

Sonoma County’s results from the 2004 California Healthy Kids Survey

Trends and challenges in youth development

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Young people face daily decisions about tobacco, drugs, alcohol, and violence—and their choices can have long-lasting effects on them and their communities. What can the youth of Sonoma County tell us about their lives and decisions? Do they have the knowledge they need to make the decisions they face? Are they making better decisions and engaging in healthier behaviors than in years past?

The *California Healthy Kids Survey* (CHKS) is a biennial questionnaire that large numbers of students in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11 complete in Sonoma County and across the state. Students self-report about their health-related behaviors and decision-making, and about the strengths, or assets, they possess. The *California Healthy Kids Survey* was first completed in Sonoma County in 2000, then administered again in both 2002 and 2004. With the recent release of the 2004 data, we have an opportunity to see county and state comparisons over time.

The complete CHKS report provides an enormous amount of information. As members of a health advisory committee for school-based and school-linked programs, we have joined together to review the data in detail and provide the community with this summary, which synthesizes some of the survey’s most significant findings.

We believe young people deserve praise for the healthy decisions they’re making and support in changing behavior that puts them at risk. After reviewing the information contained in this report, an essential question for families, teachers, health professionals, and

all other Sonoma County residents to ask is, “What can we do to support youth in making smart choices and avoiding harm from alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and violence?” If we can each answer this question in a positive and proactive way, the youth of this county will benefit.

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WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT YOUTH IN MAKING SMART CHOICES AND AVOIDING HARM FROM ALCOHOL, DRUGS, TOBACCO, AND VIOLENCE?

About the California Healthy Kids Survey

The *California Healthy Kids Survey* was developed by the California Department of Education. The number of Sonoma County students who have participated in the survey has grown steadily over the years. Approximately 4,000 students from grades 7, 9, and 11 took part in the survey in 2000 and 5,000 students completed it in 2002. In 2004, nearly 13,000 students participated—including 2,858 fifth-graders and 571 students in alternative education schools. Student participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential, and it required written parent permission.

Sonoma County has over 23,000 students in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11, so while this year’s student participation provides a good sample, it does not include all students.

Some caution should be taken when interpreting the data from the *California Healthy Kids Survey*, especially where the percentages are small. Students self-report their activities and there is no verification of the information they provide. However, data collected from the survey is generally considered reliable.

Teen tobacco use has decreased in Sonoma County

Survey results show that Sonoma County teens in grades 7, 9, and 11 are using tobacco at similar or lower rates than their peers throughout California. Over the last six years, Sonoma County students have demonstrated a dramatic rise in awareness about the harm caused by tobacco use and a steady decrease in the regular use of tobacco. The progress young people have shown in reducing cigarette smoking is a credit to them and to all Californians who have helped deliver a consistent message against tobacco use.

Changes in tobacco use in Sonoma County

Percentage of Sonoma County students who report ...	Grade	2000			2004		
		7	9	11	7	9	11
■ Trying a cigarette (even a puff)		20	42	58	14	28	44
■ Regular tobacco use in the past 30 days		4	13	24	3	9	16
■ Daily tobacco use		0	2	7	0	1	4
■ Tobacco use at school in the past 30 days		1	6	7	1	4	5
■ Thinking frequent use of tobacco is harmful		79	77	80	97	96	98

Alternative Schools	
2000	2004
80	79
52	49
36	23
23	23
75	94

Despite these encouraging signs, many young people are still smoking. Experimentation rises sharply as students progress through middle and senior high school, doubling between the seventh and ninth grades. With this in mind, parents should start early and take an active role in ensuring that their teens are not smoking.

Among Sonoma County students in alternative education schools (see note on the following page), regular and daily tobacco use has also decreased, although current rates of use are 10% higher than the state average and students in Sonoma County are using tobacco on school grounds more frequently (23% in the county versus 17% statewide). These findings indicate that students in alternative school settings need intensified intervention and support for cessation.

