



Washington County Department of Public Health & Environment

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

April 2001

Over the summer of 2000, a Youth Risk Behavior (YRB) Endowment Advisory Committee (made up of youth, parents and representatives from community agencies) was convened by the Washington County Department of Public Health and Environment.

As a result of these meetings, suicide was identified as the top risk behavior to be addressed as part of the YRB Endowment funding.

The aim of the funding is to involve youth as equal partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating the projects. In order to proceed further, the Department asked teens to complete opinion surveys to ask them what needs to be done to address depression, suicide, and teen mental health in Washington County.

The response was overwhelming. Of the 17,726 County teens in grades 7-12, 1,875 or 11% responded to one of the two surveys.

The first survey, "Depression & Suicide: How Can We Make A Difference" asks teens specific questions requiring short answers. This shorter survey was the most widely used.

The second survey, "Communities For Teen Health" consisted of a longer, open-ended question style that asked the participants to relate in their own words, their thoughts on teen suicide among their peers and ways to address this issue.

Youth, classroom teachers, and youth groups (4-H, churches) assisted and encouraged teen participation. An effort was made to equally survey Junior and Senior High youth from all school districts. These surveys were not random or scientific and are meant to give voice to youth opinion on how to address depression and suicide in Washington County.

The results of the survey are to be shared with community groups as they plan and implement strategies to address this problem.

Our thanks to all the teen respondents and others who helped get the word out and encouraged teen participation.

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Who Participated: Total of 1,875 Respondents

Service Area	Survey #1 (shorter survey)	Survey #2 (longer survey)	Total Participants by Service Area
Stillwater	235	218	453
Forest Lake	303	35	338
Mahtomedi	288	--	288
Oakdale	156	25	181
South Washington County	615	--	615
Total Respondents	1,597	278	1,875

Age	Survey #1 (shorter survey)	Survey #2 (longer survey)	Total Junior/Senior High Students
Junior High	670	0	670
Senior High	927	278	1,205
Total Respondents	1,597	278	1,875

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #1

Depression and Suicide:
How Can We Make a Difference?"

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #1 Depression and Suicide: How Can We Make a Difference?

Youth were asked the following questions:

Questions

1. Do you think that depression and suicidal thoughts or attempts are a problem among teens today?
2. What kind of information do you think teens would benefit from?
3. What do you think would be the best way of getting information about depression and suicide to teens?
4. Is there anything else that adults or teens could be doing to reach youth about mental health?

The following are the responses by youth to the four questions:

