come to that realization that no matter how hard I try to protect my two little girls, it’s a no-win situation.” A mother



Raising Children Is Harder

Compared to when you were growing up, would you say that raising children today is a lot harder, a lot easier, or is it about the same?



in the same group echoed a similar tension: “The sad thing is, to protect our children, the only way to do that is to lock them up in a room, and never let them go out in the world. We don’t want that for our children.”

Many social scientists would argue that the public often exaggerates the virtues of the past or overestimates the problems we face now, and they often have an arsenal of statistics to suggest that violence, youthful sexuality, crass language and sheer indecency have probably been around since time immemorial. Whatever the statistics show, parents interviewed for this study are convinced that they face greater challenges in this regard than their own parents did. Three quarters (76%) say that raising children is a lot harder than when they themselves were growing up. Just 3% say it is easier, and 20% say it is about the same.

Even so, parents’ complaints about the social forces that make parenting difficult do not mean that they give their own group a free pass. Sixty-one percent of the parents surveyed say they think parents are doing only a fair or a poor job of raising their children these days, and more than half (53%) say this generation of parents is doing a worse job than parents of the past. Just 7% say parents today are better, while 37% say they are about the same.

I Wouldn’t Trade It for the World

Still, it would be misleading to suggest that parents are in despair about their families or completely distressed about their own role. Virtually all of the parents interviewed (96%) agree that “being a parent is wonderful—I wouldn’t trade it for the world.” In fact, 89% of the parents say they agree with this sentiment strongly. “Some days parenting is so great,” said a mother living in Virginia. “You look at your kids and they are doing something—you see them helping somebody and you didn’t have to tell them. A little spark that they learned what I’m trying to teach them.”

As we will see in future findings, parents are often remarkably candid in assessing their own virtues and faults when it comes to raising kids, and they often question themselves on whether they are making the wisest decisions all of the time. But whatever the joys of parenting and whatever questions they are willing to entertain about their own performance, most parents indicate that the tenor of today’s society isn’t helping them. Instead, it is a source of perpetual unease.

Over and over again, parents referred to what they see as the vulgarity of modern life, and they anguished over the lessons of irresponsibility and tastelessness and selfishness that seem to come from every direction.



FINDING TWO:

Television: A Worrisome Old Friend

Parents say that TV in some form is a virtually inescapable part of life today and one that sometimes offers offensive, disturbing messages. Even so, the vast majority of parents acknowledge TV's benefits, and few say they have ever seriously considered doing without TV. Half of parents report that their child has a TV set in his or her room, and they are divided on how they handle television watching in their own homes. Many parents, especially those with younger children, report dogged efforts to supervise TV viewing and filter out or counter its more questionable aspects. Other parents take a laissez-faire approach.

Television is a ubiquitous, well-accepted presence in American life, but the combination of children and television has nearly always been problematic. Polls have chronicled public anxiety about TV's influence on children for decades,³ and the issue of TV violence even prompted congressional hearings and a U.S. surgeon general's report in the 1970s. Yet despite a decades-long discussion about the topic, the TV-and-kids combo appears to be as worrisome as it ever was. A recent Public Agenda survey, for example, showed that 83% of teachers believe that "parents who fail to control how much time their kids spend with TV, computers and video games" is a very or somewhat serious problem in their school.⁴

Parents interviewed for *A Lot Easier Said Than Done* say they too worry about the effect of TV on their children. For many families, TV is the first and primary conduit for the negative social lessons parents worry so much about. And most parents say that one of TV's worst characteristics—its reliance on lurid content to attract attention—has gotten even worse in recent years. But the vast majority of parents also believes that TV can be beneficial and useful, and that it is—whatever one may think of it—a normal, almost unavoidable part of contemporary life.

"...One in the Living Room; One Is in My Room; One Is in My Son's Room...."

Public Agenda's findings in this study reflect what the U.S. census routinely shows. Almost everyone in the United States has a TV set. In this study, just 1 parent in 100 (1%) reports having no television in his or her home, and only about 1 in 8 (13%) reports having only one TV set. In fact, more than half (56%) of parents say they have three or more TVs at home. While it might seem reasonable to conclude that having TV sets scattered about the house is a sign of affluence, the findings here suggest a more complicated picture. Families with incomes

of \$25,000 or less are about as likely to report having three TV sets as are higher-income families, although having more than that does seem to be a phenomenon of the better-off.

Private Screenings

% of parents who say their child has a TV set in his/her bedroom:

Parents of:

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| 5 to 9 year olds | 40% |
| 10 to 12 year olds | 50% |
| 13 to 17 year olds | 58% |

Not only is TV within easy reach in most homes, half of parents (51%) say their child has a TV set in his or her bedroom, although this is more common for teenage children than for younger ones, and for African American children (71%) than for white (48%) or Hispanic (59%) ones. The findings also show a division on how much parents supervise their child's viewing. Almost half of parents (47%) say there is always an adult around when their child watches TV; 46% say sometimes, and 7% report that there is hardly ever an adult present. Again, the child's age does make a difference. Parents of younger children are considerably more likely to report that there is always an adult around when their child looks at TV, compared to parents of teenagers.

A 4-Year-Old with His Own Remote

Comments from the focus groups reflect the varying levels of comfort parents seem to have with TV. A Nashville mother in a multiple-set household was guilt-free about her TV lifestyle. "[There's] one in the living room; one is in my room; one is in my son's room, one in my daughter's room. If I have something I want to watch, and I don't want them to watch, then I can go in my room and watch it...I don't like

Viewing Alone

% of parents who say there is always an adult around when their child is watching TV:

Parents of:

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| 5 to 9 year olds | 73% |
| 10 to 12 year olds | 53% |
| 13 to 17 year olds | 30% |

to fight over the TV or remote. There are four TVs in the house...it's not a big issue." But a father in the same group took a nearly opposite approach: "My kids will never have a TV in their bedroom. It won't happen at my house...you don't know what they're watching. There's so much junk. There's probably 95% garbage."

A Birmingham father hoped blocking some channels on his cable service would allow him to take a laissez-faire approach to TV, but he acknowledged his ambivalence: "I'm real relaxed on television, really too much...There's a few channels I block out of his television. The 4-year-old, he has his own television, own VCR and the remote, and he knows how to use it. The channels that you would think of are not in there, of course. But I don't monitor basically what he watches. Sometimes I go by, and I hear something. I tell him, 'Whoa, you're not watching that. That's a channel I forgot to take off...'"

No Safe Havens

While almost all of the parents surveyed say television is part of their child's life to at least some degree, most (73%) do worry about negative images in the media, with almost 4 in 10 (39%) saying they worry a lot. More than 7 in 10 say they have been "shocked or offended" by something on TV in the last year (71%), compared to 29% who say this has not happened. Nearly the entire sample—90% of the parents interviewed—agrees that when it comes to "bad language and adult themes, it seems like TV programs are getting worse every year." In fact, a large majority (70%) of parents say this is very close to their view. As one father put it during a focus group: "Soon they'll be killing people on the cooking channel. Now, they've got this very sexy woman."

Given this, relatively few parents consider the early evening hours a safe haven for family viewing—even though this is the time when parents and children are most likely to be watching TV together. Just 19% of parents say shows aired between 8:00 and 10:00 are "usually okay for the whole family to watch"; 65% say these shows often have themes that are "inappropriate for children," with parents of children 5 to 9

years old (77%) even more likely to say this is so. A Nashville father said that he had "noticed a lot of crude shows... getting earlier and earlier. It used to be that anything that had rude language on it [was] on at 10:00 or 11:00 at night, and now they're moving that to 8:00 or 9:00." A Connecticut mother had reached her own conclusion: "There isn't a safe time," she said.

"Watching Those Videos, He Thought He Was Cool"

Many parents we spoke with said they had been shocked by what they considered to be overtly sexual or gratuitously violent fare on TV, and some related their own family battles over it. A mother of a Nashville teen told her story: "Probably the biggest mistake I ever made was purchasing him a TV. I didn't do it, but his godmother did. But I condoned it and let it come into his room...My son just went crazy. I think it was the music and...the dancers were virtually naked. They were vulgar. They moved vulgar, talked vulgar. He thought it was okay, so he started talking vulgar...He's at that point in life where he's trying to figure out what is the good thing to do. Watching those videos, he thought he was cool. 'Tight' is his word."

Not all of the complaints focused on the well-visited themes of sex and violence. Parents often grumbled about insufferable, smart-mouthed TV characters, often in cartoons or situation comedies, who, as one mother put it, spend their time "running around back-talking parents and elders." Others seemed less worried about the specific

content of TV than about its overall effect on family life. A Nashville mother said: "I think we make it too easy for them. I have a granddaughter that's 4 years old, and if she's told to go to her bedroom, that's not a real big punishment. She's got a TV, VCR, radio—and she's only 4 years old."

Other parents seemed uncomfortable with what they see as television's trance-inducing effect. "I've got a sister who is a teacher," said one mother, "but her kids love that television. If you go there, they cannot hear you. You can talk to them, and they do not hear you." A Connecticut mother described a similar phenomenon in her own home. "My house comes to a halt when the TV goes on, an actual halt. They walk through the door, and they stop halfway."

Nearly the entire sample—90% of the parents interviewed—agrees that when it comes to "bad language and adult themes, it seems like TV programs are getting worse every year."

“People Are Watching It”

To the extent that parents are concerned about the content of TV—as opposed to the effect of the medium itself—they largely agree on why TV executives often push the envelope. Eighty-one percent say TV executives put sexual content and crude language on TV to make money by getting more people to watch. Just 15% believe that they emphasize these themes because they have “a different sense of what’s appropriate.”

In focus groups, parents were often fairly sophisticated, if somewhat cynical, about how the TV business works. “People are watching it,” said a Nashville father. “I just don’t want my kid watching it. It may be appropriate for a male between the ages of 24 and 35 that’s unmarried—that may be the demographic they’re going for.” A Virginia mother complained, “The networks don’t have a social conscience...they won’t take a show that [is] socially redeeming, that shows the best qualities. If it’s not attracting people, they won’t keep it on just because it’s an uplifting show.” Another mother said: “The more junk they can get out there, the more viewers they hope to get.”

Parents are divided on whether they and those who share their outlook could ever change the situation. About half (49%) say executives would pay serious attention if “10,000 people were to call a TV network to complain about something that was broadcast,” but 47% say they would probably ignore it. With such mixed views about the potential impact, it may not be surprising that just 13% of the parents who say they have been shocked by something on TV have contacted the station or network to let them know. Even those who did may not have felt they were making much of a difference. One mother described the response she received when she wrote to complain. “They sent me a letter of apology, but the show is still on...It’s a thing like ‘It’s your opinion, and you’re entitled to it.’”

“I Don’t Want Him to Be So Sheltered . . .”

Yet despite parents’ concerns about TV and their skepticism that much could change, fewer than 1 in 4 (22%) say they have seriously considered getting rid of it altogether. This is not just because they themselves might like to relax in front of the TV when the day is done. The vast majority of parents say TV definitely has a good side for kids. Virtually all parents (93%) say TV is fine for a child as long as he or she is watching the right shows and watching in moderation, and more than 8 in 10 (85%) say there’s nothing wrong with a child relaxing for a while in front of the television.

Not only is TV an acceptable form of entertainment, according to most parents, it can and does contain some uplifting, positive

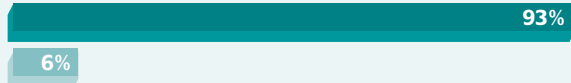
lessons. Eighty-two percent of parents say they have watched a TV program that was helpful in getting a good message across. Just 17% say this has not happened. Perhaps not surprisingly, parents who always monitor their child’s viewing are more likely to say that TV has been helpful in conveying a good message (84%, compared to 65% of parents who take a laissez-faire approach to supervising TV). Still, paying very close attention to what children watch does not guarantee good results. Parents who supervise TV closely are also more likely to say they have been shocked by something on TV (74%, compared to 56% who hardly ever supervise).

TV’s Pros and Cons

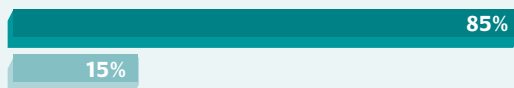
Please tell me how close each of the following statements comes to your view.

PROS

TV is fine for for my child as long as he/she is watching the right shows and in moderation

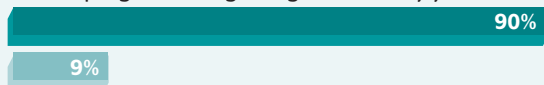


There’s nothing wrong with my child relaxing for a while in front of the television



CONS

When it comes to bad language and adult themes, it seems like TV programs are getting worse every year



Wherever my child turns he/she sees crude or sexual messages in the media



■ VERY/SOMEWHAT CLOSE ■ NOT TOO/NOT CLOSE AT ALL

In focus groups, some parents talked about how they use TV to help their child begin to cope with the world outside the family. A Nashville mother took advantage of what is often considered adult fare to introduce her teenage son to some of life’s realities. “*Boston Public* is a real heated show about a high school in Boston. They cover issues from lesbians...to the gay teachers, gangs, all kinds of things. Just real intense, but my oldest son likes to watch it, and I’ll watch it with him because it’s a prime opportunity to talk about the way other folks live. A lot of things on *Boston Public*...are real. I don’t want him to be so sheltered that he thinks everything is Mickey Mouse.”

In the end, parents seem to fall into two camps with different views on TV viewing and different ways of handling it. About half of parents (48%) say, for example, that they worry their child watches too much TV, but 52% say it is not an issue for them. Similarly, 47% of parents complain that “wherever my child turns, [he/she] sees crude or sexual messages in the media,” but 52% say this is not the case.

Parents of children aged 5 to 9 are less likely than parents of teens to say that their child encounters crude or sexual messages in the media, by a 32% to 55% margin. But parents of younger children are also more likely to say they monitor their child’s TV viewing closely: 73% say there is always an adult around when their youngster is watching TV, compared to 30% of parents of teens who say this. It is also possible that parents of younger children take advantage of TV programs and cable channels planned specifically for them and that younger children are not yet especially attracted to edgier, more adult TV fare.

Deciding to Live with the Beast

Many will see a paradox in what parents have to say about TV. Majorities castigate it for serving up a vast wasteland of vulgarity, yet few have ever taken the time to make a complaint. They say TV is awash with programs and commercials that are inappropriate and that these are available at any hour of the day. Yet nearly all families have at least one TV, and roughly half provide their child with a TV set in his or her own room.

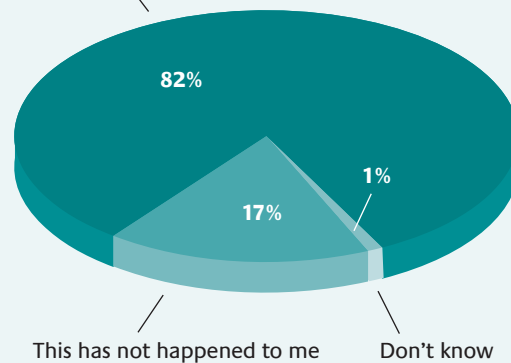
As a group, parents may indeed be inconsistent in the way they handle TV. Still, based on what we learned here, most would quickly point out that the medium can offer splendid opportunities for children to learn and expand their worlds if it is used in the right way. What’s more, many seem to say, TV is virtually unavoidable anyway. Children who don’t see TV at home will quickly encounter it in the homes of relatives and friends, and even if they don’t actually watch much, they will soon enter a world in which TV is a common cultural reference point—perhaps *the* common cultural reference point.