SONOMA COUNTY
STUDENTS HAVE
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A DRAMATIC RISE
IN AWARENESS
ABOUT THE
HARM CAUSED BY
TOBACCO USE.

Tips for reducing teen smoking:

- Show your children you care by saying, “I don’t want you to smoke.”
- Explain the short- and long-term health effects of tobacco use.
- Talk in personal ways about how tobacco has affected your life.
- Talk about the problems of addiction—even if you smoke.
- Remind your children that tobacco companies are in the business of getting young people to smoke.
- Teach your children to think for themselves.
- Get cessation support for teens who smoke by calling your physician, the free help line at 1-800-NOBUTTS, or the Sonoma County Health Department’s Prevention and Planning Unit at (707) 565-6680.

Questions for the community:

The *California Healthy Kids Survey* shows that Sonoma County teens in comprehensive schools are using tobacco at similar or lower rates than their peers throughout California. Individuals and communities are making real progress in reducing tobacco use, but stopping tobacco use by teens remains an ongoing challenge. What has been particularly successful and how can those efforts be expanded? How can we make it easier for young people to quit smoking? Are all schools delivering a research-based tobacco use prevention education curriculum? Are all local middle and high schools applying for the available tobacco education grants?

**A note about the
Alternative Education data**

In 2004, Sonoma County students at many alternative education sites—including continuation schools, community schools, and necessary small schools—participated in the *California Healthy Kids Survey*. Students from all grade levels at these schools took the survey; however, results were compiled by school site rather than by grade level. Out of 1,419 students enrolled at the participating alternative schools, only 571 joined the study, so this sample may not be representative.

Students in alternative education should not be compared with students from comprehensive high schools. Alternative education students face more risk factors and are typically placed in alternative settings to get specialized help and support. The majority of the alternative school respondents were 17 or older,¹ making them older than the eleventh-graders in comprehensive high schools.

Because of these factors, the alternative education school data is included in this report with reservation. More in-depth analysis and understanding is needed before we can draw conclusions about the data.

HOW CAN WE
MAKE IT EASIER
FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE TO
QUIT SMOKING?

Alcohol and marijuana use is above the state average

Sonoma County teens have heard the message about the harm of tobacco—and tobacco use has declined as a result—but when it comes to alcohol and marijuana use, the messages young people are receiving are weak and inconsistent, as survey results indicate.

Today, alcohol is the leading drug used by Sonoma County teens. Among seventh-graders, 11% report using alcohol in the last 30 days. This rate rises to 31% by the time students reach ninth grade and climbs to 48% in eleventh grade. A large percentage of these teens report a pattern of regular use. Fourteen percent of ninth-graders and 25% of eleventh-graders report drinking alcohol three or more days per month.

Alcohol and other drug use

Percentage of students who report using ...	Grade	County			State		
		7	9	11	7	9	11
■ Alcohol (whole drink) in the past 30 days		11	31	48	10	25	37
■ Marijuana in the past 30 days		4	16	28	4	12	20
■ Tobacco in the past 30 days		3	9	16	5	10	15

Alternative Schools	
County	State
59	51
53	39
49	39

In Sonoma County, more young people regularly smoke marijuana than tobacco. (Regular use is defined as having used a substance within the last 30 days). Although the majority of young people are not using it, marijuana is the second most commonly used drug among local teens. Marijuana use is more frequent in Sonoma County than in the state as a whole. Twenty-eight percent of eleventh-graders report using marijuana in the last 30 days, compared to 20% statewide. Six percent of Sonoma County's eleventh-graders report using marijuana daily.

Of particular concern are the high-risk behaviors that can occur in association with teen alcohol and other drug use. Over half of all eleventh-graders report getting very drunk or sick from alcohol and 30% report binge drinking² in the past 30 days. Sixteen percent report binge drinking three or more days in the past month, which suggests a regular pattern of risky drinking. One-quarter of ninth-graders and over a third of eleventh-graders report driving a car after drinking alcohol or being in a car driven by a friend who had been drinking.