1. Do you think that depression and suicidal thoughts or attempts are a problem among teens today?

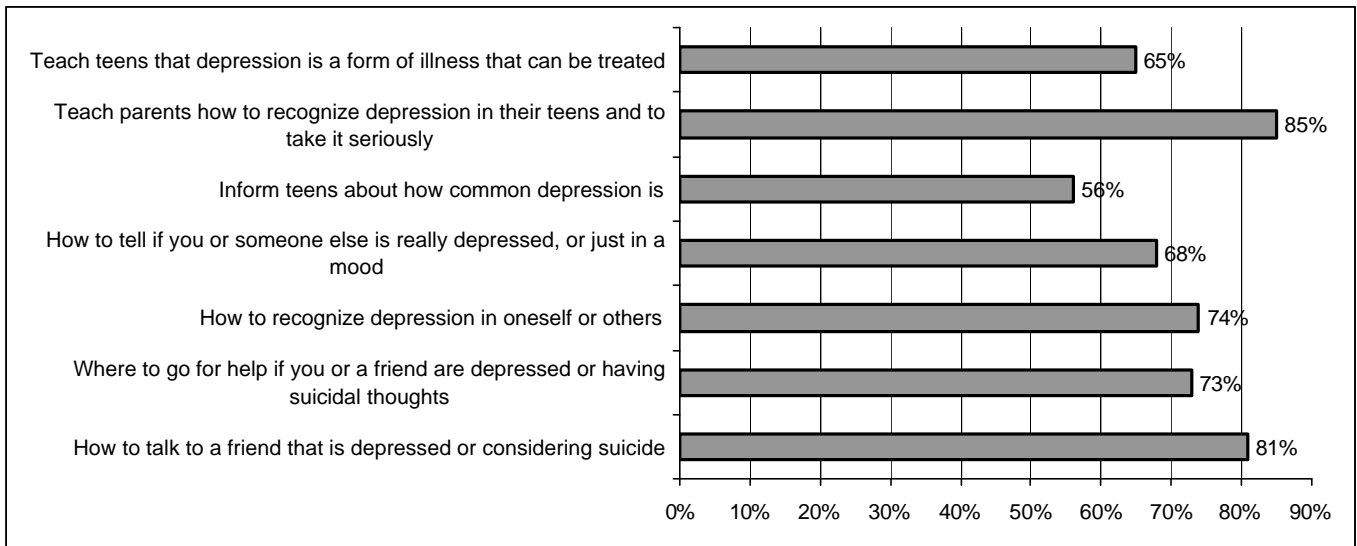
- 87% Yes
- 12% No
- 1% No Answer

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Survey #1 Depression and Suicide: How Can We Make a Difference?

2. What kind of information do you think teens would benefit from?

Respondents were allowed to choose as many of the following methods of conveying information that they thought are appropriate.



Comments to “What kind of information do you think teens would benefit from?”

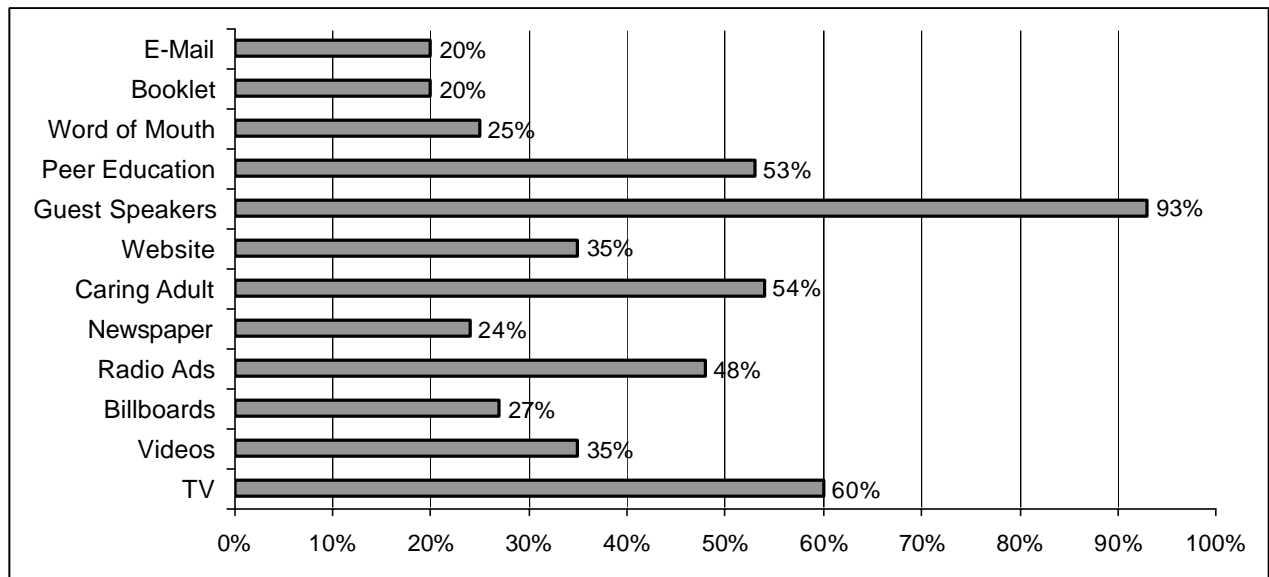
- “Teach teens how to tell if friends are going to commit suicide.”
- “Familiarize the topic and make it more open.”
- “Tell parents to listen when their kid says ‘I’m Sad.’”
- “How to get help and not be ashamed of needing it.”
- “The hardest thing is knowing how to recognize it.”
- “How to hint to someone that you need help for depression.”