Given parents’ perpetual unease about the dangers in society at large, some may also see TV as less worrisome than letting a child play outside or go to the park or take a bike ride or visit a neighbor’s house. In focus groups, parents sometimes regretted that they cannot allow their child to enjoy the aimless, unsupervised play in the neighborhood that they themselves took for granted as children.

Good Lessons from TV

In the past year, have you watched a TV program that was helpful in getting a good message or lesson across to your child, or has this not happened to you?

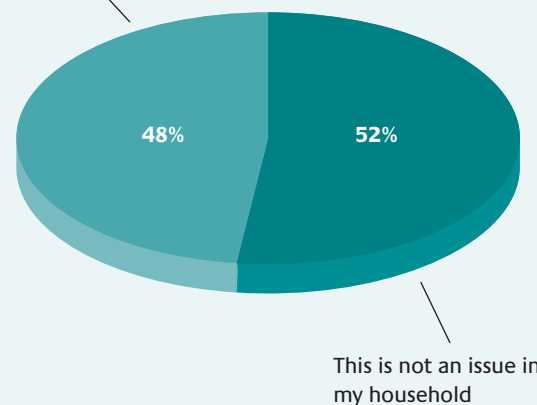
Have watched a TV program that was helpful in getting a good message or lesson across



How Much Is Too Much?

Do you ever worry that your child watches too much TV, or is this not an issue in your household?

Worry that my child watches too much TV



“We Watch TV while We Eat”

And for some parents, TV just seems to be a fact of life. A Los Angeles father described the situation in his house: “My kid watches a lot of TV. We have cable, satellite. They have every channel. I’m not saying it’s good or bad. I’ve always watched a lot of TV. If we’re not out working or at dinner, we’re watching TV. We watch TV while we eat.” When asked if he ever worried that TV might have a negative effect on his children, his answer was frank and straight to the point. “I couldn’t tell you. I don’t know what they would act like [without TV].”



FINDING THREE:

Trying to Create a Responsible Adult

America's parents know there are certain values and character traits that are essential to transmit to their children, and they readily admit that far more work needs to be done in many areas before they can claim success. Today more than ever, there seems to be a special urgency and practical relevance to making sure their children attain crucial character traits—such as independence, self-control, honesty and politeness—because having them can help mitigate the harmful messages and negative social influences that so many kids are exposed to these days.

The litany of values and character traits parents try to pass on to their children is reassuringly familiar and hardly likely to cause controversy—and perhaps it's notable for that reason. What does stand out from conversations with parents is the sense of heightened urgency behind their efforts. Today, parents believe, the stakes and risks are high. Children need to be armed with these character traits so that they have a fighting chance when they confront rough social circumstances and face tough choices.

But a very important question is the extent to which parents are following up and fighting for the realization of those values they deem essential. As it turns out, today's parents are all too willing to acknowledge that a lot of work remains to be done with their own child—often in areas that are critical.

A Reassuring Hierarchy of Values

The list of values and traits parents wish to impart to their children is hardly new. In the survey, Public Agenda asked parents about the importance of teaching their child 11 character traits and values—and some were almost universally perceived to be absolutely essential. The values that are rated in the top tier include teaching children to be honest and truthful (91% say it is absolutely essential to teach this to their child), to be courteous and polite (84%), to have self-control and self-discipline (83%) and to always do their very best in school (82%). At least intellectually, America's parents have clearly not abandoned tried-and-true character education.

In the second tier are other positive values and traits that attract slightly weaker but still significant majorities. About 7 in 10 say it is absolutely essential to teach their child to be independent (74%), to save money and spend it carefully

(70%) and to have good nutrition and eating habits (68%); about 6 in 10, to help those who are less fortunate (62%) and to have strong religious faith (61%).

Everything but the Kitchen Sink

These character traits are as reliably popular as motherhood and apple pie. What's more, one can imagine other values—teaching kids to work hard or to respect their parents come to mind—that could have been included in the survey and easily garnered similarly high levels of support. So it is perhaps reassuring to note that parents do not consider everything to be absolutely essential and are in the end willing and able to prioritize the lessons they try to teach their kids.

For example, although it will undoubtedly disappoint some, teaching kids “to enjoy art and literature” is rated by only 33% as absolutely essential—another 61% say it is important but not essential. And given the emphasis these days on healthy nutrition and eating habits, some may be perplexed by the fact that only 51% rate the importance of exercising and being physically fit as absolutely essential to impress upon their youngsters. From a parent's perspective, the number of important messages they must impart to their child is innumerable, so a hierarchy inevitably evolves. Some values rise to the top—such as having self-control—and others may be desirable but lack the same sense of urgency. After all, some parents seem to be reasoning, children who never learn to enjoy art and literature may well miss out on some of life's pleasures and humanity's greatest creations. Still, they wouldn't

necessarily grow up to be “bad” people. Children who never learn honesty and self-control, on the other hand, could well become adults who are dangerous to themselves and to others.

From a parent's perspective, the number of important messages they must impart to their child is innumerable, so a hierarchy inevitably evolves.

Today More than Ever

One important insight from the focus group conversations is the special urgency and practical relevance these values have gained, principally because parents are so worried about the risks and dangers of these times. Honesty, for example, is not only intrinsically valued; today, many parents want their child to feel he or she can tell them anything—so that mistakes and wrongdoing don't escalate into calamities because the kid was afraid of getting into trouble. “You want them to feel like they can tell you anything,” said a Texas dad. “So if they've

at teaching them. So just how good a job are parents doing of raising kids to be independent and self-sufficient, to be honest? Are they willing to critically evaluate their own performance and that of their own child?

Rather than adopting a defensive “My child is perfect,” parents are surprisingly willing to admit to their own shortcomings. One quick measure: In only 6 of the 11 traits does a (typically slim) majority of parents say they've succeeded in teaching it to their child. In the focus groups, parents

spoke with candor about weaknesses in their parenting styles, and they were more than willing to criticize themselves—though not one another—about mistakes they were making. In the Alexandria, Virginia, focus group, a dad was on the receiving end of playful ribbing when the other parents contrasted their experiences with his idyllic description of his twin girls—they even loved broccoli—and the peaceful, protected atmosphere he described as his home. The others seemed grateful for the chance to unburden themselves in front of other parents.

Trying to Teach Self-Control

A good way to assess how successful parents are—at least according to their own perceptions—is to look at the percentage of parents who identify a goal

as absolutely essential and subtract from that the percentage who think they've succeeded with their own child. This analysis shows that even in the areas where parents indicate a sense of urgency, there are still gaps between their goal and the success they feel they are making in teaching it to their child.

Using this formulation, the biggest problem area for America's parents is in teaching children “to have self-control and self-discipline.” Here, there's a vast 49-point gap between the 83% who say it's absolutely essential to teach and the 34% who say they've succeeded with their own child. A Texas dad frankly admitted he falls short in this realm: “My challenge is I need to be more focused on discipline and all that. Life is so short; I want to have fun.” As we shall see, many of the values that parents want to pass on to their child are directly connected to the concepts of self-control and self-discipline.

Materialism

The second most difficult area for America's parents appears to be in teaching kids to save money and to spend it carefully,

The Success Rate

Please tell me how essential the following are to teach your kids and whether you feel you have succeeded in doing so.

| | ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL | - | HAVE SUCCEEDED | = | GAP |
|--|-------------------------|---|-------------------|---|-----|
| To have self-control and self-discipline | 83% | | 34% | | 49 |
| To save money and spend it carefully | 70% | | 28% | | 42 |
| To be honest and truthful | 91% | | 55% | | 36 |
| To be independent and to do for themselves | 74% | | 38% | | 36 |
| To always do their very best in school | 82% | | 50% | | 32 |
| To have good nutrition and eating habits | 68% | | 40% | | 28 |
| To be courteous and polite | 84% | | 62% | | 22 |
| To have strong religious faith | 61% | | 53% | | 8 |
| To help those who are less fortunate | 62% | | 55% | | 7 |
| To exercise and to be physically fit | 51% | | 53% | | -2 |
| To enjoy art and literature | 33% | | 51% | | -18 |

just done something horrible and they come and tell us, he's not getting in bad trouble.” Several parents talked about taking their young child “downtown” to the police station when he or she was caught stealing something trivial, deliberately overreacting to make the lesson stick early and stick hard.

For parents, teaching kids to have self-discipline and to be “independent and think for themselves” warrant careful attention not only because these traits are so elemental to raising children, but because of the era in which they live. “There's a lot of scary stuff out there; we see it every day. I don't have any control over 99.9% of things that happen. If you teach somebody how to make good decisions and to rely on themselves, they're going to manage pretty well later on,” said a Virginia dad, adding, “You're not going to be there every day of their life.”

Little Johnny Is Not Perfect

It is one thing for parents to say these are critical character traits to teach their kids; and quite another to actually succeed

a practical application of the value of self-control. Here, there's a 42-point gap between the 70% of parents who think it is absolutely essential to teach this to their child and the proportion of parents (only 28%) who think they've succeeded.

A consumerist mentality appears to have taken a firm hold of many of America's youngsters, according to parents. Only 41% of parents of children 10 or older say that brand names don't matter to their child when buying clothing, shoes or sneakers, while 59% say they are at least somewhat important. A Nashville mom complained about her son: "The oldest is the most difficult; he's at the crazy insane kind of stage. He's a clothes-aholic. He'd be fine if he didn't eat for a week, as

long as I got him another pair of pants or shirt or whatever, just as long as he was the jazziest thing in school."

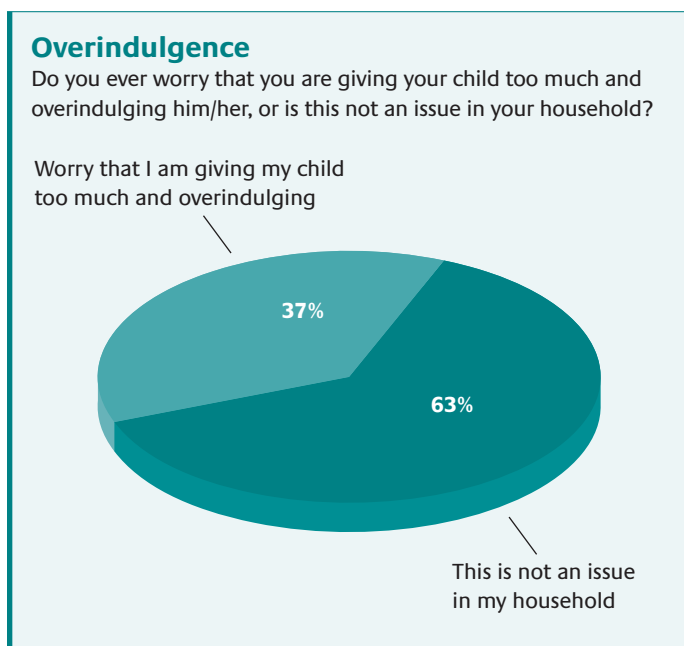
Parents who overindulge their kids were frequently criticized in the focus groups, and they were often willing to criticize themselves. We heard several comments like this one from a divorced Cleveland father: "I spoil her too much, I think, and then she takes advantage of me." And in the survey, 37% of parents were also honest enough to answer in the affirmative when asked if they "ever worry that you are giving your child too much and overindulging him/her." Perhaps not surprisingly, higher-income parents (49%) are more likely to worry that they overindulge.



Independence

There is also a 36-point gap between the percentage of parents who think teaching independence is absolutely essential (74%) and the percentage who think they've succeeded in doing it (38%). Parents have to balance a desire to give kids autonomy with fears about the consequences of a child's misstep. "My little girl, if she forgets something, I'm there," said a Texas mother. "I'm trying not to do it. I want her to learn responsibility. I tell her, 'Before you go to bed, get your backpack together because I'm not running around in the morning to do it.' Here I am, running around in the morning."

Sometimes parents are thinking about even more serious consequences of independence. A Cleveland mom who had lived in the same neighborhood her whole life said, "My daughter is 10 and I never let her go to the corner store, which is five houses down. My brother said, 'You know you need to let the child go to the store by herself.' It never even dawned on me. I used to go down and hang out at the corner store all the time when I was little, and it didn't bother my parents none. But I don't trust the corner now." Meanwhile, parents have to contend with the possibility that their son or daughter will be led astray: more than 4 in 10 say their child sometimes (40%) or constantly (5%) listens to kids who are a bad influence.



Honesty

There's a 36-point gap when it comes to teaching children to be honest and truthful: 91% of parents say it's absolutely essential, while 55% say they have succeeded. A Nashville mom told this story: "My oldest got in trouble at school for lying and taking things—taking something that belonged to someone else. That was such a big deal for me. They had a teen court at school. I went there and testified against him. I wanted them to find him guilty. I told them, 'I never want to see my son sitting on that side of the table again in the courtroom.' I was totally intolerant. He was turning 16 a

week later, and he was going to get his driver's license. But I have not allowed him to get it yet as a result of that."

Love of Learning?

Virtually no one questions the crucial role parents play in setting expectations and standards for their child. But America's parents have yet to find the right formula for getting their kids to do their very best in school. Fully 82% say it's absolutely essential to teach, but only 50% think they've achieved success on this front—a 32 point gap. "He's doing what he has to," said a Nashville dad with resignation. "I think that's where we've compromised with him. As long as his progress reports come home with a 'Yes,' then he's okay for the next week. If not, then he's grounded until we see that next sheet. That's all there is now..."

Many parents ask themselves if they could be pressing their child to try harder in school. In fact, nearly half (49%) say "they worry that they might need to push their child more when it comes to school work." African American parents (62%) and Hispanic parents (57%) are more likely to feel this way than white parents (46%).

And even as educators often point to reading as the gateway academic skill in school, only 42% of parents say that reading is something their child loves to do. Instead, 1 in 5 (21%) says his or her child does it only when there's no choice, and another 36% say it's somewhere in between. A Birmingham dad was struggling with precisely this point with his 11-year-old: "He's not wanting to read. He'll go in his room and play, he'll go play outside, come back in, want to watch TV. Then he gives me the old, 'Well, I've read for 10 minutes. Is that enough?' Now I'm thinking that he's seeing reading as a punishment—he's never going to want to read for his own enjoyment."

Eat Well

Having good nutrition and eating habits is another sore point, with a 28-point gap between those who say it's absolutely essential (68%) and those who say they've succeeded (40%). More than 9 in 10 say their child sometimes (71%) or constantly (20%) eats junk food. An Alabama dad retraced the deterioration at his family's dinner table: "It's 'Eat your vegetables.' 'I don't want to.' 'You're not going to get a dessert until you finish.' And then, 'Okay. You don't want it? All

right. Here, have some ice cream.' So I don't get too upset about when they don't eat what they should be eating." And a Virginia dad laid it on the line like this: "Once you get teenagers, you go for what's the best you can hope for. It's the abnormal teenager that's going to eat a well-balanced diet and not drink a lot of soda."

Recent government statistics show that approximately 15% of the nation's children are obese—and other reports provide even higher estimates.⁵ The findings in this survey may help explain some of the problem.