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Sonoma County students in ninth grade, eleventh grade, and alternative schools exceed statewide averages in all areas of high-risk behavior listed on the chart. There have been no significant decreases in alcohol and other drug use among Sonoma County students in grades 7, 9, and 11 during the six years that the *California Healthy Kids Survey* has been administered.

Among students in alternative education schools, there have been significant decreases in both regular and daily alcohol and marijuana use, but the rates of use remain alarmingly high. The pattern of daily marijuana use among 24% of alternative education school students is of particular concern. Twenty-one percent of alternative school students report smoking marijuana at school in the last 30 days.

It's important to remember that teens are more at risk than adults when using alcohol. Recent brain research has shown that the brain continues to go through critical developmental changes in adolescence.³ Damage from alcohol use in the teen years can be long-term and irreversible. Adolescent drinkers also suffer more immediate consequences, such as poor school performance, social problems, depression, suicidal thoughts, and violence.⁴ In the longer term, youth who begin to use alcohol before age 15 are five times more likely to report a dependence or abuse problem later in life than those who begin to use alcohol at 21 years of age or older.⁵

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THAN ADULTS
WHEN USING
ALCOHOL.

High-risk behaviors

Percentage of students who report ...	Grade	County			State			Alternative Schools	
		7	9	11	7	9	11	County	State
■ Being very drunk or sick from drinking		7	29	54	7	21	41	79	64
■ Being high on drugs		7	25	48	7	20	37	79	66
■ Binge drinking in the past 30 days		4	17	30	4	11	23	47	38
■ Binge drinking three or more times in the past 30 days		2	8	16	1	5	12	33	24
■ Drinking and driving (or being in a car driven by someone who has been drinking) ⁶		43	25	36	35	19	27	61	48

Thirty-four percent of seventh-graders, 71% of ninth-graders, and 83% of eleventh-graders in Sonoma County report that it is “fairly easy” or “very easy” to obtain alcohol. Adults can help reduce underage drinking by limiting availability and the opportunity for adolescents to drink.

The data from the *California Healthy Kids Survey* clearly indicate that there is a large increase in substance use between seventh and ninth grade, emphasizing the need to be proactive in addressing this issue at an early age.

Tips for reducing teen alcohol and other drug use:

Information alone is not an effective method of changing behavior in teens. In addition to providing accurate information about alcohol and marijuana, adults can influence youth's choices in the following ways:

- Be a positive role model.
- Build caring relationships with young people.
- Engage teens in discussion and decision-making.
- Support youth in meaningful participation in school and the community.
- Support alternative youth activities.
- Set clear expectations for abstinence from alcohol.
- Know the warning signs of alcohol and other drug abuse.
- Get help when needed.

HOW DO
ADULT DRINKING
PATTERNS AND
MEDIA IMAGES
INFLUENCE YOUTH
DECISIONS ABOUT
ALCOHOL USE?

Questions for the community:

The costs and consequences of youthful alcohol use are enormous. The best available estimate places the annual social cost of underage drinking at \$53 billion nationwide, far exceeding the costs of youthful use of illegal drugs.⁷

Given these costs and the evidence that alcohol use by adolescents is detrimental to brain development and learning, how can adults become more effective in influencing youth choices about drinking? How can we raise adult awareness of and response to youth drinking? How do adult drinking patterns and media images influence youth decisions about alcohol use? How can adults counter glamorous media messages about drugs and alcohol?

Mixed responses about violence and safety in Sonoma County

Survey responses from Sonoma County teens reveal that, on average, 56% of youth reported feeling safe or very safe in their schools, compared to 53% statewide. Just over 17% of youth reported feeling very safe in their schools.

Safety at school

Percentage of students who report ...	Grade	County			State			Alternative Schools	
		7	9	11	7	9	11	County	State
■ Feeling very safe at school		20	13	16	23	17	13	20	23
■ Feeling safe at school		44	39	41	35	34	36	30	29
■ Being afraid of getting beat up at school		25	24	16	25	19	24	16	19

The percentage of students who experienced harassment related to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability on school property has been on the rise over the past four years. Almost 40% of all Sonoma County teens say they have experienced these or other forms of harassment at school. Incidents of harassment have risen slightly in high schools over the last two years and are higher in Sonoma County than statewide.

