



TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT TOUGH ISSUES:

A National Survey of Parents and Kids

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overview

It's not just parents of teenagers anymore who are staying up late worrying about their kids. Many parents of "tweens" and even younger kids feel their children face more pressures than when they were growing up. In spite of these concerns many parents still don't talk with their kids about the "tough issues"—from violence to racism and discrimination to sexual pressures—that are a part of life at younger and younger ages.

Even when families are talking the message is not always getting through. While parents may feel a sense of relief at having raised a difficult topic, many of their children are still waiting to hear more—or wondering if the conversation happened at all.

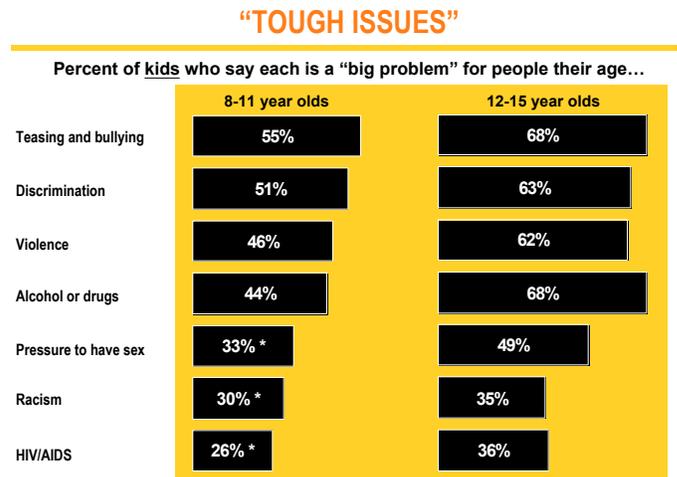
Experts encourage parents to talk early and often with their kids—before adolescence—when kids are most receptive to hearing from them. As they approach the teen years kids increasingly turn outside the home—to their friends and the media—to learn about the facts of life. Teens are also more likely to keep secrets from mom and dad—although many pre-teens do as well—saying that their parents just "won't understand."

Following is a detailed summary of findings from the Nickelodeon / Talking with Kids National Survey of Parents and Kids about what families today are talking about or not, as well as the issues kids (and their parents) say they struggle with the most. This survey was conducted as part of a broader public education partnership between Nickelodeon and Talking with Kids, an ongoing campaign of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now.

The "Tough Issues "

A majority of parents of pre-teens (65%) say their kids have it "harder" today than they did when they were young; even more parents of teens (78%) worry that this is the case. Indeed, a significant percent of kids—from age 8 to 15—say violence, racism and other forms of discrimination, alcohol and drug use, and pressures to have sex (asked only of 10 and older) are problems for kids their age. Concerns more commonly associated with the teen years now worry many younger kids as well. About half of 8-11 year olds cite violence and discrimination as "big problems" for kids their age; 44 percent say alcohol and drugs are "big problems;" and one third (of 10-11 year olds) say pressure to have sex is a concern. Teens are even more likely to say these issues are concerns among their peers. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

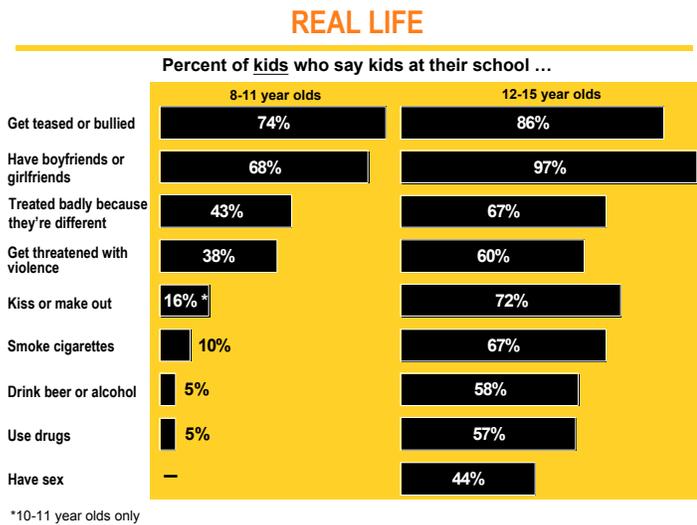


*10-11 year olds only

Nickelodeon and Talking with Kids have teamed up to help parents and kids talk together about tough issues like sex, violence, drugs and respect. Talking with Kids is an ongoing campaign of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now.