First, many parents appear to be falling short on teaching good eating habits; second, only 51% believe exercise and physical fitness are absolutely essential to teach kids. The problem does not appear to be a lack of information and knowledge, at least not for this Virginia dad, who is a trained nutritionist and chef: "I know what needs to be done, I do, but you can't fight that battle every day. Eventually they'll wear you down. What are you going to do? I did not set limits early enough. I did not put my foot down early enough." The outside world also makes it difficult for them to control what their kids eat. Here, a Virginia mother points out what she is up against. "I've got a 16-year-old that's in high school. They have Coke machines in high school, and that upsets me a lot. He takes \$2 for lunch. Does he have lunch? No. He'll buy a pack of cookies. I say, 'Don't do that.' But he still does it."

Still Work to Be Done

As we shall see in Finding Five, parents of teens, compared to parents of younger children, are more likely to report success in teaching many of these principles and values. This is not surprising—it takes time to transmit the values of hard work, self-control and honesty, among others. But even parents of teens indicate progress is rocky, and many say they still have work to do.

America's parents have yet to find the right formula for getting their kids to do their very best in school. Only 50% think they've achieved success on this front.



FINDING FOUR:

The Complex Equation of Parenting

There are an infinite number of strategies for raising children, and parents of kids of all ages say they often find themselves struggling to find the right one for each situation. Virtually all believe that giving children constant love and encouragement is a critical approach to child rearing, but they also believe that preparing children for real life requires structure and boundaries. Parents often find themselves weighing the need to protect their children from danger against the need to loosen the reins and let kids learn from their own mistakes. Last, a special analysis uncovers four types of parents with characteristic attitudes and behaviors bundled together to form distinctive parenting styles.

As the previous findings have made clear, parents have a full agenda. In the face of challenging social circumstances, they're trying to teach crucial character traits to their child, but they often suspect they are falling short. "It's hard to have rules, and it's hard to maintain those rules consistently," said a Texas mother. "It's the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. It really is."

What becomes quickly apparent from talking with parents is that whenever they have a dilemma or complicated decision to make, there is no one set strategy, no playbook, for them to rely upon. As a dad from Connecticut said, "I want to know where the manual is. When you get a piece of electronics it [comes] with a book." Instead parents are struggling with many powerfully held—and sometimes contradictory—principles about raising children. Moreover, they often try to take into account a child's personality or stage of life and to consider the consequences of going this way or that. Finally, their own state of mind will come into play: how tired they are, whom they can count on for help, what their parents would do or what their spouse may think.

Parents, it seems, must always be on the ball, able to see through puzzles that are often inherently insolvable or that at least involve trade-offs. For parents, this means there is always room for error, for miscalculations or for outcomes that seem strange to others. This may help explain to other adults—grandparents, neighbors, teachers, strangers in the supermarket—why parents sometimes allow seemingly inexplicable behavior from their kids.

Universal Principles...

From 1946 until the present, America's parents raised baby boomers—and baby boomers raised their own children—on the strength of the advice of such child experts as Dr. Spock

and Dr. Penelope Leach. So the notion that love and support are crucial to raising healthy children is by now virtually unquestioned—fully 92% of parents say that "constantly giving your child love and encouragement is crucial to preparing him/her for life."

But along with love, America's parents also believe that children will thrive with structure and boundaries. Fully 94% say that "children do best when parents set limits and enforce them." One parent told us: "The discipline hurts me more—I want to see her on the phone having fun with her friends, so it's hard to take her phone away from her. But that's more loving...to set rules." And 75% agree with the statement, "When I say something I expect my child to listen—not to question me."

...And How Parents Apply Them

It's easy enough to see that these varying principles can often pull parents in different directions when decision time comes around. If the child does something wrong, should they focus on reassuring the child that they still love him or her? Or should they make clear that a line has been crossed? Or should parents stand aside and let the chips fall where they may? With so much advice and so many possible approaches, there is a lot of room for ambiguity, confusion and mixed messages.

For example, parents are divided on how to teach the importance of keeping commitments. The survey asked parents if disciplining their child for not keeping a promise is "crucial to preparing him/her for life." Half (50%) say discipline is crucial in this situation, but about half (47%) say there are better ways to do this. "[My child] is not a baseball player," said a mother from Texas. "But he wanted to be there because his friends did it...He was awful. But the rule we had—if you sign up, and we pay the money, you owe it to your team—to finish the season." But another mom in Virginia had a tough experience trying to

teach her child to live up to a commitment. She had serious reservations when her teen daughter insisted she wanted to visit a girlfriend in Europe, but she relented under pressure from her husband and daughter. As it turned out, her daughter had a miserable time and from the first day called asking—and finally pleading—to come home. The mom, trying to teach the “you made your bed, now lie in it” lesson, ended up with even more damage on her hands. “The day after she got there she called me up and said, ‘Can I come home?’ She was homesick. Her friend had really changed. That was a very costly mistake. I kept thinking, ‘Stay; you’ll make it over the hump.’ She never made it over the hump. She ended up staying eight days. She came home. We had a \$1,000 phone bill. It was very hard to get her to go anywhere for a long time. I’m very happy she went away to college—that was an accomplishment. She was really traumatized by the whole thing.”

Are Parents Too Weak?

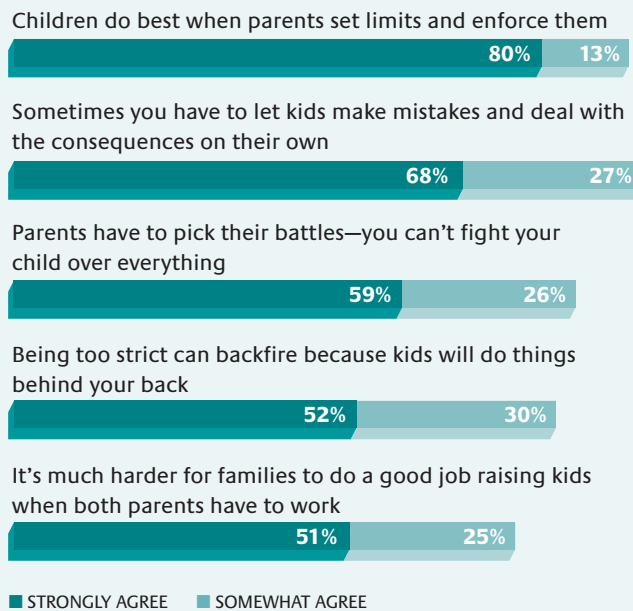
Schoolwork provides an even more concrete example of how, as parents juggle different goals and priorities, something may be dropped. Thirty-seven percent of parents say that pushing their child to finish schoolwork even when he or she is tired is crucial to preparing the child for life, but 61% say there are better ways to accomplish this.

Outrageously weak parents? Sometimes. Teachers will often complain about parents who fail to shoulder responsibility for their kids when it comes to schoolwork, and as we will see later in this finding, there is a small group of parents who give in at the first sign of resistance from their kids. But what may be perceived as a shirking of parental duty in certain cases may in fact be an attempt by parents to teach their child to take responsibility for their own work and for prioritizing time productively. This was a principal insight of Public Agenda’s *Playing Their Parts* study, in which parents put a premium on getting kids to take more responsibility for their schoolwork as they got older. Sometimes it meant sending kids to school unprepared—and letting them suffer the consequences.⁶

In a focus group in Sacramento for the current study, a mom told us about how she refused to buy her daughter new books for school. The teachers thought she was an irresponsible parent, but this mother was outraged that her daughter had allowed the old ones to be ruined. She was trying to teach her child to take responsibility for her possessions and to appreciate the value of money, even if it meant that her grades in school would suffer. “Okay, if you don’t take care of your books...you’re going to lose all of your privileges and all your stuff,” this mother told her daughter. “You figure it out... The grade is not the issue. It is the money we have to pay out because you’re not being responsible. So you need to learn now.”

Universal Truths of Parenting

% of parents who say they “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the following statements:



Let Them Make a Few Mistakes

Parents are also caught struggling among conflicting prerogatives when they weigh the need to protect children from danger against giving them the chance to learn life’s lessons from taking chances and making mistakes.

Virtually all parents (95%) subscribe to the belief that “sometimes you have to let kids make mistakes and deal with the consequences on their own.” And teaching children to be mature and to take responsibility means that failure is an option. Sixty percent of parents say they feel that it is more important to let their son or daughter learn from making some mistakes and dealing with the consequences, while 35% say they feel it is more important to protect their child from making harmful mistakes. A mother from Frisco, Texas, put it this way: “As they get a little bit older you have to let them fail. Let them make a choice. Let them suffer the consequences for that choice. If you’re constantly standing behind them making their choices for them, they’ll never succeed.”

Yet parents are all too aware of the dangers facing their child: nearly 8 in 10 (79%) admit to at least some worries about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol; 3 in 4 (76%) admit to at least some worries about someone physically harming or kidnapping their child. So parents must also judge when the risk of harsh consequences is too great. Perhaps this is the reason only 45% say letting their child handle stressful situations alone is crucial to preparing the child for life, while 51% say there are better ways to accomplish this.

Picking Their Battles

Parents must also decide which battles are more important to fight—since they also believe it is untenable and unrealistic to constantly be admonishing, warning and keeping a tight rein on their kids. Fully 85% say that “parents have to pick their battles—you can’t fight your child over everything.” More than 8 in 10 (82%) believe that “being too strict can backfire because kids will do things behind your back.” Hold the leash too tight, they might secretly violate your rules. Hold the leash too loose and they might get into trouble they can’t get out of.

At the same time, many parents may resort to picking their battles simply because they are too exhausted to fight after

What becomes quickly apparent is that whenever they have a dilemma, there is no one set strategy, no playbook, for them to rely upon.

putting in a full day at the office. More than 3 in 4 parents (77%) agree with the statement, “It’s much harder for families to do a good job raising kids when both parents have to work,” with 51% saying they strongly agree. And about 2 in 3 worry either a lot (35%) or some (31%) about juggling the demands of work and family. This mom from Cleveland described what

it was like for her when both she and her husband worked outside the home: “Well, I would come home, and I would be tired, and I’d have to still do all the things that I do now. I had to do the laundry. I had to do the grocery shopping. I had to get dinner. All those things still have to be done, even if you’re working full-time. So, when you get home, it’s just stressful. Then, if you had a bad day, and your husband comes home, you don’t really feel like giving him a lot of TLC. If you’re going to give it to anybody, it’s probably going to be to the kids, because you’ll feel guilty if you don’t. It’s just hard.”

Yell, Threaten, Bribe, Cajole

Today’s parents have probably learned the mantra that modeling good behavior is the best way to insure that their kids will absorb. “Kids watch what you do, not what you say” was a common refrain in the focus groups. But somehow—either because the practice of parenting is very different from the ideal or because they simply run out of options—only a third (33%) of parents think it’s a realistic possibility to raise well-behaved children by relying solely on positive reinforcement and teaching by example. Far more—63%—believe it’s sometimes necessary to rely on punishment or threats, even if they don’t quite believe that this tactic works for the best. A father from Birmingham described this back-and-forth with his son: “He won’t straighten up his room. He won’t pick up anything on the floor. He’ll step over his Rollerblades in the middle of

the living room...He’s supposed to be working on homework ...My tactics are punishment. Take Nintendo away, stay in your room, can’t go outside and play with your friends. He will do it. But like I said, I’d like for him to learn to be responsible on his own, and I don’t see much progress of that happening.” Only 24% of parents say they themselves never yell or threaten to punish their child—far more (76%) admit this is something they have resorted to at least once in a while. Only a third (33%) say they never bribe kids with a reward to get them to do things they don’t want to—far more (67%) admit this is something they have resorted to at least once in a while.

Spanking

Corporal punishment—spanking—was perhaps the most controversial topic in the focus groups and the one area where parents, usually loath to question one another’s tactics—were willing to take one another on. Many (43%) go so far as to think that parents who never spank can’t “do as good a job of disciplining children as parents who do spank”; but 53% think parents who don’t spank can do as good a job. Nevertheless, most of America’s parents (63%) say they have spanked their child, while 37% say this is something they do not do. For some parents, it simply depends on the child. “We have two boys,” a father from Texas told us. “One child is, ‘Come on, Dad, spank me, let’s get it over with so I can go back to what I was doing.’... My other son, you just look at him and he’s almost in tears.”

Spanking

% of parents who say:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Parents who never spank can do as good a job disciplining children as parents who do spank | 53% |
| Spanking is something they never do | 37% |
| Spanking is something they have resorted to | 63% |

Naturally, the age of the child matters. Parents answering the survey with a teenager in mind were less likely to resort to spanking than those with children 5 to 12 years of age (49% to 64%)—though the fact that about half of teens still get spanked is notable. A mother from Alabama described what happened with her teenager: “I just noticed a drastic change in him. His voice changed...and I had to change the way I dealt with him. I no longer hit him...I try to communicate with him more. I try to reason with him.” Also noteworthy: African American parents are more likely to say they spank than white parents are (76% to 61%), and parents who have an only child are more likely to say they never resort to spanking than parents with three or more kids (45% to 31%).

Parenting Style

Very early in the focus group research, Public Agenda interviewers noticed that some parents have distinctive mind-sets—a particular set of beliefs that shape their worldview of parenting. Some parents, for example, clearly think of themselves as their child’s best friend, others consider themselves strict disciplinarians. These parenting styles are interesting in their own right, and there are also some intriguing links between these different approaches and how they affect children’s behavior.

A series of questions was built into the survey to uncover some of these parent archetypes, and four prominent ones were distilled: The Overwhelmed—parents who feel stressed and not in control of how their child turns out; the Softies—parents whose first inclination is to give in or look the other way; the Parents in Chief—parents who run a tight parenting ship; and the Best Buddies—parents who want to think of themselves as their child’s best friend. We should caution that not every parent falls into a specific type and that just because a parent falls into one type doesn’t mean that he or she can’t hold attitudes that belong to another.

The Overwhelmed

The sense that many parents are failing at their core mission is fairly ubiquitous. In *A Lot Easier Said Than Done*, 61% give parents negative marks when it comes to the job they are doing raising children today. And by their own accounting, there is one group of parents that does seem to be having a significant degree of trouble getting the results they want from their kids. These parents fall into The Overwhelmed category—17% of the sample. They seem to have lost a sense of efficacy as parents and feel there is little they can do to control how their child turns out. They also appear to parent the most at-risk families. One hundred percent of The Overwhelmed say that “there’s so much stress in my life that being a parent can be overwhelming”; that “I can see how my child has picked up some bad habits from me”; and that “children are born with their own personality—as a parent there’s only so much I can do.” “In my family we do a lot of yelling because he [my son] yells and we yell to be heard over him. I worry about that. Just try to do the best you can do and hope you’re doing the right thing,” said a Virginia father whose beleaguered household typified this approach.