More than a third of Sonoma County high school students and over 40% of seventh-graders report being pushed, shoved, or hit. Although the likelihood of experiencing this type of harassment in Sonoma County decreases with age, these rates are higher than the statewide average. Likewise, incidents of verbal harassment are higher for Sonoma County teens than for their peers in grades 7, 9, and 11 throughout California.

A number of schools and districts in Sonoma County have implemented new policies and programs to reduce violence and teach pro-social skills. Research-based programs that show evidence of success, such as *Second Step* or *Caring School Communities*, are being implemented in schools to teach empathy, impulse control, problem-solving, and anger management.

Sonoma County teens reflect the state averages when it comes to carrying guns to school, and there is little difference in these practices among the different grade

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levels. Although the number of youth involved in carrying guns to school is low (3-5% in Sonoma County), the risks associated with even one weapon are grave. There has been little change in this finding over the last two years. Approximately 12% of Sonoma County youth and 39% of alternative education school students report carrying other weapons to school during the past 12 months.

While girls and boys are generally at equal risk in regard to harassment, boys are at more risk of carrying weapons and belonging to gangs.

Violence, weapons, and gangs

Percentage of students who report ...	Grade	County			State			Alternative Schools	
		7	9	11	7	9	11	County	State
■ Being harassed in the past 12 months		41	44	36	38	33	31	36	35
■ Being pushed, shoved, or hit		46	37	25	42	31	22	29	33
■ Carrying a gun to school		4	5	3	5	5	5	16	15
■ Carrying another weapon to school		10	14	13	10	10	12	39	32
■ Ever belonging to a gang		8	9	7	10	13	9	29	25

About 8% of Sonoma County students in grades 7, 9, and 11 say they have belonged to a gang, as compared to almost 11% statewide. This figure climbs to 29% in alternative education schools, as compared to 25% among their peers statewide.

In the section of the *California Healthy Kids Survey* related to physical and mental health, students are asked if they have, during the past year, “felt so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks that they stopped doing some usual activities.” Among seventh-graders, 22% responded affirmatively. Thirty-one percent of ninth-graders and 33% of eleventh-graders reported these feelings. In alternative education schools, 42% of the students reported this degree of sadness or hopelessness. This rate of response is cause for concern, even though it appears similar to statewide trends. These feelings, especially when compounded with alcohol or other drug use or left untreated, can lead to depression, violence, and suicide. Identification of mood disorders and depression is needed to create intervention options and to reduce risk.

Sonoma County students also mirror the state averages for student-reported truancy. In Sonoma County, this problem appears most serious at the upper ages, with 18% of eleventh-grade students and 38% of alternative school students reporting that they

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had skipped school or cut classes at least once a month during the past 12 months. Truancy has been identified as one of the most powerful predictors of poor achievement and delinquency.

Tips for reducing youth violence:

- Know your children’s whereabouts, friends, and activities and establish a curfew.
- Teach problem-solving and anger management skills. Don’t tolerate behavior that hurts others.
- Praise kindness, empathy, and negotiation.
- Take every report of bullying seriously.
- Encourage youth to report dangerous situations. Teach the difference between “tattling” to get someone in trouble and “telling” to get help.
- Restrict access to firearms and weapons.
- Notice when a young person is sad or isolated.
- Use school specialists and professionals as resources.
- Work with your adolescent to develop an educational program that is challenging and fits their specific learning styles and interests.

HOW OFTEN
DO WE DISCUSS
ISSUES OF
VIOLENCE OR
DEPRESSION
WITH OUR SONS,
DAUGHTERS,
OR OTHER
STUDENTS?

