



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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The YMCA's Teen Action Agenda

by Nels Ericson

In January 2001, the YMCA of the USA commissioned the After School for America's Teens survey. The survey found that teens who are unsupervised during the afterschool hours of 3 to 6 p.m. are more likely to engage in risky behaviors—drug and alcohol abuse, sexual activity, cigarette smoking, and carrying and using weapons—than youth who are supervised by a parent or another adult or who are involved in structured activities during those hours. In response to these findings, the YMCA has launched its Teen Action Agenda, a nationwide campaign to double the number of teens it serves through its afterschool and other programs, to 5 million by 2005.

The Teen Action Agenda's goals are to build skills and values; improve teens' health practices, educational development, and character; help teens become contributing members of their communities; and place committed, caring adults in long-term relationships with the youth. Participating local YMCAs will offer programs that focus on three key areas: (1) education, career, and life skills; (2) health, safety, and well-being; and (3) leadership and service learning. Each local YMCA chapter must offer at least one program in each of the key areas, dedicate a full-time program staff member to every 1,000 youth served, and issue a membership card to every teen served in the community. Each chapter will measure the success of its efforts and report the findings to the YMCA of the USA.

Survey Findings

In the survey, 500 U.S. teens between the ages of 14 and 17 were interviewed by telephone. The poll was designed to determine their attitudes and behaviors in the afterschool hours. Specifically, the survey sought to determine:

- ◆ The nature of teens' relationships with their parents.
- ◆ The amount of supervision teens receive after school.
- ◆ The effects of insufficient supervision and participation in afterschool activities on teens' school performance and at-risk behaviors.

- ◆ The availability of community- or neighborhood-based afterschool programs and teens' awareness of existing programs.

Key findings from the survey are summarized below:

Teens lack supervision in the hours after school. The average teen in the United States is unsupervised after school 2 days per week for up to 5 hours. Nearly 6 in 10 teens (59 percent) are left without supervision by a parent or other adult at least 1 day per week after school, and nearly 4 in 10 (39 percent) are left unsupervised 3 or more days. Older teens (17 and 18 years old) are more likely than younger teens (14 to 16 years old) to lack adult supervision after school at least 1 day per week (67 percent versus 52 percent). Teens from single-parent households are left unsupervised for more days per week than teens from two-parent homes (an average of 2.2 days versus 1.7 days).

Lack of supervision leads to at-risk behavior in teens. Teens who are unsupervised after school are much more likely than teens who are supervised to engage in activities that put them at risk. Compared with teens supervised every day of the school week, those unsupervised 1 or more days are more likely to drink alcohol (34 percent versus 22 percent), smoke cigarettes (16 percent versus 11 percent), and engage in sex (17 percent versus 11 percent). Unsupervised teens are three times as likely to use marijuana or other drugs (14 percent versus 4 percent). Compared with teens who are supervised every day of the school week, those who are left unsupervised 1 or more days of the week are nearly twice as likely to skip a day of school (27 percent versus 14 percent) and nearly three times as likely to skip classes at school (30 percent versus 11 percent).

Participation in afterschool activities leads to better grades and better behavior in teens. Nearly 8 in 10 teens (79 percent) who engage in afterschool activities are "A" or "B" students, but only half (52 percent) of teens who do not participate in afterschool activities earn these high marks. Teens who do not engage in afterschool activities are five times as likely to be "D" students as those who participate in afterschool activities (15 percent versus 3 percent). More than one-third of teens who do not

participate in afterschool activities drink alcohol (36 percent) and get into trouble at school (36 percent), compared with about one-fourth of teens who engage in afterschool activities (26 percent drink alcohol and 24 percent get into trouble at school).

Not enough afterschool programs are available for teens. More than half of the surveyed teens (52 percent) said they wish more afterschool activities were available in their neighborhood or community. Six in 10 teens (62 percent) left unsupervised during the week said they would be likely to participate in afterschool programs if they were available. More than one-half of the teens (54 percent) said they would watch less television or play fewer video games if they had other things to do after school.

YMCA Programs

YMCA's Teen Action Agenda is working to improve afterschool options for all teens, but specifically for those who lack adult supervision. To reach teens during the afterschool hours, local YMCAs sponsor a wide range of resources: mentoring programs, computer literacy classes, basketball leagues, drug prevention programs, culturally specific curriculums, writing and literary arts centers, teen leadership clubs, and recycling and environmental projects. YMCAs also partner with juvenile courts, housing authorities, police departments, and schools to provide delinquency intervention and prevention programs.

For Further Information

For more information on YMCA's Teen Action Agenda and other programs contact:

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For more information on the After School for America's Teens survey, visit YMCA's Web site at www.ymca.net. Click on "Press Room" and select "Press Releases."

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