These overwhelmed parents are more likely than the rest of the sample to say they worry their child is too rude or talks back (50% to 33%) and to say their child constantly or sometimes uses bad language (38% to 25%). They are also more likely to report their child wears clothes that are too sloppy or revealing—a 41% to 29% margin. More than half (51%) say they worry their child is acting too grown-up, too fast—compared

to 32% of the rest of the sample. They are more likely to say their child listens to kids who are a bad influence by a 57% to 41% margin. They worry that they aren’t pushing their kids enough when it comes to schoolwork (63% to 46%). Perhaps most revealing, The Overwhelmed are almost twice as likely as others to say they have gone “to a professional therapist or counselor about issues regarding [your] child”—a 36% to 19% margin. Demographically, The Overwhelmed tend to have lower incomes and less education, and they are less likely to be married. They are more likely to be mothers.⁷

The Overwhelmed (17% of sample)

100% of The Overwhelmed say:

I can see how my child has picked up some bad habits from me

Children are born with their own personality—as a parent there’s only so much I can do

There’s so much stress in my life that being a parent can be overwhelming

Base: n=276

The Softies

Softies—17% of the parents in our survey—are the parents who by their own account are too quick to give in to their child’s wants and are reluctant to lay down the law. All of the Softies say they are “sometimes too tired to be firm with my child even when I know I should,” and they all describe themselves as a parent who “sometimes lets too many things go” and who “sometimes gives in too quickly.” A Virginia mom seemed to exemplify this mind-set: “There’s a lot out there and you hate to say no. ‘You want to do this? Okay.’ So much of your parenting is a result of your own childhood, and we never had the money to do a lot of things.”

Softies (17% of sample)

100% of Softies say:

I’m sometimes too tired to be firm with my child even when I know I should

I sometimes let too many things go

I sometimes give in too quickly

Base: n=278

More than half (54%) of Softies have kids who spend too much money shopping, compared to 37% of the rest of the sample. They worry that they are giving too much and overindulging their child (a 48% to 35% margin). Softies are more likely to confess they resort to bribing their child (81% to 64%); to say their child listens to music with bad language (63% to 53%);

and to say that their child wears clothes that are too sloppy or revealing (43% to 29%). Softies are more likely to worry that they might need to push their child more in school (60% to 47%). Softies are also substantially more likely to worry that their child is too rude or talks back—a 53% to 32% margin. In only one demographic area are Softies significantly different than other parents: they are more likely to be mothers.⁸

Parents in Chief

Parents in Chief are those who seem to watch their kids carefully and are clear about who’s in charge. These parents, 18% in our sample, also have a distinctive response set. One hundred percent say that “when I say something I expect my child to listen—not to question me.” Said a mother from Texas: “I give respect. I demand it. She’s 9 and she’s at that point where she’s rolling her eyes, making that noise. I do not like that and I will tell her straight up, ‘Do not do that to me.’... I have slapped her a couple of times, and I tell my husband fear is not a bad thing.” All Parents in Chief reject the statement that they “would have never dared to say to my parents some of the things that my child says to me.” Finally, they all describe themselves as parents “who can sometimes be too overprotective.”

| |
|---|
| <p>Parents in Chief (18% of sample) 100% of Parents in Chief:</p> <p>Agree:</p> <p>When I say something I expect my child to listen—not to question me</p> <p>I can sometimes be too overprotective</p> <p>Disagree:</p> <p>I would have never dared to say to my parents some of the things that my child says to me</p> <p>Base: n=288</p> |
|---|

Fully 72% of Parents in Chief report that their child never spends too much money shopping, compared to 58% of the rest of the sample. They are also far more likely to say their child never talks back, a 41% to 25% margin; never uses bad language, an 84% to 70% margin; and never listens to music with bad language, a 58% to 42% margin. And they are far less likely to worry about back-talk or rude behavior (21% to 39%). Demographically, Parents in Chief are more likely to be the parents of young children, to have more than one child and to have daughters.⁹

Best Buddies

Finally, 8% of the parents in our survey are Best Buddies, parents who seem to want to be their child’s friend rather than an authority figure. All of the parents in this category say they “sometimes feel more like my child’s best friend than

their parent”; say they “try hard to be a very different kind of parent than my own parents were”; describe themselves as “a parent who sometimes does too much explaining”; and also describe themselves as “a parent who sometimes praises too much” rather than criticizes.

| |
|---|
| <p>Best Buddies (8% of sample) 100% of Best Buddies say:</p> <p>I try hard to be a very different kind of parent than my own parents were</p> <p>I sometimes feel more like my child’s best friend than their parent</p> <p>I sometimes do too much explaining</p> <p>I sometimes praise too much</p> <p>Base: n=126</p> |
|---|

Best Buddies seem to be fighting against the closest role models of all—their own parents. Fully 58% of them say they are doing a better job than their own parents did—only 35% of the rest of the sample say the same. A mom in Virginia put it this way: “My parents said no to us a lot. No, no, without ever thinking it out, and we couldn’t have an opinion. My sister and I don’t have a lot of self-esteem as a result of that, so I made a decision I would listen to [my child].” Best Buddies are somewhat less educated than other parents.¹⁰

Are We Having Fun Yet?

At certain points in the focus group conversations, the cumulative troubles and dilemmas of raising children seemed so daunting that the moderator sometimes asked the parents if the parenting business was ever fun or rewarding. One parent in Texas had this perspective: “I have a 24-year-old and a 17-year-old, so I remember all the fun things of them meeting you at the door and they thought you were the greatest person in the world. Then you go through the teenage years where you don’t know anything and you never will know anything. But I have to say, it’s also finding out as they become adults—with my 24-year-old daughter, we’re very close. Whatever happened—the fights we had as a 5th grader through about 9th grade to 11th grade—I really thought, ‘We’ll never have a relationship, it will always be strained.’ But we’re very close.”

Other parents talked about moments of pride, moments of accomplishment, that made all of their effort seem worthwhile. But for nearly everyone, the notion that parenting was an easy-to-do, risk-free job that entailed little sacrifice or no hard work was an utterly foreign concept. Perhaps as a function of the hard times they live in, and/or perhaps because the stigma has lessened, 22% of America’s parents say they have gone to a professional therapist or counselor about issues regarding their child.



Finding Five:

Dating, Driving and Decisions: The Teen Years

Parents face a special set of dangers and problems as their children navigate the teen years, and parents fully recognize this. Yet parents of teens also are committed to the idea that as children get older they must make their own decisions—and learn from their mistakes. The findings suggest that a chief goal of parenthood is to raise youngsters to be independent, to make wise decisions and to function well without constant adult intervention.

In a survey of parents of public school children conducted in 1999, Public Agenda asked them to predict which time of their child’s life would cause them the most worry—the elementary, middle or high school years. The answer, according to more than 7 in 10 parents, was the high school years.¹¹

In the focus groups for *A Lot Easier Said Than Done*, parents across the country talked about a number of very real outside threats that plague their thoughts about their teenage child. What if a student sneaks a gun into school? Does my child pal around with the wrong crowd? Is my child experimenting with drugs or alcohol? Just how obliging should I be when my teenager legally reaches driving age? “It doesn’t get any easier,” said a parent in the San Francisco Bay Area. “They get into high school and there are drugs and gangs...”

So Much Time, So Many Temptations

While it may sound cliché to say that raising a teenager is a whole different ball game, parents of teenagers recognize the genuine difficulties and dangers their youngsters may encounter. In Public Agenda’s study *Kids These Days ’99*, approximately 9 out of 10 parents of teens said too much violence or sex in the media, exposure to drugs and alcohol and the threat of crime and gangs are serious problems for today’s kids.¹² In the current study, more than half of the parents of teens say they worry a lot about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol (53%), and approximately 4 in 10 worry a lot about negative peer influence (44%), someone physically harming their child (43%) and low-quality public schools (39%). In addition, 6 in 10 (60%) agree that, as children get older, it gets much harder to know their kids’ friends or become acquainted with other parents (39% agree strongly with this sentiment). A mother from Sacramento, California, put it this way: “It’s completely different now than it was 40 years ago. There’s drugs and...crime and, it’s just a completely different society. There’s so many bad influences out there.”

A Lot More Worrying

Here are some statements about raising teenagers. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following:

You start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to drive



Kids become a lot more challenging when they hit the teen years



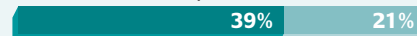
You start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to date



As kids get older, parents have to ease up and give them more freedom



When kids get older, it’s much harder to know their friends and their friends’ parents



Base: Parents of teens (n=820)

■ STRONGLY AGREE ■ SOMEWHAT AGREE

“Don’t Even Ask until You’re 17”

Parental concerns increase markedly when children reach the age for two teenage rites of passage—driving and dating. Virtually all parents of teens (93%) agree that parents “start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to drive,” with 76% saying they agree strongly. This anxiety came through plainly in focus groups. “I have two teenagers that are approaching the driving age, which is frightening to me,” said a working mother of four in Connecticut. “For the past three or four years I’ve been drilling each of the kids, ‘Don’t even ask until you’re 17.’” A father from Birmingham said, “I worry about my teenagers...you get into a car with some nut...you’ve got no problem with your son, but I met some of the guys he’s hanging with. What kind of judgment do they have?”

An overwhelming majority of parents of adolescents (83%) also say that parents “start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to date,” with 60% agreeing strongly. For parents, there is an all-consuming fear that one mistake could end up haunting their teen for the rest of their lives. A mother from Nashville put it bluntly: “It’s my own personal greatest fear. It’s that my sons will make an irrefutable error as a child that will devastate their life forever. He’s 16...I think about my son, and it would be easy for him to get involved in sexual activity. He could father a child at 16. Well, whether we call that a mistake or a blessing, a child, it’s his forever until the day he dies.” In Cleveland, a mother whose daughter was just shy of her 16th birthday described the dating scenario in her home: “We have to know what time, who’s driving, where she’s going. We want a phone call when they get there. I mean, we have tons of rules in our house, and if she wants to go out on that date, she’s got to follow all those rules.”

Higher Stakes, Less Control

With all of the trials and tribulations of adolescence, it’s not surprising that the vast majority of parents of teenagers think that child rearing becomes a lot more challenging when kids reach the teen years (86%). One of the greatest challenges for parents is figuring out when it’s appropriate to permit their teen to assert independence without compromising his or her safety. A 13-year-old may find it reasonable to expect to walk to and from school each day without having a parent tag along, but parents may see danger lurking on every street corner. For older teens, the stakes are even higher, as this mother from Los Angeles summed up: “If my daughter is in her car, I don’t know if she’s going to have an accident on the freeway. I don’t know if she’s going to go someplace she shouldn’t go and somebody puts something in her soda. If she’d get raped. There are so many things that could happen.”

Loosening the Reins

However difficult it may be, it is during the teen years that parents make a concerted effort to loosen the reins and let kids learn from their own mistakes, according to the parents surveyed for *A Lot Easier Said Than Done*. More than 8 in 10 (82%) parents of teens agree, “As kids get older, parents have to ease up and give them more freedom,” with 40% agreeing strongly with this statement. “When they grow up you have to—little by little—train them to live on their own,” explained a mother from Nashville. “Give them more freedom and room to make mistakes as they get older.” And she added, “It’s hard to let your kids make mistakes.”

In an earlier survey of parents conducted by Public Agenda, more than 6 in 10 said that less parental involvement in school as children get older “is a sign the student is learning

to be independent and to manage school on their own.”¹³ As one Cleveland parent interviewed for the current study commented, “Especially when they’re older, with homework, if you choose not to do it, you’ll pay the consequences. You can’t always tell them every little thing that they have to do. They have to learn to make decisions on their own, and live with the consequences.”

On the one hand, it is a parent’s job to teach independence, encourage curiosity and prepare kids for life in the real world. At the same time, however, how does a parent knowingly send their innocent teen out into a world full of potential dangers and pitfalls? The mother in Nashville who was worried about her 16-year-old son becoming sexually active said, “As a parent, I don’t want to be so tough that my kids don’t learn and don’t become independent...But my fear is that if I’m not there to teach them right and to mold them, they will make that [one] mistake...” “I’m raising black males,” said a Birmingham mom. “I knew they were going to grow to be taller than me. So I used that elephant mentality on them. You know how they say, tie the elephant up when he’s younger. When he grows, he still thinks he’s tied. He won’t move.”

Turn Off that Noise

While many parents do take a firm stand on some of the more troublesome teen activities, most lean toward being flexible rather than rigid. For example, the survey asked what parents should do if teenagers “want to listen to music with bad or crude language.” Twenty-seven percent of parents of teens say they should “forbid it under any circumstances,” compared to 63% who say parents should be flexible. Only 1 in 10 (10%) says parents should not make an issue of it at all. A parent from Connecticut explained the deal she and her husband have made with their teenage son about listening to rap music: “I don’t like that every other word is f— or sh—. Excuse me, but they’re loaded with swears...So what we learned is that if he wants to listen to it and he swears, then he loses his music for 24 hours. So my son no longer swears. If he does, he will immediately catch himself in it.” In the survey, most parents report that their teenager “listens to music with bad language” either sometimes (51%) or constantly (12%). Thirty-six percent say this never happens.

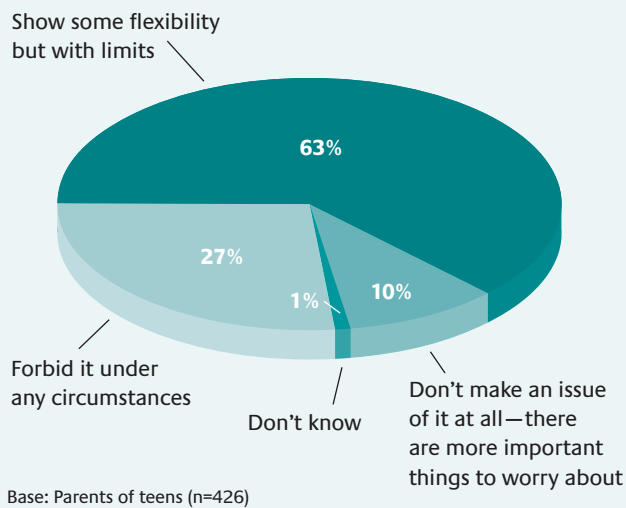
“...But my fear is that if I’m not there to teach them right and to mold them, they will make that [one] mistake...”

—Nashville mother

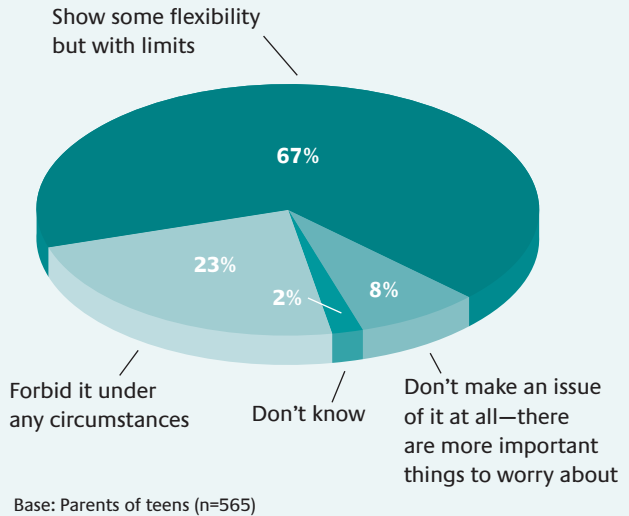
Crude Language, Sloppy Clothes

If teenagers do each of the following, what should parents do?