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #1 Depression and Suicide: How Can We Make a Difference?

3. What do you think would be the best way of getting information about depression and suicide to teens?

Respondents were asked to rank their top three choices.



Comments to “What do you think would be the best way of getting information about depression and suicide to teens?”

- “Personal things-media is too generic for someone with depression to pay attention.”
- “It needs to be everywhere because not all teens do the same things-like watch TV.”
- “Teenage speakers that can relate and tell about personal experiences.”
- “Peer and close to peer counseling (college-age people) who are wise.”
- “Motivational speakers.”
- “Guest speakers at mass assembly.”

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Survey #1 Depression and Suicide: How Can We Make a Difference?

4. Is there anything else that adults or teens could be doing to reach youth about mental health?

Not all students responded to this open question. The top three responses were categorized as:

- 1. Talk and Listen to Youth**
- 2. More Education**
- 3. Decrease Stress**

Comments to “Is there anything else that adults or teens could be doing to reach youth about mental health?”

- “Well, all teens need is someone to help them get through it. That’s all they need, someone to talk to.”
- “Be willing to listen and take what is said seriously.”
- “Not letting suicide be a taboo subject.”
- “Talk to people who seem to be having problems. It could save their life to know that somebody cares.”
- “Actually listening to us about it, not talking to us about it.”
- “Inform a teen then have them talk to others instead of having an adult give a speech.”
- “Be approachable, don’t feed us a bunch of jargon. Be real and candid with us.”
- “Talking to kids is both crucial and effective.”
- “It would just help if people knew how to see it, and don’t have to ask so many questions.”
- “Inform parents more.”
- “I think the most important thing we need to know is how to help our peers.”
- “Start talking with junior high kids so they get a better idea and also high school kids.”

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #1 Depression and Suicide: How Can We Make a Difference?

Comments to “Is there anything else that adults or teens could be doing to reach youth about mental health?” (continued)

- “Adults need to teach their kids more about things like this. Lots of kids are afraid to show their emotions.”
- “I just think that it is important to understand how common it is and how it can be treated and that it can be treated.”
- “Parents need to recognize symptoms and talk to kids.”
- “Have a speaker come in who has gone through depression and thought about suicide, but found happiness.”
- “Make it a required course with self-evaluations, and taught in a fun way.”
- “Doctors could inform students when they come in for the physical check-ups about depression and suicide.”
- “Actually put more effort into caring about a teen’s issues.”
- “They could start to make more clubs in school so people can make friends and or keep occupied.”
- “Take folks into the woods, everything is more clear after a walk in the woods.”
- Encourage parents to spend more quality time with kids.”
- “Be more open about problems, get more youth involved in helping.”
- “After school activities.”
- “Take surveys or something to find out if teens really have depression so they know and can treat it.”
- “Make them feel wanted in school. We need to try to cut down on the ‘clicks.’”
- “I have bipolar disorder and you need to tell children that have this that it’s not their fault because it is scary.”
- “Don’t just say they need to tell somebody because it is harder than they think.”
- “Hire more counselors so they can spend more time with each student.”

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #2

Communities for Teen Health

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #2 Communities For Teen Health

Youth were asked the following questions:

Questions

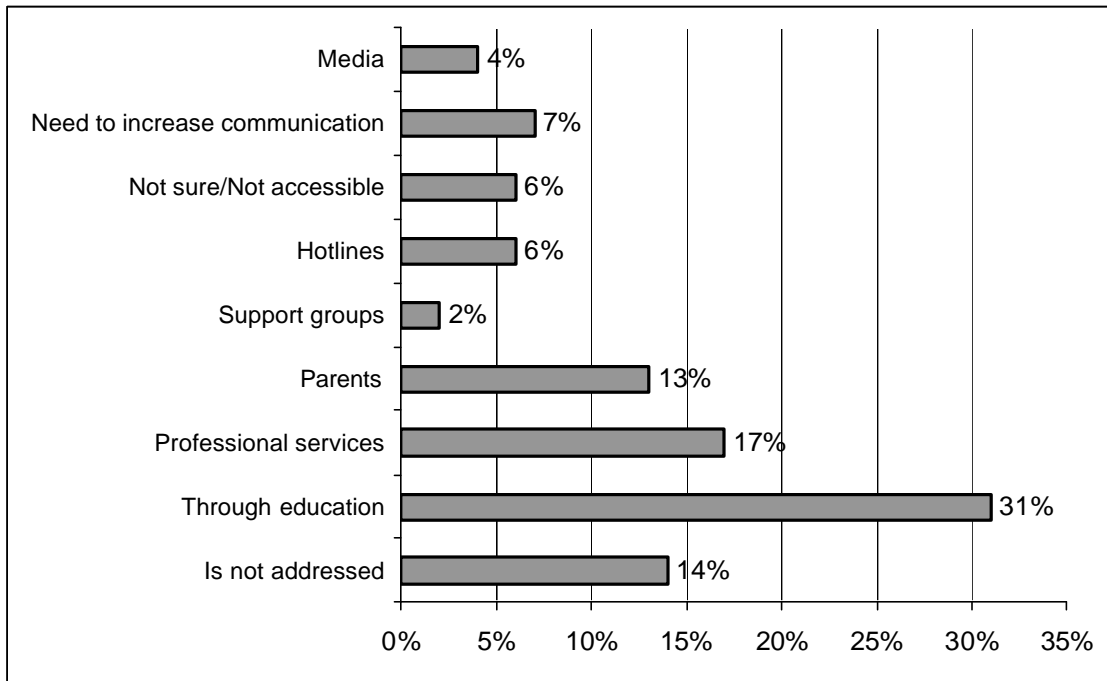
- 1. How do we address the problem of suicide, depression and mental health with teens in Washington County?**
- 2. How do we reach youth that need to be reached? How can adults reach teens? Where do you go for help?**
- 3. What is the best way to reach youth about mental health issues? How best can this be done?**
- 4. Is parent/teacher education needed?**
- 5. How would you spend money to address this problem?**

The above questions were asked in open-ended form. The responses were categorized and in some cases, more than one response was listed.

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #2 Communities For Teen Health

1. How do we address the problems of suicide, depression and teen mental health in Washington County?



Comments to “How do we address the problems of suicide, depression and teen mental health in Washington County?”

