



Taking Some Chances

FINDINGS ON RISKY BEHAVIORS

From the March 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington, Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest link to their health.

This brochure takes a quick look at the findings from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students.

RISK BEHAVIORS ARE WIDESPREAD

Most young people completing the survey reported one or more risk behaviors. When we examined data on ten common risk behaviors (see list below), we found that few youth are "risk-free":

1. About one in three young people in 6th grade were risk-free.
2. About one in four young people in 8th grade and one in five young people in 10th grade were risk-free.
3. Only about one in ten young people in 12th grade were risk-free.

TEN COMMON RISK BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Cigarette smoking
- ✓ Alcohol use
- ✓ Marijuana use
- ✓ Inhalant use
- ✓ Fighting
- ✓ Persistent signs of depression
- ✓ Lack of exercise
- ✓ Excessive television
- ✓ Unhealthy weight loss methods
- ✓ Irresponsible sexual intercourse

KEY FINDINGS

Among Arlington's youth in grades six, eight, ten and twelve,

- ✓ 28 percent report getting into a fight in the past year and 15 percent carried a weapon in the past month.
- ✓ 14 percent use marijuana, 13 percent smoke cigarettes, and 26 percent use alcohol.
- ✓ 22 percent felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more and 9 percent report at least one suicide attempt in the past year.
- ✓ 60 percent do not meet current recommendations for exercise while 29 percent report watching 3 or more hours of television on a typical school day.

TRENDS IN BEHAVIORS

Several risk behaviors have decreased significantly since 2001, when Arlington's first YRBS was done. Fewer young people reported fighting, depressive symptom and smoking.

*Good health and good sense are
two of life's greatest blessings.*

Publius Serrus, 42
B.C.

WHO'S AT RISK?

While risk behaviors are common, some groups of young people are more likely to be involved in particular activities. Among the ten common risk behaviors:

- ✓ Boys are more likely to report marijuana use, cigarette use, inhalant use and too much television. Girls are more likely to report signs of depression and inadequate levels of exercise.
- ✓ Older youth are more likely to report using alcohol and marijuana while youth in middle school are more likely to use inhalants and get into physical fights.

NOT JUST PART OF GROWING UP

While risk behaviors are common among Arlington youth, they need *not* be part of growing up. Research shows that communities strongly influence young people, helping them learn to make healthy choices. How? By making sure youth have the "assets" they need to grow up to be caring, healthy, and responsible adults.

Assets are things like a supportive family, caring neighbors and teachers, friends who set a good example, and a community that sees young people as a vital resource. Assets also include personal qualities such as honesty, planning skills, and the desire to do well in school.

More assets mean fewer risk behaviors. For example, only six percent of young people with many (30 of 40) assets use alcohol compared to 54 percent of those with few assets (10 or fewer).

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2500 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child from participation. Less than two percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

CONNECT WITH KIDS

One of the best ways to build assets among our youth *and* reduce risk behaviors in our community is for adults to reach out and "Connect with Kids." When young people know that adults care about them, value their contributions, have high expectations for them, and will enforce consistent community values, they are much less likely to behave in ways that risk their health and well-being.



Connect With Kids

Assets Make the Connection

Anyone can find a way to Connect with Kids. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Be a good role model for children. They are always watching and listening.
2. Find ways to include young people in your civic, volunteer or religious organizations. Help them have a voice in the community.
3. Smile at young people, especially teens, when you see them at the mall or in your neighborhood.
4. Volunteer in schools or with other youth-serving organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To see more detailed results from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, please go to our Web site, click on Publications, and choose *Chartbook of Statistics: 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey*.

For questions about the data or how the survey was done, contact Amy Graham, Data Coordinator, at 703-228-1668 or by E-mail at agraha@arlingtonva.us.

To learn more about the Connect with Kids campaign, contact Mary Ann Moran, Assets Liaison, at 703-228-1671 or by E-mail at mmoran@arlingtonva.us.

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