Questions for the community:

How can we increase opportunities for developing conflict resolution skills, rather than violence, as a first response to conflict? What activities can provide positive outlets for frustration and anger? How can schools ensure a consistently safe and supportive school climate? What steps can be taken to eliminate weapons on campus? How often do we, as caring adults, discuss issues of violence or depression with our sons, daughters, or other students?

Results for fifth-graders: A first for Sonoma County

In 2004, the *California Healthy Kids Survey* was completed by 2,858 fifth-graders, which is the first time a majority of students at this grade level completed the questionnaire. Like their counterparts in grades 7, 9, and 11, these students, most of whom are 10 or 11 years old, answered questions about their use of alcohol or other drugs, smoking and tobacco use, feelings of safety and violence, and perception of health. Their responses are important because they can provide us with early warning signs of trouble and key information about when and how health-related behaviors develop.

Small percentages of fifth-graders are using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs

About a third of Sonoma County's fifth-graders have tried alcohol, but report having only one or two sips. Two percent have had a full drink of alcohol; this represents about 60 students among those surveyed and, by extension, over 100 in the total fifth-grade population in the county.

Students were also asked if they had ever tried marijuana, sniffed something through the nose to get high, or smoked cigarettes. The use of marijuana and inhalants for Sonoma County fifth-graders is slightly less than what's reported by fifth-graders statewide, but 1% of students have tried marijuana and 3% have tried inhalants. In addition, 3% of the county's fifth-graders have smoked tobacco. About half the students who have tried cigarettes say they have smoked within the last month, which indicates more frequent usage than a one-time trial.

Almost all of Sonoma County's fifth-graders think that using alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco is very bad for a person's health. This is a good sign, which—if reinforced in the coming years—could help protect these students from future usage.

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Fifth-grade alcohol, tobacco, and drug use

Percentage of fifth-graders who have tried ...	County	State
■ One or two sips of alcohol	29	24
■ A full drink of alcohol	2	3
■ A puff of tobacco	3	5
■ A whole cigarette	1	1
■ Marijuana	1	2
■ Inhalants	3	4

Students generally feel safe at school, but report significant harassment

Most Sonoma County fifth-graders feel safer in the school environment than outside of it. Sixty percent of students say they always feel safe at school, while only about one-third feel consistently safe outside of school. (On the flip side, 5% of students said they never feel safe at school and 13% never feel safe outside of school.)

Almost half of the county’s fifth-graders have been harassed by other students at school. Forty-six percent have been hit or pushed; 46% also say they’ve had mean rumors spread about them.

When asked about their behavior toward other students, two-thirds of those surveyed say they never hit or push others, but 25% have done this one or two times and 9% have done so repeatedly. Three-fourths say they never spread mean rumors, 20% have done this one or two times, and 4% have done so repeatedly. According to their responses, Sonoma County fifth-graders harass their peers less than statewide averages, but they still need help from parents, teachers, and other adults to deal with bullying behaviors—whether they are being bullied, bullying others, or witnessing it taking place.

Of course, the highest level of concern in the area of student safety is the presence of weapons on campus. Although the actual number of students bringing weapons to school is small, even one weapon in the school environment is disturbing and can have dangerous consequences. Three percent of Sonoma County’s fifth-graders say they have brought a gun or knife to school, and a much higher number (18%) have seen another student with a weapon. More information is needed to understand the reasons that students bring weapons to school and the circumstances surrounding these incidents in order to ensure the safety of both students and staff at school.

Adult supervision and protection from injury can keep students safe outside of school

More than half of Sonoma County’s fifth-graders report that an adult is always present with them at home, but many students say they are at home without

Fifth-grade violence and safety

Percentage of fifth-graders who report ...	County	State
■ Feeling safe at school all the time	60	57
■ Feeling safe outside school	35	33
■ Being hit or pushed at school (not just playing)	46	48
■ Hitting or pushing others	34	40
■ Having mean rumors spread about them	46	51
■ Spreading mean rumors about others	24	30
■ Wearing a bicycle helmet all the time	10	13
■ Wearing a seat belt all the time	78	69

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adult supervision at least some of the time. Unsupervised children are at significantly greater risk of truancy from school, poor academic performance, substance use, stress, and violence during the after-school hours.