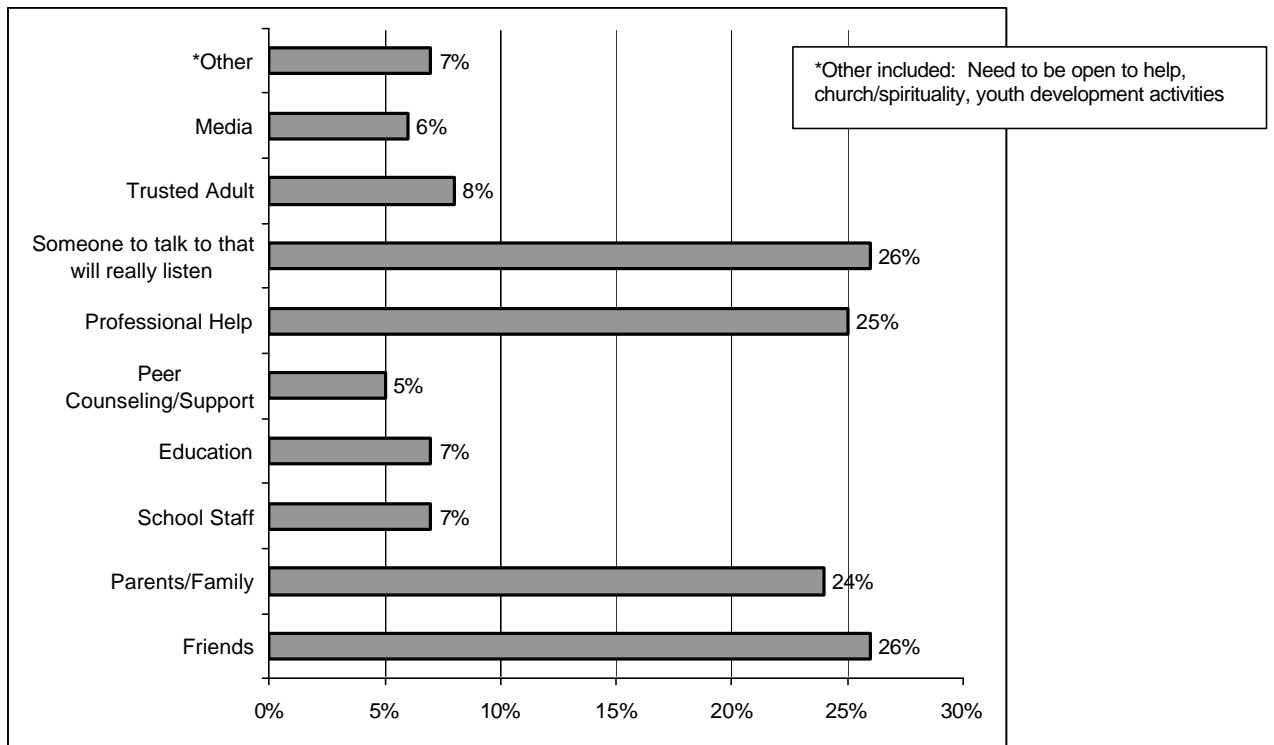
- “Schools bring up depression in classes like health, but I don’t recall lengthy discussions about it (side effects, their emotions, etc.)”
- “I think talking about it in psychology class is good, but we should have an entire grade talk about it so everyone can be reached.”
- “I have no idea. I assume there is a phone number or something, but I do not know it off hand. So I’d say there needs to be more reaching out rather than people coming to you.”
- “In Washington County the problem of depression is not addressed. It is hidden secret among teenagers and that’s why, what was then a small problem, is not a huge life threatening situation. I do think there are groups and information, people just don’t know how to find it.”
- “I think programs are available if people need them, but I also feel a person would really have to search to find them.”
- “We address it in school a little, but parental teaching is necessary for some with telltale signs.”
- “That’s kind of hard to answer. Where I live, we usually get help from our school counselors, which are a huge help. They can get you further help if needed.”

Adolescent Depression & Suicide Opinion Survey

Survey #2 Communities For Teen Health

2. How do we reach youth that need to be reached? How can adults reach teens?

Where do you go for help?