For many pre-teens and teens alike these pressures are a part of their daily lives. Large majorities of 8-11 year olds say threats of violence, teasing and bullying, and discrimination are commonplace in their schools. One out of six (16%) see other students “kissing or making out.” By the time they reach the early teen years, sexual pressures, smoking, and alcohol and drug use are more pronounced. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

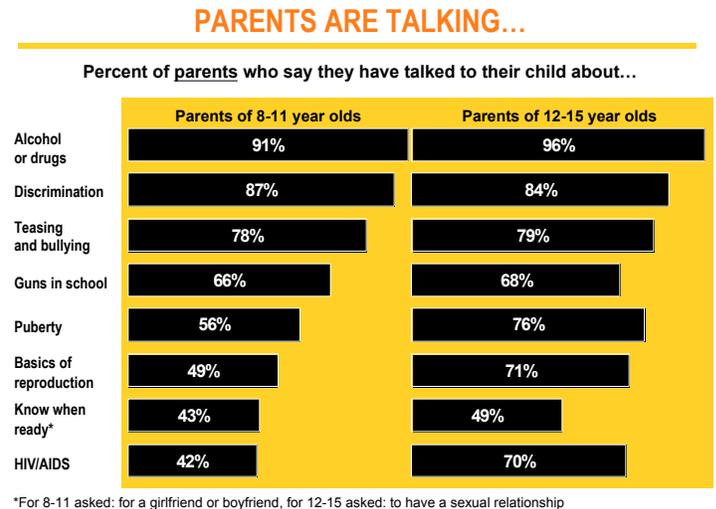


What Families Talk About ... And What They Don't

Most parents have talked with their pre-teen about alcohol, drugs and violence. Sex, however, still goes undiscussed in many families. Fewer than half of parents of 8-11 year olds say they have talked with their child about the basics of reproduction, as compared with 91 percent who have discussed alcohol and drugs. For parents of adolescents, getting beyond the “birds and bees” and puberty can be a challenge: just 49 percent have talked about decision making about sex and relationships. (See Figure 3).

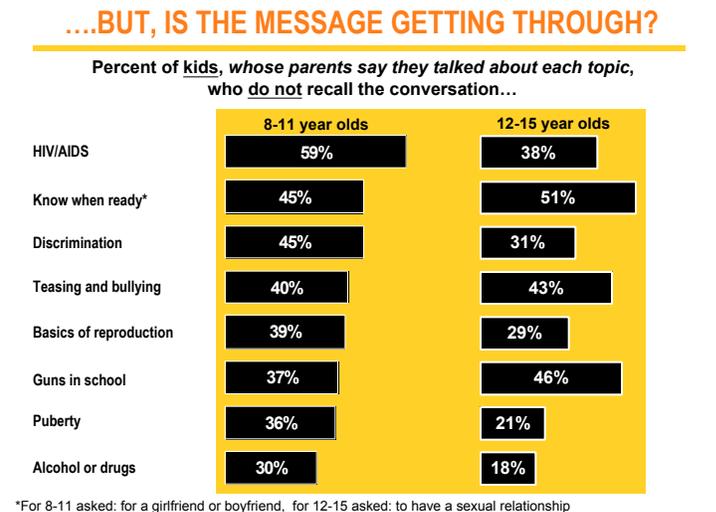
While mothers and fathers are equally likely to have tackled alcohol and drugs, violence and discrimination with their kids, the responsibility of talking about sex and related issues is more likely to fall to mom. Parents are also somewhat more likely to talk with daughters about these issues than their sons.

Figure 3



Even when parents are talking, many kids don't seem to be hearing what they have to say. As many as one in two 8-11 year olds whose parents say they talked to them about a particular topic don't remember the conversation. Half of teens (51%) whose parents reported a conversation don't recall getting advice about sexual decision making. (See Figure 4). Kids are also less likely than their parents to consider these talks as happening on “regular” basis, recalling instead having just talked a “couple of times” about a particular topic.

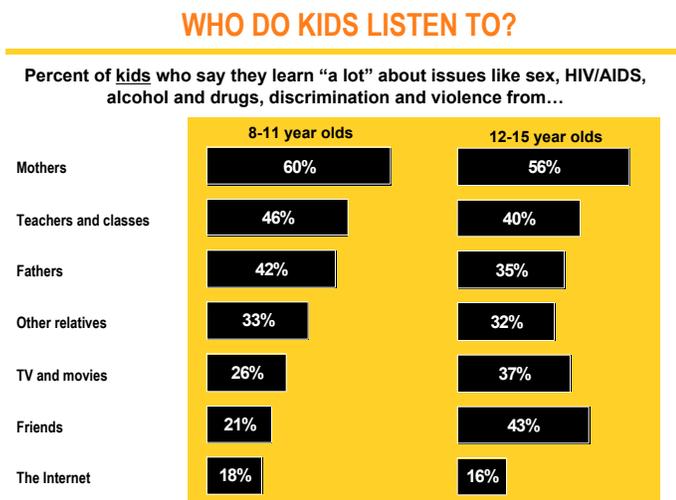
Figure 4



New Influences

Just as kids' worlds are becoming more complicated, they start turning outside the home for advice. While mom remains the number one resource among pre-teens and young teens alike, other influences start to gain significance once kids reach adolescence. Twice as many 12-15 year olds—43 percent—say they learn “a lot” about issues like sex, alcohol and drugs, and violence from their friends as compared with 8-11 year olds (21%). The media also becomes more influential as kids get older: 37 percent of 12-15 year olds say they get “a lot” of their information” from television and movies, as compared to 26 percent of 8-11 year olds. Fathers fall behind media and friends once adolescence hits. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5