Unintended physical injuries are the main cause of childhood mortality—and many of these injuries are preventable. Automobile accidents are a leading cause of death and serious injury among youth, yet one-quarter of the students surveyed say they don't always use seat belts and only 10% of students wear bicycle helmets all of the time.

Students' physical health is on par with state averages

With few exceptions, Sonoma County students mirror their peers in California on the survey items pertaining to physical health. While it's good news to know Sonoma County students are typical in this regard, there is growing concern in our state and nation about childhood obesity and rising rates of diabetes and asthma in children.

Eighty-three percent of all students said they exercise, dance, or play sports at least three days per week, which is the recommendation of the American Medical Association. Close to 50% exercise every day, which is what the American Heart Association and Surgeon General have recommended. About a third of the students watch TV or play video games less than one hour per day, which means that two-thirds of our students are spending more than an hour a day at these sedentary activities.

Seventy-eight percent of Sonoma County fifth-graders feel their body is about right, but 37% are trying to lose weight and 31% have been teased about their bodies at school. About 20% of students report some symptoms of asthma.

In contrast to students who eat too much or engage in little physical activity are those who come to school without having eaten breakfast. Students who eat breakfast learn better, perform better on standardized tests, are less apathetic and lethargic, and have better attendance at school. Most students surveyed ate breakfast the day of the survey, but 18% had come to school having had no breakfast.

Tips for supporting younger children's healthy development:

- Know and discuss the risks associated with alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, drugs, and weapons and limit your children's access to these items.
- Encourage empathy, sharing, and helping.

WITH FEW
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STUDENTS MIRROR
THEIR PEERS
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ITEMS PERTAINING
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HEALTH.

- Model and teach anger management and problem-solving skills.
- Follow up with fair consequences for misbehavior.
- Always have your children buckle-up when in an automobile and wear a helmet when riding a bike.
- Encourage daily physical exercise and limit the amount of time your children watch television and/or play video games.
- Make sure that your children have breakfast every day and that they eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods.

A question for the community:

How can we find time in our daily and weekly schedules to strengthen our understanding, communication, and connection to children and families?

KNOWING

THE POSITIVE

STRENGTHS

EXHIBITED BY

LOCAL STUDENTS

IS JUST AS

IMPORTANT AS

IDENTIFYING

UNSAFE OR

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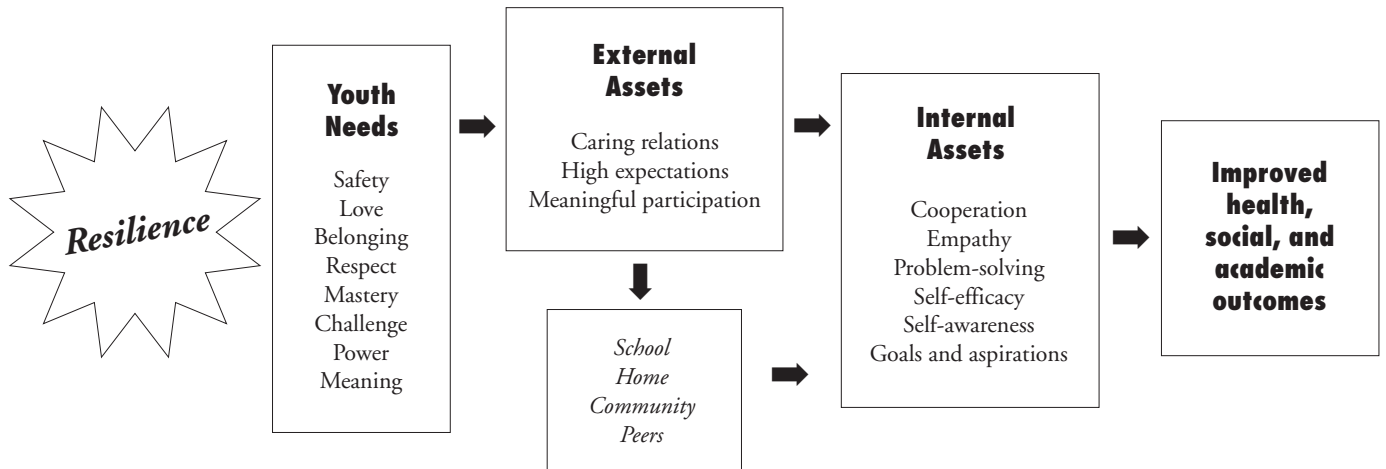
BEHAVIORS.