If teenagers want to listen to music with bad or crude language



If teenagers want to wear sloppy or revealing clothes



You're Not Wearing That

Similarly, when it comes to wearing “sloppy or revealing clothes,” 23% of parents of teens say parents should “forbid it under any circumstances,” compared to 2 out of 3 (67%) who think parents should be flexible. Only 8% opt for a totally hands-off approach. “I don’t mind buying him underwear—I want him to have nice underwear,” said a mother of a teenage boy in Nashville. “[But] if I see your underwear again, that means I bought those pants too big, and that was my fault, and I will take them back...When he’s home his pants are up because I just think it’s disrespectful, I don’t want to see anybody’s underwear.” Another mom commented, “I’m not wasting money on clothes that are inappropriate for my daughter to wear. I will throw them in the trash in a heartbeat.” But according to parents of teens, arguments about proper attire are not as commonplace in their households as many might expect. Almost 2 in 3 of the parents of teenagers surveyed (65%) say their child never “wears clothes that are too sloppy or revealing”; 26% say it sometimes happens; and about 1 in 10 (9%) says it constantly happens.

More Talking Back

There is no doubt that raising teens comes with some serious challenges and new worries. But according to parents themselves, many of the day-to-day problems they face can be attributed to typical teenage angst or to adolescent behavior that is more likely to be irritating than dangerous. For example, almost 8 in 10 parents of teenagers report that, at least some of the time, their teen does not do the chores he or she is asked to do, and almost 7 in 10 say their teen “talks back.”

Said one parent in Connecticut, “Their mouths start running as they get older, definitely, and they’ll push you that way and just try to wear you down.” More than half say their teen spends too much time on the computer or on the telephone, and more than 4 in 10 say their teen spends too much money shopping. And, hardly unusual, almost 9 in 10 parents who have more than one child say their teen “fights or argues with their siblings” at least some of the time. “Overall, I’m happy and it’s fun, especially now as she’s older and I can do more things with her,” said a mother from northern Virginia. “[But] she’s getting to that cranky teenage age. You can’t give up on them...It has its ups and downs.”

On a more positive note, in some of the more disturbing areas where youngsters could be heading in the wrong direction, most parents in our survey report that their own teen seems to be on the right track. More than 3 in 4 say their teenager never stays out too late (77%), and a large majority also say their teen never uses bad language (63%). More than half say their teen never “listens to kids who are a bad influence” (55%).

A Job that’s Never Done

In Finding Three, we saw ample evidence from the survey data and the focus groups that parents themselves admit to falling short when it comes to teaching important character traits to their kids. One might argue that teaching and attaining any of the values that parents want to pass on to their children—self-control, for example, or courtesy and politeness—is work that requires time. This prompts a question: Are parents whose children are older (13 to 17 years old) more likely than parents

of younger kids (5 to 9 years old) to say they have succeeded in teaching their children essential values?

The survey findings show that in some areas, parents are more likely to report success as their children age—but in other areas the improvement is less than spectacular. Signs of progress can be found in the large majorities of parents of teens who say they have succeeded in teaching courtesy

and politeness (70%), understanding for those who are less fortunate (62%) and honesty (61%), compared to smaller proportions of parents of younger children.

But there has hardly been astounding progress on what many may consider to be far more critical measures of character. For example, while 83% of parents of teens say it's absolutely essential to teach children "to have self-control and self-discipline," only about 4 in 10 (41%) say they've succeeded at teaching this to their child, only modestly better than the 24% of parents of younger children who say they have been successful. Similarly, 44% of parents of teens say they have succeeded in teaching their child "to be independent and to do for themselves," compared to 30% of their counterparts with younger kids. And there's virtually no improvement when it comes to teaching children to always do their best in school—only about half of the parents of teens (51%) and parents of 5 to 9 year olds (48%) say they've succeeded at teaching this.

The Problems

How often does your [teenager] do each of the following?

| | HAPPENS CONSTANTLY | HAPPENS SOMETIMES | NEVER HAPPENS |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Stays out too late | 3% | 20% | 77% |
| Wears clothes that are too sloppy or revealing | 9% | 26% | 65% |
| Uses bad language | 4% | 33% | 63% |
| Does poorly in school | 5% | 36% | 59% |
| Spends too much money shopping | 11% | 32% | 56% |
| Listens to kids who are a bad influence | 5% | 39% | 55% |
| Spends too much time on the phone | 20% | 34% | 46% |
| Spends too much time on the computer | 16% | 43% | 41% |
| Listens to music with bad language | 12% | 51% | 36% |
| Talks back | 9% | 60% | 31% |
| Fails to do the chores you ask him/her to do | 14% | 63% | 23% |
| Fights or argues with siblings [Asked of parents with 2 or more children] | 28% | 60% | 12% |
| Eats junk food | 24% | 65% | 11% |
| Base: Parents of teens (n=820) | | | |

The Success Rate

Have you succeeded in teaching your kids the following?

| % OF PARENTS WHO SAY IT IS "ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL" TO TEACH THEIR CHILD | PARENTS OF 5 TO 9 YEAR OLDS | PARENTS OF TEENS |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| To be courteous and polite | 52% | 70% |
| To help those who are less fortunate | 42% | 62% |
| To be honest and truthful | 46% | 61% |
| To always do their very best in school | 48% | 51% |
| To be independent and to do for themselves | 30% | 44% |
| To have self-control and self-discipline | 24% | 41% |
| Base: Parents of 5 to 9 year olds (n=460) | | |
| Base: Parents of teens (n=820) | | |



FINDING SIX:

Depending on the Circumstances: The Views of Low-Income Parents and Single Parents

As we have seen, most parents in America today share similar goals for raising their children and have similar fears regarding society’s impact on the well-being of youngsters. But there are some noteworthy distinctions among low-income parents and single parents. Both groups are more likely to have serious worries about their children’s social milieu, making ends meet and getting health insurance for their kids. And despite their personal struggles, both groups of parents say their biggest challenge is protecting their children from negative social influences.

Thus far, we have examined the attitudes and concerns of America’s parents overall and discovered two important findings. First, parents across the board share the same goal, essentially that their children grow up to be decent, caring human beings who are independent, self-disciplined and good decision makers. Second, the majority of parents in this country are extremely uneasy about a barrage of harmful societal influences they believe children of all ages face. Parents contend with negative messages that children get not only from peers in school—which parents believe they can manage to some extent—but also from television and other aspects of popular culture, which are seemingly ubiquitous and difficult to control. Parents today say they are fighting—and sometimes losing—an uphill battle to raise their children to have strong values. Moreover, they face an unending conflict around when to be tough on their kids and when to ease up.

It would be natural to expect that families with different circumstances have different attitudes and experiences—for example, those with two working parents face different challenges than those with one parent at home. Few substantive differences emerge when we compare such demographic characteristics as the race, geography, employment status and area of residence of respondents. Low-income parents and single parents, however, do stand out and face special burdens and concerns. Mothers and fathers who are struggling to make ends meet or are raising children alone face burdens that make parenting far more difficult compared to those who have higher incomes or have someone at home to share the child rearing. But what is remarkable is that despite the enormous personal pressures these parents face, keeping their children safe from the coarseness of today’s culture and from

the harmful influences they see all around them still remains their most challenging task.

First, we turn our attention to low-income parents.

The Threats Seem Greater

Please tell me how much you worry about the following:

| % OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY THEY WORRY “A LOT” | LOW-INCOME PARENTS | HIGH-INCOME PARENTS |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| Protecting your child from drugs and alcohol | 73% | 46% |
| Someone physically harming or kidnapping your child | 65% | 39% |
| The negative influence of other kids on your child | 63% | 39% |
| Low quality public schools | 56% | 38% |
| A lack of organized activities for your child to join | 28% | 7% |

Social Troubles

From negative peer influences and worries about drugs and alcohol to lack of organized activities and poor-performing schools, low-income parents stand out from their more affluent counterparts.* For example, almost 3 in 4 low-income parents (73%) say they worry a lot about protecting their child from drugs and alcohol, compared to less than half of high-income parents (46%). They are considerably more likely to say they worry a lot about “someone physically harming or kidnapping” their child (65% vs. 39%). And low-

* Low-income parents are those who report household income of \$25,000 or less in 2001 (n=277); high-income parents report household income of more than \$75,000 in 2001 (n=373). Bases are smaller for questions where split sample was used.

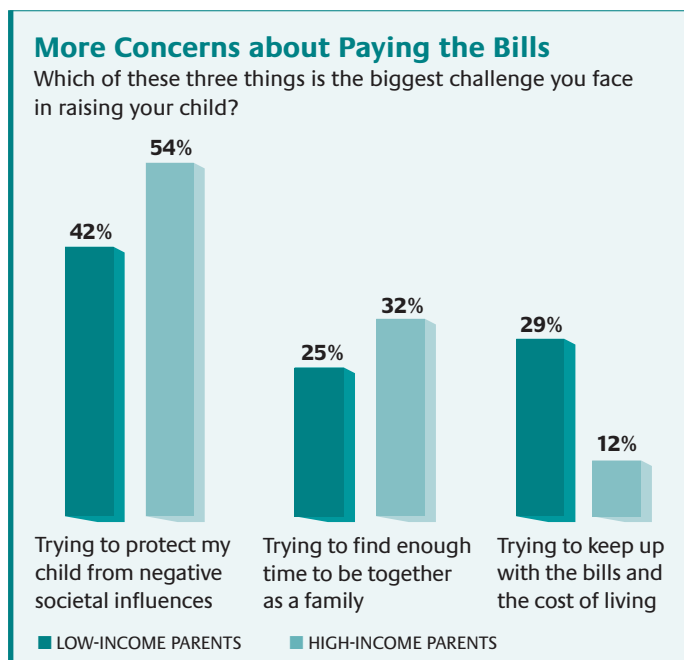
income parents are four times as likely to point to “a lack of organized activities” for their child to join as something they worry about a lot (28% vs. 7%). Similarly, while just a little more than half of low-income parents (53%) say their child regularly participates in structured activities such as a church youth group or organized sports, more than 8 in 10 high-income parents say this is true for their child (82%).

Peer Pressure

Fear that their child will succumb to peer pressure or be under the influence of the wrong crowd is especially troubling for low-income parents. Sixty-three percent say they worry a lot about negative influences coming from their child’s peers, compared to 39% of high-income parents. Six in 10 (60%) also say it’s not unusual for their preteen or teen to be swayed by kids who are a bad influence, compared to 40% of their high-income counterparts. A mother from Sacramento described a recent experience with her 12-year-old: “When she first started junior high...she was defiant and the kids were telling her, ‘...Don’t listen to your parents, just do what we tell you to do.’...She was just like a status person: ‘I have to act this way, I have to look a certain way, I have to be a certain way.’...When I started really talking to her about it, [I found] she really wanted to feel important, she wanted to be popular, she wanted the best clothes, she wanted to just have everything perfect so people would like her.”

Adding to the Burden

Public Agenda and others who conduct research on the nation’s schools consistently find that low-income parents face myriad problems with their local public schools that are just simply not as common among more affluent parents.



Likewise, in Public Agenda’s 2000 study of parents’ views about child care, low-income parents with very young children expressed more fear and wariness about day care centers compared to higher-earning parents.¹⁴ In the current survey, a majority of low-income parents (56%) say they worry a lot about the quality of their child’s school, compared to 38% of high-income parents. And although majorities of both low- and high-income parents say their child’s school mostly reinforces the values they are trying to teach, a smaller proportion of low-income parents feels this way (69% vs. 85%).

Money Matters

But low-income parents also have the added burden of struggling to make ends meet. About half of low-income parents (49%) say they worry a lot about “getting health insurance and good medical care” for their child, compared to only 1 in 5 high-income parents (20%). And they are more than twice as likely as affluent parents to name “trying to keep up with the bills and the cost of living” as their primary challenge (29% vs. 12%, respectively). Still, to reiterate an important result we reported in Finding One: A plurality of low-income parents does single out protecting their child from negative social influences as their greatest parental challenge, above making ends meet or finding time to spend together as a family.

Virtually all parents—rich or poor or in between—say they wouldn’t trade being a parent for the world. But few would argue that having more discretionary income can mitigate the pressures and strains that accompany raising a family. According to the survey findings, low-income parents are more than twice as likely as those in affluent families to agree that life as a parent can sometimes be too stressful and overwhelming (56% vs. 24%); to say they worry a lot about “juggling the demands of work and family” (52% vs. 24%); and to say that there’s too much tension and arguing in their home (27% vs. 13%). And they are almost twice as likely to say they worry a lot about not having enough time to spend together as a family (41% vs. 23%, respectively).

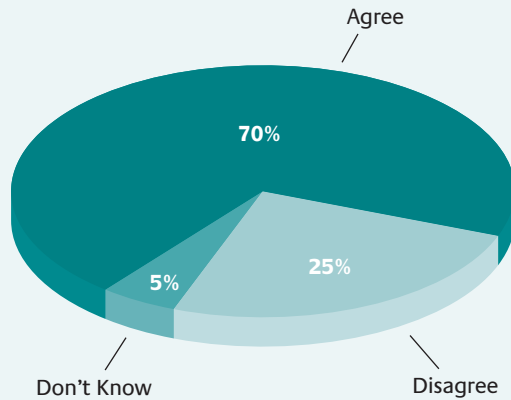
The Parent-Child Relationship

For many parents, especially those who lack sufficient funds, it’s inevitable that their frustrations and anxieties over money would somehow affect how they behave toward their child. The findings suggest that parents in lower-income families are softer on their kids in some ways and perhaps more likely to overlook bad behavior. More than half of low-income parents (53%) say they agree with the statement “I’m sometimes too tired to be firm with my child even when I know I should,” compared to 38% of those who earn more than \$75,000 per year. More than 7 in 10 (71%) agree with the statement “I would have never dared to say to my parents some of

Stress and the Single Parent

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

To be a single parent has got to be the most stressful thing in the world



Drugs, Bills and Insurance

Please tell me how much you worry about the following:

| % OF PARENTS WHO SAY THEY WORRY "A LOT" | SINGLE | MARRIED |
|---|--------|---------|
| Protecting your child from drugs and alcohol | 73% | 52% |
| Paying bills and making ends meet | 51% | 31% |
| Getting health insurance and good medical care for your child | 49% | 30% |

the things that my child says to me,” compared to 52% of high-income parents. And while only one in four (25%) low-income parents say they stay very consistent “when it comes to enforcing rules” for their child, one in three (34%) of the more affluent parents say this is true for them.

“It’s Really Hard”

The other group that faces a special set of challenges is single parents. Parents overall view the job of parenting as a tough one—to think of doing it alone is virtually unimaginable to most. Seven in 10 parents in America (70%) agree that “to be a single parent has got to be the most stressful thing in the world,” with 51% saying they agree strongly. This sentiment is held by majorities of parents across the board—married or single, urban or suburban, black or white, low income or high. In our focus groups, single parents corroborated this finding, speaking openly about their struggles. “It’s really hard,” said a Los Angeles mother. “They know there’s only one income...that there’s only a certain amount of money that goes so far...the burden of being the [only] one there to answer their problems. You have to keep them in close check.”

One single mother in the Nashville focus group said it quite plainly: “When you have to be the mommy and daddy, you have to learn real quick [sic].”

Those who have a wife or husband at home were sympathetic. “I think that’s the hardest job in the world,” said a married mother from Texas. Another added, “I know the frustration and the weariness that everyone gets, but a single parent has to continue [because] they’re all that child has...I can remember many a night that I said I’m going to get in the bathtub, going to bed, turning on a movie, reading a book, I don’t want to hear any little voices. I was able to do that...”