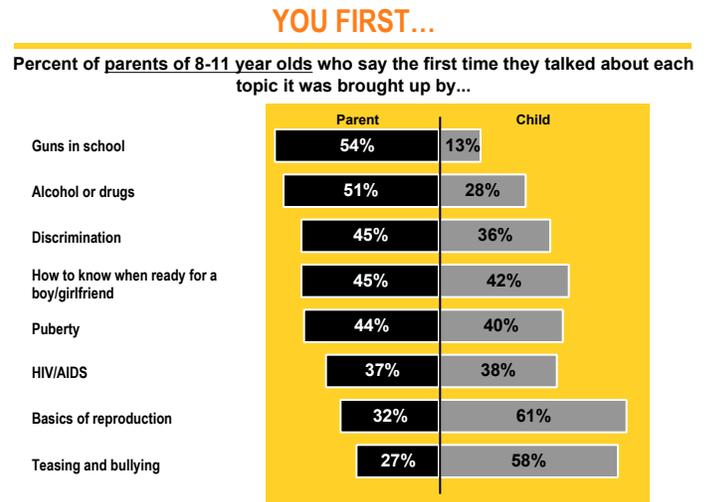


Kids are also more likely to start keeping secrets from their parents about what is going in their lives in the teen years: 82 percent of 12-15 year olds, and 67 percent of 8-11 year olds, say at least “some of the time” they keep things from their parents because they think they just “won’t understand.” One in four teens (22%) keep secrets “all or most of the time.”

Waiting Too Long ...

Parents who wait for their kids to raise a topic may find themselves waiting a long time. Sex and related issues are among the topics parents are most likely to delay talking about until their kids bring it up. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6

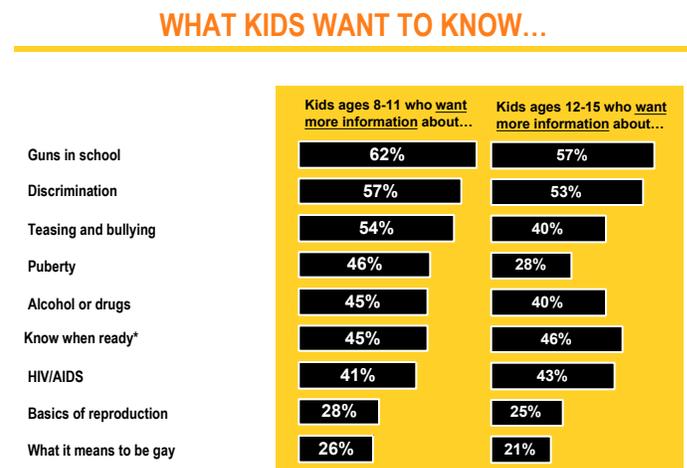


One reason kids say their families don’t talk about “tough issues,” like sex, is that it’s too embarrassing (70%). Kids also want to “protect” their parents: 61 percent say their parents will get worried if they ask. More than half (52%) say their parents just don’t understand.

More Information Needed

While they may not admit it, pre-teens—and teens as well—want to know more about issues from puberty to guns in school to racism and other types of discrimination. (See Figure 7).

Figure 7



*For 8-11 asked: for a girlfriend or boyfriend, for 12-15 asked: to have a sexual relationship

Methodology

The Nickelodeon / Talking with Kids National Survey of Parents and Kids is a nationally representative survey of parents and their children age 8-15. The survey was designed by staff at Nickelodeon, the Kaiser Family Foundation and International Communications Research (ICR) and conducted by telephone by ICR between December 7, 2000 and January 18, 2001.

A total of 1,249 parents of children age 8-15 and 823 children age 8-15 were interviewed for this survey, including oversamples of African Americans and Latinos. Depending on the preference of the respondent, interviews were conducted in English or Spanish. Certain questions were not asked of all age groups.

The margin of sampling error is $\pm 3\%$ for the total sample of parents, $\pm 4\%$ for the total sample of children and may be larger for certain subsets represented in this analysis.

This survey was conducted as part of a partnership between Nickelodeon and *Talking with Kids*, an ongoing campaign of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now. Nickelodeon and *Talking with Kids*, have teamed up to help parents and kids talk together about tough issues like sex, violence, drugs and respect. The partnership includes public service messages and resources for parents and kids as well as original research on family communication.

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Children Now is a nonpartisan, independent voice for America's children. Using innovative research and communication strategies, Children Now promotes pioneering solutions to problems facing America's children.

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