Adults can help young people grow strong and resilient

Knowing the positive strengths exhibited by local students is just as important as identifying unsafe or unhealthy behaviors. To this end, the *California Healthy Kids Survey* asks about the external supports and personal skills—collectively termed assets—that are associated with positive youth development. The survey measures external assets in four environments (home, school, community, and peer group) and six internal assets, as illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

Resiliency research is based not only on studies of human development, but on research in school effectiveness, healthy families, competent communities, and successful youth-serving programs. It indicates that caring relationships, high expectation messages, and opportunities for meaningful participation should be available in all environments in a young person’s world. Attention to external assets in school settings promotes both positive academic and behavioral outcomes.

Sonoma County youth report their strongest, most positive external asset to be *high expectations from their home environment*. About 80% of students in grades 5, 7, 9, and 11 say they have a parent who “expects me to follow the rules,” “believes that I will be a success,” or “always wants me to do my best.” High parental expectations,



backed by family support and love, are repeatedly associated with academic and life success.

Eighty-two percent of fifth-graders and 64% of students in grades 7, 9, and 11 reported high assets in the area of *caring relationships with adults in the home environment*. It is important to note that this is the most powerful protective factor in the lives of children. However, only 20% of fifth-graders and 43% of the older students surveyed rated themselves high in *meaningful participation in the home environment*. Most youth said that they do not consistently go places with their parents and other adults, do things at home that make a difference, or help make decisions with the family. This is an important factor to change, because children show reduced risk behaviors and increased academic success when they are given valued responsibilities, planning, and decision-making opportunities and chances to contribute and help others in their home, school, and community.

The lowest ranked external asset was *meaningful participation at school*. Less than 15% of Sonoma County youth said it was “very much true” that they engage in interesting activities at school, help decide things like class activities or rules, or do things at school that make a difference. Giving young people opportunities to participate in meaningful school activities can engage their intrinsic motivation and innate ability to learn. Students who do not feel some power, control, or sense of belonging at school may disconnect from that environment, which can lead to involvement in problem behaviors.

In the home, school, and peer environments, Sonoma County students closely resemble their peers throughout California. However, Sonoma County middle and high school students’ total external assets are boosted, as compared to students statewide, by their strong perception of community support. Sonoma County

MOST YOUTH SAID THAT THEY DO NOT CONSISTENTLY GO PLACES WITH THEIR PARENTS, DO THINGS AT HOME THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE, OR HELP MAKE DECISIONS WITH THE FAMILY.

students reported significantly higher rates of caring relationships, high expectations, and meaningful participation in their community environment. This is even more important given the low rates of meaningful participation reported in the home and school environments.

Sonoma County youth reported that their most positive internal asset is their *goals and aspirations*. Over 80% of students scored themselves high in this factor. These students say they have goals for the future, plan to graduate from high school, and will go to college or some other school after high school. Young people who have goals and aspirations develop a sense of deep connectedness, which has been shown to protect them from negative outcomes like teen pregnancy, school failure, emotional distress, alcohol and other drug use, suicide, and violence.

The lowest rated internal asset among Sonoma County youth continues to be *problem-solving*. Only 40% of fifth-graders and 49% of the older students surveyed identified strongly with the following statements: “When I need help, I find someone to talk with. I know where to go for help with a problem. I try to work out problems by talking about them.” Problem-solving includes the ability to plan, be resourceful, think critically and reflectively, and creatively examine multiple perspectives before taking action. These skills are present in successful adults and should be encouraged in youth.