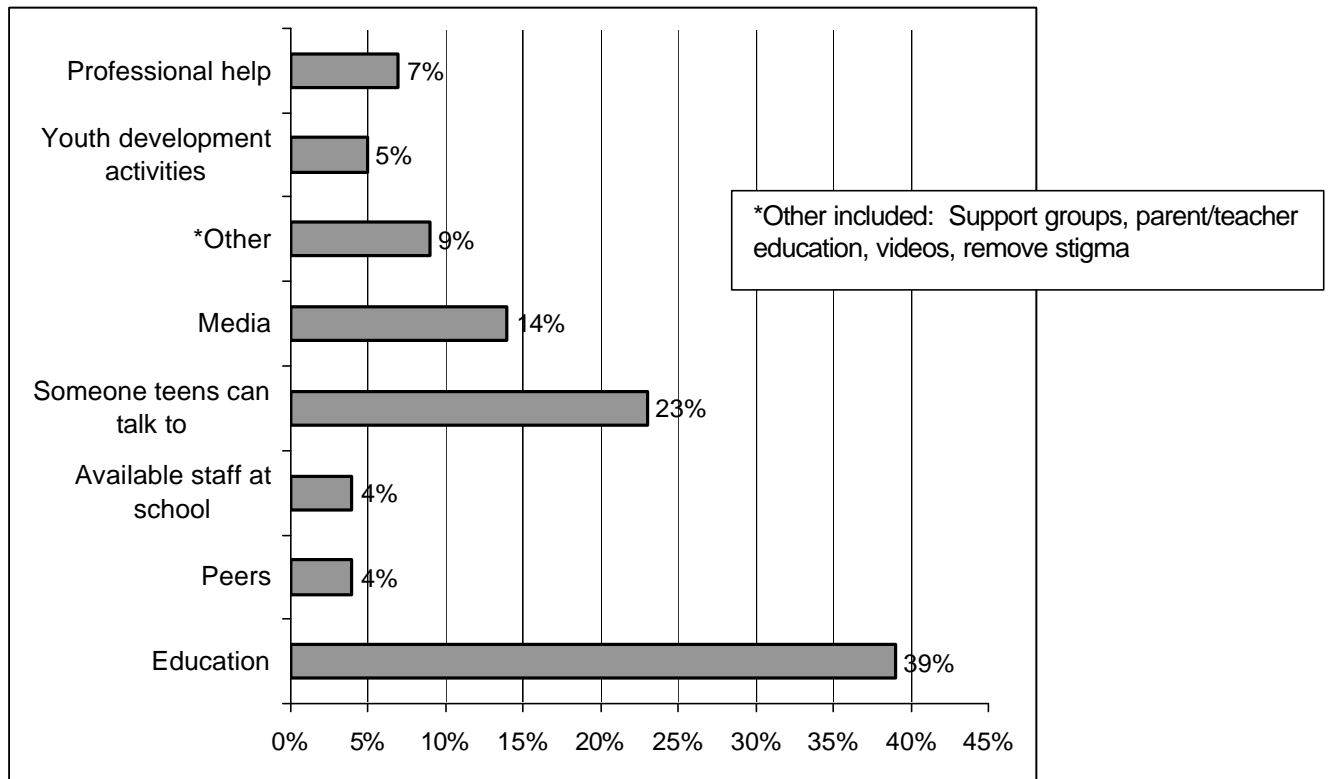
Comments to “How do we reach youth that need to be reached? How can adults reach teens? Where to go for help?”

- “Actually adults aren’t as helpful – we receive more help from your friends or people we know really well. I go to my pastor because he is the only one I can tell everything to. Adults just need to be open and truthful for us to come to them.”
- “Make young adults feel as equals. I go to peer counselors for help if I need to talk. I trust them and they don’t make me feel bad because I have issues.”
- “Friends and family should talk to someone, because the depressed people aren’t going to ask.”
- “The easiest way to reach teens is to make help very easy and available. People want help but they shy away if it is difficult to get. School counselors are too busy and not helpful in my experience.”
- “I don’t know how adults can reach teens. Whenever I try to get help, money gets in the way. I don’t have money.”
- “A lot of times it is hard for depressed teens to get help because they’re confused and don’t need the stigma of identifying themselves with mental illness. It seems dependent upon family, friends and teachers to ask what is going on.”
- “I usually go to my parents for help, but many kids don’t have that. They can go to counselors or other adults they trust. Though, I honestly don’t know where else. I have not heard of many places kids can go.”

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Survey #2 Communities For Teen Health

3. What is the best way to reach youth about mental health issues?



Comments to “What is the best way to reach youth about mental health issues?”

- “Through television, all kids do is watch TV. There could be some public service announcement type stuff and that might help some kids realize what to do, and come out about their problems.”
- “Don’t make it scary and extremely serious, provide information and be there to help.”
- “Have speakers...I know it can be difficult to gather assemblies, but if we can have (a) sports rally we really should be able to have an assembly to save our kids’ lives.”
- “Parents need to address it with their kids, tell them that it is normal and affect many people, and not to be afraid to tell someone if they are feeling down.”
- “Teach youth about mental health in a way that disorders aren’t considered ‘weird’ and make kids comfortable. Don’t just show the most severe cases of disorders, phobias, and diseases...”
- “Part of the curriculum from grade school on. Make people aware of mental health issues from little to big. Every year drugs are addressed, why not depression?”