In many ways, single parents vary little in their attitudes and experiences when compared to their married counterparts.* But on some matters, particularly when it comes to concerns about preserving their child’s innocence or anxieties about their child’s physical well-being, the differences are notable. About half of single parents (49%) say they worry that their child is acting “too grown-up, too fast,” compared to about a third of married parents (32%). Single parents are also considerably more likely than those who are married to say they worry a lot about such things as protecting their child from drugs and alcohol (73% vs. 52%), paying the bills (51% vs. 31%) and getting health insurance and medical care for their child (49% vs. 30%).

Despite the enormous personal pressures these parents face, keeping their children safe from the coarseness of today’s culture and from the harmful influences they see all around them still remains their most challenging task.

But still, when asked to choose their biggest parenting challenge, single parents are somewhat more likely to point to the dangers of the outside world than to financial concerns. A plurality of single parents say protecting their child from negative societal influences is their greatest challenge (36%), compared to 30% who say keeping up with the bills and 29% who say finding enough family time. (For married parents, these percentages are: 49% protecting their child, 22% keeping up with the bills and 27% finding family time.)

* The category of “married” includes those who say they are currently married (n=1,160) and those who are living as a couple (n=50). The category of “single” includes only those who indicate they have never been married (n=128). Bases are smaller for questions where split sample was used. Those who say they are currently divorced, separated or widowed are excluded from the analysis; according to the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report *America’s Families and Living Arrangements* (June 2001), divorced parents are typically older, are more educated and have higher incomes than those who never married.

“Sometimes I Cry”

While half of single parents (50%) agree with the statement “There’s so much stress in my life that being a parent can be overwhelming,” a substantially smaller 34% of married parents agree. For some, the pressures are at times almost unbearable. “Oh, it’s very stressful,” a mom from Birmingham, Alabama, said. “I’m a pretty educated person, but it’s just so stressful. I can understand why [single] women are abusive to their children. I mean, I don’t think it’s right, but I can understand the kind of stresses that lead to that. I’ve been a single parent for five years.” A single mother of twin 12-year-old girls in Sacramento, California, put it this way: “Sometimes I cry now because, you know, I’m thinking, ‘How am I going to do this?’ ...It’s kind of stressful sometimes. But I, I do it.” This same mother described how she constantly strives to show her daughters how grueling it is to be a single parent—to dissuade them from any romantic notions about what it would be like to have a baby of their own. “Almost every week—I probably get on their nerves saying it, but I say it—if I see an example of a mother, just by herself, and she is pushing a stroller, I say, ‘Okay, what do you see? Tell me what you see here.’ And they say, ‘Well, there’s no dad there. She’s walking. She probably doesn’t have no [sic] money for the bus or she doesn’t have no [sic] car, and she is carrying her groceries and it’s 12 o’clock, so she probably doesn’t work, and she’s got a kid.’”

Parenting Approach

As we report earlier in this study, parenting styles and strategies are numerous. Sometimes parents try different things depending on a child’s temperament or age, for example, and sometimes their approach depends more on their own state of mind or personality. Generally, single parents seem more likely to be a “best buddy” than married parents. Half of single parents (51%) say they “sometimes feel more like my child’s best friend than their parent,” compared to one-third of married parents (34%). They are more likely to agree with the statement “I try hard to be a very different kind of parent than my own parents were” (67% of single vs. 55% of married). And single parents also are more likely to say they sometimes praise too much than married parents (42% vs. 31%).

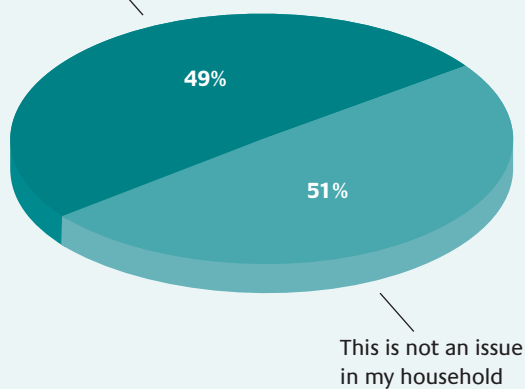
When describing what it’s like to raise a child alone, some single parents in the focus groups talked about having a feeling that they somehow need to make up to their son or daughter for their missing parent. Sometimes this manifests itself in giving in too easily. “My son, I guess because his father wasn’t in the picture ...I let him get away with everything,” said a single mother from Redwood City, California. “I think he’ll live with me until he’s about 40...” The survey findings suggest, however, that single parents are no more likely than married parents to say they worry about overindulging or giving too much to their child (34% vs. 38%).

Children Growing Up Fast

Do you ever worry that your child is acting too grown up, too fast, or is this not an issue in your household?

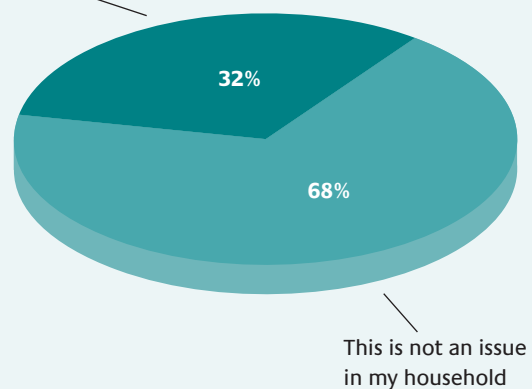
Single Parents

Worry that my child is acting too grown up, too fast



Married Parents

Worry that my child is acting too grown up, too fast



Afterword by Deborah Wadsworth, President, Public Agenda

Over the months we spent talking with parents for this study, and in the weeks that have followed its completion—as I’ve begun sharing our findings with experts in the field, colleagues, journalists, family and friends—I have been stunned by the intensity of the responses these issues elicit.

It may not be hard to understand why this should be so among those who are themselves parents. But the universal intensity of these reactions begins to make sense only when one realizes that every person who brushes up against this study inevitably and immediately conjures memories, images and events of a personal passage from childhood to maturity. Whether the journey was happy or troubled, secure or lonely, successful or not, I suspect every reader of this study cannot help but compare his or her own childhood “then” with what parents say their children are experiencing today.

Today’s parents have much to say about these times, and most particularly that the times have changed indeed. Recent studies have amply documented the economic constraints facing many families, and parenting literature has repeatedly provided evidence of the stress families feel as a consequence of the pace of life, the obligations of the workplace and the lack of time to parent well.

You Can Never Let your Guard Down

There is no doubt that for many parents these problems are serious and in need of attention. And, in *A Lot Easier Said Than Done*, hard-pressed parents often reiterated these concerns. But, this study also highlights another area that consumes their attention. Whatever problems parents face, from too few resources to too little time for togetherness, these are often overshadowed by the challenge of trying to protect their children from the morally inhospitable and even dangerous environment that undermines them at every turn. It is difficult to overstate the scope and intensity of the anxieties and fears parents experience as they attempt to shield their children from myriad threatening social influences. Many parents say that today’s environment makes it impossible for them to let their guard down even for a minute. For parents who lack the financial wherewithal to move to better neighborhoods and schools, the threats from negative social forces are even more daunting.

Kids Are Scary Too

Now, it is also a fact that large numbers of adults say they too feel anxious, finding kids wild and disrespectful. In earlier studies by Public Agenda, large majorities say too many

youngsters seem to be out of control—and they don’t mean just teenagers. Moreover, the public holds parents responsible for producing these unruly, disrespectful youngsters, with large numbers believing far too many children lack a consistent moral compass. They point to distracted parents as part of the problem. At the same time, most people also agree that it is much harder to raise kids these days.¹⁵

Not Guilty of Disinterest

The parents we interviewed clearly acknowledge their responsibility for their children, and most are remarkably honest about their successes and failures in instilling the values they hope their children will live by. Nor are most of them particularly defensive when it comes to evaluating their own child, acknowledging in many instances that they still have a long way to go toward accomplishing their parenting goals. They may be guilty of many of the accusations leveled against them, but ignoring their job as parents is not a common sin.

The parents we interviewed are anything but thoughtless about how they ought to raise their children. If at times they seem riddled with ambivalence and tension, conflicted about how best to respond to a given situation, they also convey how seriously they are struggling to figure out how to balance their desire to raise independent, self-disciplined youngsters while protecting them from the dangers they see lurking. They are giving a lot of thought to how best to arm their child to cope with modern life.

A Job Half-Done?

This study suggests that, despite the effort parents are making, they’re having trouble. They have no difficulty laying out a

vision of the values they think it essential to impart to their child, but succeeding at the job is another matter. In some cases, the gaps between their aspirations and their own evaluation of their effectiveness are stunning.

There is a virtual consensus among parents that it is critical to teach their children to be honest and truthful, yet little more than half of our sample say they have succeeded. Nothing could be more important, they say, than raising kids to have self-discipline and self-control. Yet again, little more than a third believe they are being successful. As important as they say it is for their youngsters to do well in school, again only half think they've achieved success on this front.

A Lot Easier Said Than Done offers plenty of ammunition for those who say that parents themselves are part of the problem. Some critics, often conservatives, worry that so many parents are indecisive on so many fronts that children are understandably confused about what's right and wrong. The findings here suggest that nearly one parent in every four could well be considered a "softie" or "best buddy." Other critics, more often liberals, worry that too many parents practice an authoritarian, "do as I say or else" style that produces children who are rebellious and resentful, with little internalized or independent sense of values. These critics will probably not be pleased to learn that over four in ten parents think that you can't do as good a job raising children unless you spank them, and about half of parents of teens say they still use corporal punishment.

And finally, the study picks up a group of parents—about one in six—who really do appear to be operating on the edge. The parents we categorize as "overwhelmed" seem to be living in out-of-control home environments that simply can't be all that good for the kids. The bottom line is that if one is searching for evidence to support criticism against parents themselves, it can be deduced from the numerous findings within this study.

Disrespect and Vulgarity

Another recent Public Agenda study, *Aggravating Circumstances*, showed that 84% of Americans point to parents' failure to teach respect to their kids as a major cause of rude and disrespectful behavior in our society.¹⁶ Adults across the board bitterly complain about how out of control so many people seem to be these days. Most also would agree that it's tough for anyone to navigate in a world so infected by incivility, disrespect and vulgarity. There is a sense among adults that

there was a kinder, gentler time in the not-too-distant past, and parents in *A Lot Easier Said Than Done* echo that view, yearning for a healthier environment in which to raise their child.

It is indisputable that parents today are facing challenges that require them to be eternally vigilant. At the same time, parents acknowledge their inconsistencies in dealing with their children, saying they're constantly juggling their responses as they feel the sand shifting beneath their feet. But, parents are not alone. We are all—young and old—besieged by cultural shifts that in many cases leave us breathless. Voracious consumerism is rampant as advertise-

ments invade every nook and cranny of our lives. Cheating in school and in the workplace appears to be commonplace, with very little redress. Indeed, it has even gotten tougher to insist upon something as basic as healthy diets for children as fast-food alternatives compete for their attention, springing up seemingly overnight on street corners in every town and in cafeterias in every school.

The Balance that Isn't Working

Older generations are often quick to point out that they had an easier time raising their children because of societal institutions that could be counted on to reinforce their values. Parents today feel bereft of such allies. And, there is broad public agreement about the roughness of the environment families confront. Yet, this society also has a commitment to the principles of free expression in the media and has comfortably adopted a live-and-let-live approach to people's private lives. As a society, we hope to balance these contending goals and principles. Significantly, parents say the balance isn't working for them.

As the nation moved to reform welfare in the 90s, the driving force was a belief in both societal and individual responsibility as the key to reducing poverty for children and families. The question, ultimately posed by this study, is whether we believe we have a similar shared obligation when it comes to children and values. Are we really interested in creating a more values-friendly environment that would give parents some allies in their struggles to raise good kids? Do we have the will even to question the circumstances that lead parents today to say that their jobs are "A Lot Easier Said Than Done?"



The question is whether we believe we have a shared obligation when it comes to children and values. Are we really interested in creating a more values-friendly environment that would give parents some allies?

Endnotes

1. Farkas, Steve, Jean Johnson, et al. *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think about the Next Generation*. Public Agenda, 1997, funded by Ronald McDonald House Charities and conducted on behalf of The Advertising Council. Based on national telephone surveys with 2,000 adults and 600 young people aged 12-17 years old. Also, *Kids These Days '99*, a follow-up study to the original. Based on national telephone surveys with 1,005 adults and 328 young people aged 12-17 years old.
2. Farkas, Steve, Ann Duffett, et al. *Necessary Compromises: How Parents, Employers and Children's Advocates View Child Care Today*. Public Agenda, 2000, p.19. National telephone survey of 815 parents of children aged 5 years old or younger.
3. See, for example, *Washington Post* Poll. National telephone survey of 2,028 adults conducted October 1978. "There is much talk about the effect of TV on children. I'm going to mention some possible effects...First, the question of children seeing things they shouldn't see...I'd like you to tell me whether you think it is a serious problem (53%), a minor problem (32%) or not a problem at all (12%)." Not sure (3%).
4. Farkas, Steve, Jean Johnson, et al. *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk about Parental Involvement in Public Schools*. Public Agenda, 1999, p.44. National telephone survey of 1,220 parents with children in public school grades K-12.
5. See, for example, National Center for Health Statistics. "Obesity Still on the Rise, New Data Show," October 8, 2002, www.hhs.gov. See also, Poussaint, Alvin. "Obesity Among Children," www.familyeducation.com.
6. *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk about Parental Involvement in Public Schools*. "How close does the following come to your own view: as children get older, it's important that they increasingly handle school-work on their own." Very close (72%); Somewhat close (21%); Not too close (4%); Not close at all (2%).
7. Parents in "The Overwhelmed" group are more likely than other parents to have household incomes of \$25,000 or less (28% vs. 17%); to have a high school diploma or less (45% vs. 34%); and to be female (71% vs. 58%). "The Overwhelmed" are less likely to be married/living as a couple (66% vs. 78%).
8. Parents in the "Softies" group are more likely than other parents to be female (69% vs. 58%).
9. Those in the "Parents in Chief" group are more likely than other parents to have children aged 5-9 (39% vs. 26%), to have more than one child (76% vs. 66%) and to be parents of girls (58% vs. 48%).
10. Parents in the "Best Buddies" group are more likely than other parents to have a high school diploma or less (44% vs. 35%).
11. *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk about Parental Involvement in Public Schools*. "And which years do you think will cause you the most worry? Will it be the elementary school years (4%), the middle school years (21%) or the high school years (72%)?" All (1%); None (1%); Don't know (1%).
12. *Kids These Days '99*. "How about kids seeing too much violence or sex on television and in the movies? Is that problem very serious (67%), somewhat serious (25%), not too serious (4%) or not serious at all (5%) for today's kids?" "How about kids abusing drugs and alcohol? Is that problem very serious (58%), somewhat serious (32%), not too serious (7%) or not serious at all (-) for today's kids?" Don't know/Not sure (3%). "How about kids threatened by crime or gangs? Is that problem very serious (47%), somewhat serious (40%), not too serious (11%) or not serious at all (-) for today's kids?" Don't know/Not sure (3%).
13. *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk about Parental Involvement in Public Schools*. "Parents are often less involved in their children's education in later grades. Which of these comes closer to your feeling about parental involvement as children get older: Less parental involvement in later grades probably means a student's academic work will suffer (30%), or this is natural—it is a sign the student is learning to be independent and to manage school on their own (63%); Neither (2%); Both (4%); Don't know (2%).
14. *Necessary Compromises: How Parents, Employers and Children's Advocates View Child Care Today*. p.21-22.
15. See, for example, *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think about the Next Generation* (1997 and 1999).
16. Farkas, Steve, Jean Johnson, et al. *Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America*. Public Agenda, 2002. National telephone survey of 2,013 adults. "Please tell me if you think too many parents failing to teach respect to their kids is a major cause (84%) of rude and disrespectful behavior in our society, a minor cause (12%) or not a cause at all (3%)?" Don't know (1%).

