

Review/Analysis: Positive Family Communication

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Positive family communication is important to youth development which in turn is important to community development. Positive communication with children in the family context results in a significant reduction of future risk behaviors. Although 68% of youth claim to have family support, only 28% say that they experience positive family communication, which makes this a big enough issue to consider (Benson, 2006).

When it comes to the issue of positive communication, there is a direct link between the frequency of communication and the amount of high risk behaviors that youth partake in. Although this concept has been proven time and time again, it is in recent studies that researchers have more clearly defined the communication that is proven effective. In a study that was funded by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), 668 mother and adolescent pairs were studied in regards to their communication and its effects on the child's behavior (Guilamo-Ramos). The study goes beyond prior research, and examines three key aspects for effective communication between a mother and her adolescent son or daughter. The study explored the child's perception of how knowledgeable the parent was, how trustworthy they were, and the accessibility of that parent. It was found in this study that there is a direct correlation between the frequency of communication and the availability of these three criteria in mother-adolescent relationship (Guilamo-Ramos, 2006).

The concept of the correct way in which to positively communicate with youth has also been examined with regards to timing. The Journal of Marriage and the Family presents a study done with 537 adolescent-parent pairs where participants were interviewed at one point in time and then took part in a follow-up interview one year later (Ennett, 2001). The extensive study drew conclusions based on the time and content which was discussed between the child and parent. The study found that if parents waited too long to discuss the topic, the child may have already started one of the risk behaviors or they might initiate one of them by acting out of rebellion when told the consequences of doing them. The study discusses the overall importance of realizing the appropriate timing and being willing to discuss the content area with your child (Ennett, 2001).

Although many parents are aware of the importance of positive communication with their child, there may be other aspects holding them back. Peter L. Bensons discusses the problems that parents face with effectively parenting their child. He reports that “Seventy-seven percent of parents said it would help them to have opportunities to talk with other parents about parenting issues” (Benson, 2006). He goes on to say that “40 percent indicated they would value being able to attend parenting classes or workshops” (Benson, 2006). Many parents simply need guidance and reassurance with proper communication with their children.

There are several key challenges relating to this problem, and it is not only the parent's responsibility, but also the community's responsibility to work towards a solution. One issue to be resolved is parent's lack of awareness about the importance of having positive communication with their children. Many parents have no idea how beneficial it can be to their kids. Another problem is that parents do not know the correct way to go about it. It is the responsibility of any organization that works with children to provide this information to parents. Even simply having a brochure available for parents to look at could at least raise awareness about the issue. Beyond simply providing a pamphlet, recreation centers could allow opportunity for parents to get together and discuss the issue.

Many parents are reporting that they would benefit from having the support of other parents. As a community, there needs to be more awareness and in turn more information available to parents. Positive family communication can not start soon enough with kids, and it is everyone's responsibility to get that message out there.

## References

- Benson, P. J. (2006). All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents 2<sup>nd</sup> edition San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ennett, S. T., Bauman, K. E., Forshee, V. A., Pemberton, M., & Hicks, K. A. (2001). Parent-child communication about adolescent tobacco and alcohol use: What do parents say and does it affect youth behavior?. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 63, 48-62.
- Guilamo-Ramos, V., Jaccard, J., Dittus, P., & Bouris A. (2001). Parental expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility: Parent-adolescent communication and adolescent risk behavior. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 68, 1229-1246.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the three most important topics you feel parents should be talking about with their children?
2. Discuss a potential program for parents to meet with each other, which could promote positive family communication. Who would facilitate this meeting?  
What format would you use to best suit the needs of the parents? (guest speakers, open discussion, etc.)
3. Other than their parents, what other people in a child's life could continue positive communication outside their home?
4. Do you feel that positive family communication is a big enough issue to be concerned about? Why or why not?