All adults can play a part in creating supportive environments for young people. Adults engaged with students can help build the external assets that meet youth needs for safety, belonging, love, respect, mastery, challenge, power, and meaning. A recent research report indicates that although teens and adults agree on what kids need from adults (see list below), most adults don’t act on their beliefs. “The general assumption in our culture is that people are to take care of themselves and their own, and then mind their own business. But our children and youth need a network of caring adults, in addition to their parents.”⁸

Tips for supporting positive youth development:

- Support initiatives, programs, and policies that encourage interaction between young people and adults.
- Encourage school involvement.
- Teach shared values such as honesty, equality, and responsibility.
- Teach respect for cultural differences.
- Guide decision-making.

SONOMA
COUNTY
MIDDLE AND
HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS’ TOTAL
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SUPPORT.

- Celebrate and acknowledge children, youth, and adults who model positive behaviors and relationships.
- Share these findings with other leaders and with the media.

ALL ADULTS

CAN PLAY

Questions for the community:

A PART IN

How can adults maintain an active role in the lives of young people as they grow up? How can we strengthen meaningful student and parent participation at school? How can adults provide ongoing opportunities for youth in planning, critical thinking, and decision-making?

CREATING

SUPPORTIVE

ENVIRONMENTS

FOR YOUNG

Notes and references:

PEOPLE.

- 1 The average age of eleventh-graders in comprehensive high schools is 16.
- 2 Binge drinking is defined as consuming five drinks in a row in a single setting or occasion within a couple of hours.
- 3 Gargi Talukder, "Decision-Making is Still a Work in Progress for Teenagers," *The Brain Connection*, July 2000.
- 4 *Fact Sheet: Effects of Alcohol on Brains of Adolescents*, American Medical Association, 2003, www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/print/9416.html (accessed on September 15, 2004).
- 5 *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, (Office of Applied Studies, NSDUH Series H-25, DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964). Rockville, MD, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004.
- 6 The question seventh-graders were asked was, "Have you ridden in a car driven by someone who has been drinking alcohol?" Ninth- and eleventh-graders were asked, "Have you ever driven a car when you've been drinking or been a passenger with a friend who has been drinking?"
- 7 Richard J. Bonnie and Mary Ellen O'Connell, Editors, *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility*, (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking). The National Academies Press, Washington DC, 2004.
- 8 Peter Benson, *Grading Grown-ups 2002*, Search Institute, November 2002.

Youth-focused community agencies serving Sonoma County

For a complete list of agencies and services, see the Sonoma County Human Services Information and Referral website at www.sonoma-county.org/Human/Iris/iris_search.asp.

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Sonoma County (707) 584-2780
- California Parenting Institute (707) 585-6108
- Circuit Rider Productions, North Sonoma County (707) 838-6641
- Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa (707) 544-6911
- Drug Abuse Alternatives Center (DAAC), Santa Rosa (707) 544-3295
- El Nido Teen Center, Boyes Hot Springs (707) 939-1452
- LifeWorks, Choices for Change (family programs), Santa Rosa.... (707) 568-2300
- LifeWorks, Family Education Center (707) 568-2300
- Mendocino County Youth Project, Point Arena (707) 882-1945
- Petaluma People Services Center (PPSC), Petaluma (707) 765-8488
- Restorative Resources (707) 823-8080
- Routes For Youth (Teen Court), Santa Rosa (707) 527-6810
- Social Advocates for Youth (SAY), Santa Rosa (707) 544-3299
- Social Advocates for Youth (SAY), Sonoma (707) 996-7991
- Social Advocates for Youth (SAY), North County (707) 431-7658
- Sonoma County Adult & Youth Development (SCAYD), Cotati ... (707) 793-9030
- Volunteer Center of Sonoma County (707) 573-3399
- West County Community Services (707) 887-2226

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More information about the *California Healthy Kids Survey* is available at www.wested.org/hks