Methodology

A Lot Easier Said Than Done is based on telephone interviews with a national random sample of 1,607 parents or guardians of children aged 5 to 17. The survey was preceded by 12 focus groups conducted in various sites across the country.

The Survey

Telephone interviews were conducted between July 31 and August 15, 2002 with 1,607 parents of children between 5 and 17 years old currently living with them. Interviews averaged 26 minutes in length. The parents in the nationwide sample were selected through a standard, random-digit-dialing technology whereby every household in the 48 contiguous states had an equal chance of being contacted, including those with unlisted numbers.

The margin of error for the sample of 1,607 parents is plus or minus three percentage points; the margin of error is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by Public Agenda, and all interpretation of the data reflected in this report was done by Public Agenda. As in all surveys, question order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensively pre-testing the survey instrument and randomizing the order in which some questions and answer categories were read.

The survey was fielded by Robinson and Muenster Associates, Inc. of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Sample was provided by Survey Sampling, Inc.

The Focus Groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public's attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from these groups were important to the survey design, and quotes were drawn from them to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the survey interviews.

A total of 12 focus groups were conducted. In March and April 2002 four focus groups were conducted in the following cities: Danbury, Connecticut; Frisco, Texas; Alexandria, Virginia; and Nashville, Tennessee. In August and September 2000 eight focus groups were conducted in the following cities: Birmingham, Alabama; Cleveland, Ohio; Los Angeles, Sacramento and Redwood City, California.

Characteristics of the Sample

| | Total (n=1,607) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| | % |
| Gender | |
| Male | 40 |
| Female | 60 |
| Household Income | |
| \$25,000 or less | 19 |
| \$25,001 to \$50,000 | 32 |
| \$50,001 to \$75,000 | 22 |
| More than \$75,000 | 25 |
| Marital Status | |
| Married/Living as a couple | 75 |
| Single | 8 |
| Divorced | 11 |
| Separated | 3 |
| Widowed | 2 |
| Race/Ethnicity | |
| African American | 11 |
| Hispanic | 8 |
| White | 76 |
| Age | |
| 18-29 | 11 |
| 30-39 | 38 |
| 40-49 | 40 |
| 50 or older | 11 |
| Education | |
| Less than high school | 7 |
| High school graduate | 29 |
| Some college/Associates degree | 33 |
| College degree/Graduate degree | 31 |
| Employment | |
| Working full time | 58 |
| Working part time | 11 |
| Self-employed | 9 |
| Homemaker | 15 |
| Age of Child | |
| 5-12 | 49 |
| 13-17 | 51 |
| Urbanicity | |
| Rural | 26 |
| Suburban | 53 |
| Urban | 21 |
| Region | |
| Northeast | 20 |
| Midwest | 24 |
| South | 35 |
| West | 22 |

Complete Survey Results

A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk about Raising Children in Today's America

This study is based on a nationally representative cross-section of 1,607 parents of children aged 5 to 17.

Results of less than .5% are signified by an asterisk. Results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100% due to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between the numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

Split sample methodology was used for the following questions: Q29-Q38, Q58-Q65, Q86-Q89, Q111-Q115, Q125, Q126.

QS1 Are you the parent or guardian of any children between 5 and 17 years old who currently live with you, or not?

100% Yes, parent of child/ren 5-17

QS2 In total, how many children do you have under 18?

32% 1
40% 2
18% 3
9% 4 or more

QS3a How old is your child [oldest child] who is under 18 years old?

[NOTE: If more than one child, respondent was asked to think about their oldest child under 18]

29% 5-9
20% 10-12
26% 13-15
25% 16-17

QS4 Is this child a boy or a girl?

50% Boy
50% Girl

Q1 Overall, how good a job would you say parents these days are doing of raising their children—excellent, good, fair or poor?

4% Excellent
32% Good
43% Fair
18% Poor
3% Don't Know

Q2 Compared to when you were growing up, would you say that raising children today is a lot harder, a lot easier, or is it about the same?

76% A lot harder
3% A lot easier
20% About the same
1% Don't Know

Q3 Would you say that today's parents are doing a better job than parents of the past, a worse job, or is it about the same?

7% Better job
 53% Worse job
 37% About the same
 3% Don't Know

Q4 And how about yourself? Compared to your own parents, would you say you're doing a better job, a worse job, or is it about the same?

37% Better job
 7% Worse job
 55% About the same
 1% Don't Know

[RANDOMIZE Q5-Q28]

Some of the things parents try to teach their kids may be more important and some less important. For each of the following, please tell me if it is absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not important for you to teach your child.

| | ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL | IMPORTANT BUT NOT ESSENTIAL | NOT IMPORTANT | DON'T KNOW |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------------|
| Q9A To be honest and truthful | 91% | 9% | * | - |
| Q7A To be courteous and polite | 84% | 16% | * | * |
| Q25A To have self-control and self-discipline | 83% | 17% | * | * |
| Q5A To always do their very best in school | 82% | 18% | * | * |
| Q11A To be independent and to do for themselves | 74% | 26% | 1% | * |
| Q27A To save money and spend it carefully | 70% | 29% | * | * |
| Q19A To have good nutrition and eating habits | 68% | 32% | 1% | * |
| Q23A To help those who are less fortunate | 62% | 36% | 1% | * |
| Q21A To have strong religious faith | 61% | 32% | 7% | * |
| Q17A To exercise and to be physically fit | 51% | 48% | 1% | - |
| Q15A To enjoy art and literature | 33% | 61% | 6% | * |

And when it comes to teaching this to your own child, do you think you have succeeded, or is there still work to be done?

Base: Asked in sequence of parents who responded "absolutely essential" in previous question.

| | I HAVE SUCCEEDED | THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE | DON'T KNOW |
|---|------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Q8B To be courteous and polite [n = 1,346] | 62% | 38% | * |
| Q10B To be honest and truthful [n = 1,455] | 55% | 45% | * |
| Q24B To help those who are less fortunate [n = 1,002] | 55% | 45% | * |
| Q18B To exercise and to be physically fit [n = 814] | 53% | 46% | * |
| Q22B To have strong religious faith [n = 972] | 53% | 47% | * |
| Q16B To enjoy art and literature [n = 524] | 51% | 49% | * |
| Q6B To always do their very best in school [n = 1,310] | 50% | 50% | * |
| Q20B To have good nutrition and eating habits [n = 1,086] | 40% | 60% | - |
| Q12B To be independent and to do for themselves [n = 1,186] | 38% | 62% | * |
| Q26B To have self-control and self-discipline [n = 1,330] | 34% | 66% | * |
| Q28B To save money and spend it carefully [n = 1,122] | 28% | 72% | * |

[RANDOMIZE Q29-Q38]

Now, please tell me how much you worry about each of the following. Do you worry a lot, some, only a little or not at all?

| | WORRY A LOT | SOME | ONLY A LITTLE | NOT AT ALL | DON'T KNOW |
|---|----------------|------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Q38 Protecting your child from drugs and alcohol <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,109]</i> | 55% | 24% | 13% | 8% | - |
| Q32 Someone physically harming or kidnapping your child <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,110]</i> | 50% | 26% | 16% | 8% | * |
| Q29 The negative influence of other kids on your child <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 831]</i> | 47% | 29% | 16% | 8% | * |
| Q35 Low quality public schools <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 824]</i> | 41% | 25% | 13% | 21% | * |
| Q36 Negative messages in the media <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,108]</i> | 39% | 34% | 15% | 13% | * |
| Q31 Paying bills and making ends meet <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 832]</i> | 36% | 32% | 16% | 15% | - |
| Q37 Juggling the demands of work and family <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 827]</i> | 35% | 31% | 18% | 17% | - |
| Q30 Getting health insurance and good medical care for your child <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,108]</i> | 33% | 17% | 15% | 35% | * |
| Q34 Lack of time to spend together as a family <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,109]</i> | 28% | 30% | 20% | 22% | - |
| Q33 A lack of organized activities for your child to join <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 832]</i> | 14% | 22% | 22% | 42% | - |

Q39 Which of these do you worry about more as a parent? [ROTATE]

- 49% Raising a child who is well behaved and has good values
- 23% Providing for your child's health and physical well being
- 25% [VOL.] Worry about both equally
- 2% [VOL.] Don't worry about either
- * Don't Know

Q40 Which of these three things is the biggest challenge you face in raising your child? [ROTATE]

- 47% Trying to protect your child from negative societal influences
- 27% Trying to find enough time to be together as a family
- 23% Trying to keep up with the bills and the cost of living
- 3% Don't Know

[RANDOMIZE Q41-Q50]

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements about what it's like to raise children today.
 [PROBE: Is that strongly or somewhat?]

| | TOTAL AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | TOTAL DISAGREE | SOMEWHAT DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | DON'T KNOW |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Q41 Being a parent is wonderful— I wouldn't trade it for the world | 96% | 89% | 7% | 4% | 2% | 2% | * |
| Q50 When I say something I expect my child to listen—not to question me | 75% | 50% | 25% | 24% | 17% | 7% | 1% |
| Q43 I can see how my child has picked up some bad habits from me | 63% | 24% | 39% | 37% | 16% | 21% | * |
| Q44 I try hard to be a very different kind of parent than my own parents were | 58% | 37% | 21% | 42% | 20% | 22% | * |
| Q42 I would have never dared to say to my parents some of the things that my child says to me | 58% | 41% | 17% | 41% | 16% | 25% | 1% |
| Q46 Children are born with their own personality— as a parent there's only so much I can do | 58% | 29% | 29% | 41% | 17% | 24% | 1% |
| Q45 I'm sometimes too tired to be firm with my child even when I know I should | 42% | 17% | 25% | 58% | 18% | 41% | * |
| Q48 There's so much stress in my life that being a parent can be overwhelming | 38% | 18% | 20% | 62% | 25% | 37% | * |
| Q47 I sometimes feel more like my child's best friend than their parent | 38% | 19% | 19% | 61% | 27% | 34% | 1% |
| Q49 There's too much tension and arguing in my home | 18% | 7% | 11% | 82% | 24% | 58% | * |

[RANDOMIZE Q51-Q57]

Q51 Do you ever worry that you are giving your child too much and overindulging him/her, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 37% Worry that I am giving my child too much and overindulging
- 63% This is not an issue in my household
- * Don't Know

Q52 Do you ever worry that you are over-scheduling your child with activities, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 10% Worry that I am over-scheduling my child with activities
- 90% This is not an issue in my household
- * Don't Know

Q53 Do you ever worry that your child is too rude or talks back, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 36% Worry that my child is too rude or talks back
- 64% This is not an issue in my household
- * Don't Know

Q54 Do you ever worry that your child watches too much TV, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 48% Worry that my child watches too much TV
- 52% This is not an issue in my household

Q55 Do you ever worry that your child is reading magazines or books with material that's too adult for his/her age, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 12% Worry that my child is reading magazines or books with material that's too adult
- 88% This is not an issue in my household

Q56 Do you ever worry that your child is acting too grown-up, too fast, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 35% Worry that my child is acting too grown-up, too fast
- 65% This is not an issue in my household
- * Don't Know

Q57 Do you ever worry that you might need to push your child more when it comes to school work, or is this not an issue in your household?

- 49% Worry that I might need to push my child more when it comes to school work
- 51% This is not an issue in my household
- * Don't Know

[RANDOMIZE Q58-Q65A]

Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these general statements about parenting.

[PROBE: Is that strongly or somewhat?]

| | TOTAL AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | TOTAL DISAGREE | SOMEWHAT DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | DON'T KNOW |
|--|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Q62 Sometimes you have to let kids make mistakes and deal with the consequences on their own <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 831]</i> | 95% | 68% | 27% | 5% | 3% | 2% | * |
| Q64 Children do best when parents set limits and enforce them <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 829]</i> | 94% | 80% | 13% | 6% | 4% | 2% | * |
| Q58 Parents have to pick their battles—you can't fight your child over everything <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 830]</i> | 85% | 59% | 26% | 14% | 6% | 7% | 1% |
| Q59 Being too strict can backfire because kids will do things behind your back <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,107]</i> | 82% | 52% | 30% | 18% | 9% | 9% | 1% |
| Q63 It's much harder for families to do a good job raising kids when both parents have to work <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,106]</i> | 77% | 51% | 25% | 22% | 11% | 11% | 1% |
| Q60 The busier kids are the better—they have less time to get into trouble <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 830]</i> | 70% | 43% | 27% | 29% | 17% | 12% | 1% |
| Q61 To be a single parent has got to be the most stressful thing in the world <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,097]</i> | 70% | 51% | 19% | 25% | 14% | 11% | 5% |
| Q65 When a child doesn't know how to behave it usually means parents are not doing their job <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,107]</i> | 58% | 33% | 25% | 41% | 25% | 16% | 1% |
| Q65A Parents who never spank can do as good a job disciplining children as parents who do spank | 53% | 32% | 21% | 43% | 21% | 23% | 4% |

[RANDOMIZE Q66-Q70]

Here are some statements about raising teenagers. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each.

[PROBE: Is that very or somewhat?] Base: Parent of a teenager [n = 820]

| | TOTAL AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | TOTAL DISAGREE | SOMEWHAT DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | DON'T KNOW |
|---|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Q67 You start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to drive | 93% | 76% | 17% | 5% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Q70 Kids become a lot more challenging when they hit the teen years | 86% | 67% | 19% | 14% | 9% | 4% | 1% |
| Q68 You start worrying a lot more when kids are old enough to date | 83% | 60% | 24% | 15% | 10% | 6% | 2% |
| Q69 As kids get older, parents have to ease up and give them more freedom | 82% | 40% | 43% | 17% | 10% | 8% | 1% |
| Q66 When kids get older, it's much harder to know their friends and their friends' parents | 60% | 39% | 21% | 40% | 19% | 20% | 1% |

Q71 Right now, do you feel that it's more important: [ROTATE]

60% To let your child learn from making some mistakes and dealing with the consequences

35% To protect your child from making mistakes that could harm him/her

5% Don't Know

Q72 What is your current marital status—are you married, divorced, separated, widowed, living as a couple or single?

72% Married

11% Divorced

3% Separated

2% Widowed

3% Living as a couple

8% Single

Q73 How would you describe yourself when it comes to enforcing rules for your child? Do you stay very consistent, do you sometimes give in depending on the circumstances, or do you give in too often?

32% Stay very consistent

60% Sometimes give in depending on the circumstances

8% Give in too often

* Don't Know

Q74 How would you describe your spouse or partner when it comes to enforcing rules for your child? Does your spouse or partner stay very consistent, sometimes give in depending on the circumstances, or do you give in too often?

Base: Married or living as a couple [n = 1,206]

36% Stays very consistent

50% Sometimes gives in depending on the circumstances

14% Gives in too often

* Don't Know

Q75 Do you think it's realistic for parents to think they can raise well-behaved children by relying solely on positive reinforcement and teaching by example, or is it sometimes necessary for parents to rely on punishment or threats?