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Survey #2: Communities For Teen Health

4. Is parent or teacher education needed?

- **80% Yes**
- **10% No**
- **4% Maybe/Other**
- **6% No Answer**

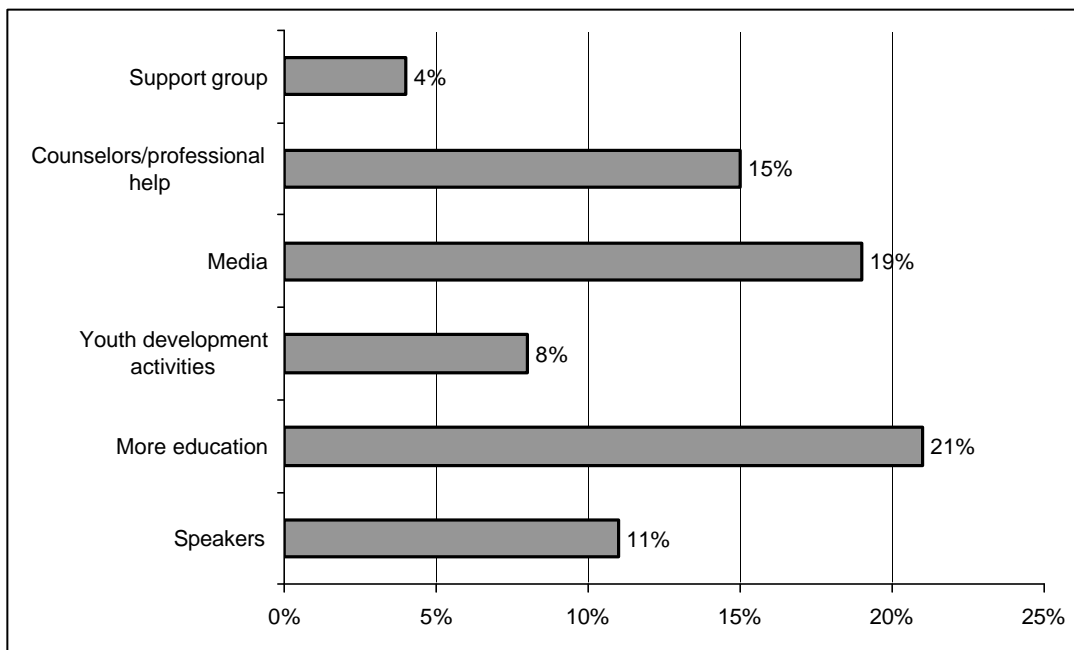
Comments to “Is parent or teacher education needed?”

- “Teacher especially, I think most teens are never around their parents.”
- “...a good, solid parent child relationship is the best beginning, and further help and communication between parent and teachers who work with the kids on a regular basis is important too.”
- “...a lot of our time is spent in school and maybe teachers could tell if there was a change in someone’s attitude.”
- “...many parents would not know the signs if their kids have problems and then they need to learn how to handle the problem.”
- “Parent and teacher education is needed very much so that they can learn to interact with teenagers. A lot of times it doesn’t feel like adults really talk on the same level as teenagers.”
- “I think parents shouldn’t be afraid to talk to their kids about health issues.”
- “How can we trust them and believe in what they’re telling us, or go to them for help if they don’t know anything either?”

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Survey #2: Communities For Teen Health

5. How would you spend money to address the problem?



Comments to “How would you spend money to address the problem?”

- “Have a special place teens can go just to have someone to listen to them. Many times teens don’t want their parents to know about their problem and would rather talk to anyone qualified in the area of stress and depression.”
- “Pay counselors to offer services to people that can’t afford counseling.”
- “I would advertise and try to make the program more socially acceptable so kids don’t feel embarrassed or ashamed if they think they have depression.”
- “Make videos, posters, commercials and programs for teens and adults in the school and community.”
- “Put money into programs like Young Life and Real Life because these really attract kids and make them feel they are part of a group. And these are both full of other wholesome, FUN STUFF that can help any kid.”
- “Spend money on programs (theatrical performance, entertaining yet educational) for students to see. Also classes for families, parents, teachers, and students on how to communicate better. There needs to be a safe environment.”