- 33% It's realistic for parents to think this
- 63% Sometimes necessary for parents to rely on punishments or threats
- 4% Don't Know

Q76 What is your attitude toward bribing kids with a reward to get them to do things they don't want to do? Is it something you never do, something you resort to once in a while, or something you rely upon often?

- 33% Something I never do
- 61% Something I resort to once in a while
- 5% Something I rely upon often
- 1% [VOL.] Something I did when child was younger
- * Don't Know

Q77 What is your attitude toward yelling or threatening to punish kids to get them to do things they don't want to do? Is it something you never do, something you resort to once in a while, or something you rely upon often?

- 24% Something I never do
- 67% Something I resort to once in a while
- 9% Something I rely upon often
- * [VOL.] Something I did when child was younger
- * Don't Know

Q78 What is your attitude toward spanking? Is it something you never do, something you resort to once in a while, or something you rely upon often?

- 37% Something I never do
- 53% Something I resort to once in a while
- 4% Something I rely upon often
- 6% [VOL.] Something I did when child was younger
- * Don't Know

Q81 Are you a parent who: [ROTATE]

- 55% Sometimes does too much explaining
- 21% Sometimes does too much yelling
- 12% [VOL.] Neither
- 10 [VOL.] Both
- 1% Don't Know

Q82 Are you a parent who: [ROTATE]

- 52% Sometimes lets too many things go
- 22% Sometimes punishes too quickly
- 18% [VOL.] Neither
- 7% [VOL.] Both
- 1% Don't Know

Q83 Are you a parent who: [ROTATE]

- 33% Sometimes praises too much
- 31% Sometimes criticizes too much
- 21% [VOL.] Neither
- 13% [VOL.] Both
- 1% Don't Know

Q84 Are you a parent who: [ROTATE]

- 43% Sometimes sticks to their guns too much
- 37% Sometimes gives in too quickly
- 12% [VOL.] Neither
- 7% [VOL.] Both
- 1% Don't Know

Q85 Are you a parent who: [ROTATE]

- 58% Can sometimes be too over-protective
- 22% Can sometimes give too much freedom
- 11% [VOL.] Neither
- 9% [VOL.] Both
- 1% Don't Know

[RANDOMIZE Q86-Q89]

Q86 Do you think that constantly giving your child love and encouragement is crucial to preparing him/her for life, or are there better ways to accomplish this?

Base: Split sample A [n = 831]

- 92% Crucial to preparing child for life
- 8% Better ways to accomplish this
- 1% Don't Know

Q87 Do you think that letting your child handle stressful situations on his/her own is crucial to preparing him/her for life, or are there better ways to accomplish this?

Base: Split sample B [n = 1,104]

- 45% Crucial to preparing child for life
- 51% Better ways to accomplish this
- 4% Don't Know

Q88 Do you think that pushing your child to finish his/her school work even when he/she is tired is crucial to preparing him/her for life, or are there better ways to accomplish this?

Base: Split sample A [n = 817]

- 37% Crucial to preparing child for life
- 61% Better ways to accomplish this
- 2% Don't Know

Q89 Do you think that disciplining your child when he/she doesn't keep a promise is crucial to preparing him/her for life, or are there better ways to accomplish this?

Base: Split sample B [n = 1,100]

- 50% Crucial to preparing child for life
- 47% Better ways to accomplish this
- 4% Don't Know

Q90 When talking with their kids, do you think that parents should be totally honest about their own misbehavior or are there times when a little lying is in order?

- 60% Parents should be totally honest about their own misbehavior
- 37% There are times when a little lying is in order
- 3% Don't Know

Q91 Thinking about your child's school, does it mostly reinforce or mostly undermine the values you are trying to teach your child about right and wrong?

- 77% Mostly reinforces
- 14% Mostly undermines
- 5% [VOL.] Neither
- 4% Don't Know

[RANDOMIZE Q92-Q105]

Please tell me how often your child does each of the following.

| | HAPPENS CONSTANTLY | HAPPENS SOMETIMES | NEVER HAPPENS | DON'T KNOW |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Q104 Stays out too late <i>Base: Parent of child 13 or older [n = 819]</i> | 3% | 20% | 77% | - |
| Q95 Uses bad language | 2% | 25% | 73% | * |
| Q98 Wears clothes that are too sloppy or revealing <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,144]</i> | 7% | 25% | 68% | * |
| Q93 Does poorly in school | 3% | 32% | 64% | 1% |
| Q101 Spends too much money shopping <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,143]</i> | 10% | 30% | 60% | * |
| Q100 Listens to kids who are a bad influence <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,143]</i> | 5% | 40% | 55% | 1% |
| Q102 Spends too much time on the phone <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,146]</i> | 16% | 30% | 55% | - |
| Q103 Spends too much time on the computer <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,141]</i> | 13% | 40% | 47% | * |
| Q99 Listens to music with bad language <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,144]</i> | 9% | 46% | 44% | 1% |
| Q96 Talks back | 8% | 64% | 28% | * |
| Q97 Fails to do the chores you ask him/her to do <i>Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,145]</i> | 14% | 64% | 22% | * |
| Q105 Fights or argues with their siblings <i>Base: Parent has more than one child [n = 1,085]</i> | 28% | 60% | 12% | * |
| Q92 Eats junk food | 20% | 71% | 9% | - |

Q106 Would you say that reading is something your child loves to do, something he/she does only when he/she has to, or is it somewhere in between?

- 42% Something my child loves to do
- 21% Something he/she does only when he/she has to
- 36% It is somewhere in between
- * Don't Know

Q107 When buying clothing, shoes or sneakers, how important is it to your child to buy brand name items? Would you say it is very important to your child, somewhat important or is it something that doesn't really matter?

Base: Parent of child 10 or older [n = 1,145]

- 25% Very important
- 34% Somewhat important
- 41% Something that doesn't really matter
- * Don't Know

Q108 After school hours, does your child regularly participate in activities such as a church youth group, the Scouts or organized sports, or is this something your child doesn't regularly do?

- 70% Regularly participates in activities
- 29% Something my child doesn't regularly do
- 1% Don't Know

Q109 How many TV sets do you have in your home—zero, one, two, three or more than that?

- 1% Zero
- 13% One
- 30% Two
- 29% Three
- 27% More than that

Q110 Does your child have a TV set in his/her bedroom, or not?

Base: Has TV set in the home [n = 1,584]

- 51% Has TV set in bedroom
- 49% Does not have TV set in bedroom

[RANDOMIZE Q111-Q115]

Please tell me how close each of the following statements comes to your view.

| | TOTAL CLOSE | VERY CLOSE | SOMEWHAT CLOSE | TOTAL NOT CLOSE | NOT TOO CLOSE | NOT CLOSE AT ALL | DON'T KNOW |
|---|-------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|------------|
| Q115 TV is fine for my child as long as he/she is watching the right shows and in moderation <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 819]</i> | 93% | 73% | 20% | 6% | 4% | 3% | * |
| Q114 When it comes to bad language and adult themes, it seems like TV programs are getting worse every year <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,107]</i> | 90% | 70% | 20% | 9% | 5% | 4% | 2% |
| Q112 There's nothing wrong with my child relaxing for a while in front of the television <i>Base: Split sample B [n = 1,078]</i> | 85% | 42% | 43% | 15% | 8% | 8% | * |
| Q111 Wherever my child turns he/she sees crude or sexual messages in the media <i>Base: Split sample A [n = 820]</i> | 47% | 23% | 25% | 52% | 27% | 25% | 1% |
| Q113 I have seriously considered getting rid of the TV from my home altogether <i>Base: Has TV set in home and Split sample A [n = 820]</i> | 22% | 11% | 12% | 78% | 15% | 63% | * |
| Q116 In your experience, are TV programs that air on the major networks between eight and ten in the evening usually OK for the whole family to watch, or do they often have themes that are inappropriate for children, or don't you know enough to say? 19% Ok for the whole family to watch 65% Often have themes that are inappropriate for children 15% Don't know enough to say | | | | | | | |
| Q117 Why do you think that TV executives and writers put sexual themes and crude language into TV programs? [ROTATE] 81% To make money by getting more people to watch their shows 15% Because they have a different sense of what's appropriate and what's not 4% Don't Know | | | | | | | |
| Q118 When your child is watching TV, how often would you say there is an adult around who is keeping an eye on the TV—is there always an adult around, sometimes, or hardly ever? <i>Base: Has TV set in home [n = 1,579]</i> 47% Always an adult around 46% Sometimes an adult around 7% Hardly ever an adult around * Don't Know | | | | | | | |

Q119 In the past year, have you found yourself shocked or offended by something you saw on TV, or has this not happened to you?

- 71% Yes, have found myself shocked or offended by something on TV
- 29% No, this has not happened
- * Don't Know

Q120 Have you written a letter or phoned or e-mailed a TV station to let them know you were offended by an aspect of their programming, or not?

Base: Yes, shocked or offended by something on TV [n = 1,131]

- 13% Yes, have written, phoned or e-mailed a TV station
- 87% No, have not

Q121 Is that because you didn't think it would make a difference, or because you didn't have the contact information handy, or because you forgot about it?

Base: No, have not written, phoned or e-mailed a TV station [n = 944]

- 42% Didn't think it would make a difference
- 30% Didn't have the contact information handy
- 23% I forgot about it
- 4% Don't Know

Q122 Suppose that tomorrow 10,000 people were to call a TV network to complain about something that was broadcast. Do you think that the executives in charge would pay serious attention to this, or would they probably ignore it?

- 49% Would pay serious attention to this
- 47% Would probably ignore it
- 5% Don't Know

Q123 In the past year, have you watched a TV program that was helpful in getting a good message or lesson across to your child, or has this not happened to you?

- 82% Have watched a TV program that was helpful in getting a good message or lesson across
- 17% This has not happened to me
- 1% Don't Know

Q124 Have you ever taken your child to an R-rated movie when he/she was still under 16 years old, or has this never happened?

- 22% Have taken my child to an R-rated movie when he/she was still under 16 years old
- 77% This has never happened
- 1% Don't Know

Q125 If teenagers want to listen to music with bad or crude language, what should parents do?

[ROTATE FIRST AND THIRD ONLY]

Base: Split sample A [n = 826]

- 31% Forbid it under any circumstances
- 60% Show some flexibility but with limits
- 7% Don't make an issue of it at all—there are much more important things to worry about
- 1% Don't Know

Q126 If teenagers want to wear sloppy or revealing clothes, what should parents do? [ROTATE FIRST AND THIRD ONLY]

Base: Split sample B [n = 1,104]

- 27% Forbid it under any circumstances
- 65% Show some flexibility but with limits
- 6% Don't make an issue of it at all—there are much more important things to worry about
- 2% Don't Know

Q127 How often has your child seen you and your spouse or partner in a serious argument where there was some yelling—often, sometimes, hardly ever or never?

Base: Married or living as a couple [n = 1,210]

- 3% Often
- 24% Sometimes
- 54% Hardly ever
- 18% Never
- * Don't Know

Q128 Overall, would you say that having a child has brought you and your spouse or partner a lot closer together, or did this not happen?

Base: Married or living as a couple [n = 1,196]

- 81% Brought my spouse and I a lot closer together
- 17% This did not happen
- 2% Don't Know

Q129 Overall, would you say that having a child caused a lot more tension and stress in your relationship, or did this not happen?

Base: Married or living as a couple [n = 1,204]

- 29% Caused a lot more tension and stress in my relationship
- 69% This did not happen
- 2% Don't Know

Q130 Did you manage to keep up your hobbies and friends after having a child, or did you have to give up a lot of those things?

- 54% Managed to keep up my hobbies and friends after having a child
- 45% Had to give up a lot of those things
- 1% Don't Know

Q131 When it comes to your approach to raising children, is there at least one important area where you and your spouse or partner regularly disagree, or do you agree about all the important issues?

Base: Married or living as a couple [n = 1,204]

- 28% At least one important area where my spouse or partner and I regularly disagree
- 71% We agree about all the important issues
- 1% Don't Know

Q132 Would you say that your child's other parent is usually a helpful and positive influence on your child, usually unhelpful and negative, or is the other parent currently not involved in your child's life?

Base: Divorced, separated or single [n = 355]

- 44% Usually a helpful and positive influence
- 21% Usually unhelpful and negative
- 34% Other parent is currently not involved
- 1% Don't Know

Q133 Have you ever gone to a professional therapist or counselor about issues regarding your child, or not?

- 22% Yes, have gone to a professional therapist or counselor about issues regarding my child
- 78% No, have not gone

Q134 How often do you take your child to religious services—regularly, occasionally, hardly ever or never?

- 52% Regularly
- 25% Occasionally
- 12% Hardly ever
- 11% Never
- * Don't Know

Q135 In your family, who takes care of most of the day-to-day needs of the children—is it mom, dad, is it equally split between the two of you, or is it someone else?

- 64% Mom
- 6% Dad
- 28% Equally split
- 2% Someone else
- * Don't Know

Q136 Which of these statements comes closest to describing you?

- 36% I'm a parent who is very active at my child's school—I often volunteer for events and many people in the building know me
- 52% I'm not very active at the school but I get very involved with my child's education at home
- 10% I don't really have a chance to get as involved as I'd like to be with my child's education at school or at home
- 2% My child is home schooled
- 1% Don't Know

Q138 Please stop me when I read your current employment status.

- 58% Working outside the home full time
- 11% Working outside the home part time
- 9% Self-employed
- 15% A homemaker
- 2% Retired
- 3% Unemployed but not retired
- 1% A student
- * Don't Know

Q139 Which of these best describes you?

- 36% Both parents in my home work full time
- 33% One of us works full time and the other is home
- 20% I am a single parent
- 6% [VOL.] One of us works full time and the other works part time
- 6% Something else [Specify]
- * Don't Know

Q140 What is your age?

- 11% 18-29
- 38% 30-39
- 40% 40-49
- 10% 50-64
- 1% 65 or older
- * Don't Know

Q141 What is the highest level of school you completed?

- 7% Less than high school
- 29% High school graduate
- 21% Some college or trade school, no degree
- 13% Associates degree/2 yr. degree
- 19% College or 4-yr. degree
- 12% Graduate/Professional degree
- * Don't Know

Q142 Were you born in the U.S. or in another country?

- 93% Born in the U.S.
- 7% Born in another country

Q143 I'm going to read some ranges of annual household income. Please stop me when you hear the category that best describes your total household income before taxes in 2001.

- 7% \$15,000 or Under
- 12% \$15,001 to \$25,000
- 13% \$25,001 to \$35,000
- 19% \$35,001 to \$50,000
- 22% \$50,001 to \$75,000
- 25% Over \$75,000
- 2% Don't Know

Q144 Do you consider yourself Hispanic, White, African American or Black, Asian or something else?

- 8% Hispanic
- 76% White
- 11% African American/Black
- 2% Asian
- 1% [VOL.] Native American
- 2% Something else (SPECIFY)
- * Don't Know

Q145 May we call you back another day if we have a quick follow-up question?

- 96% Yes, you may call me back
- 4% No, you may not call me back
- * Don't Know

Gender

- 40% Male
- 60% Female

Urbanicity

- 26% Rural
- 53% Suburban
- 21% Urban

Region

- 20% Northeast
- 24% Midwest
- 35% South
- 22% West

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