

KIDS THESE DAYS '99

WHAT AMERICANS REALLY THINK ABOUT
THE NEXT GENERATION



A Report from Public Agenda

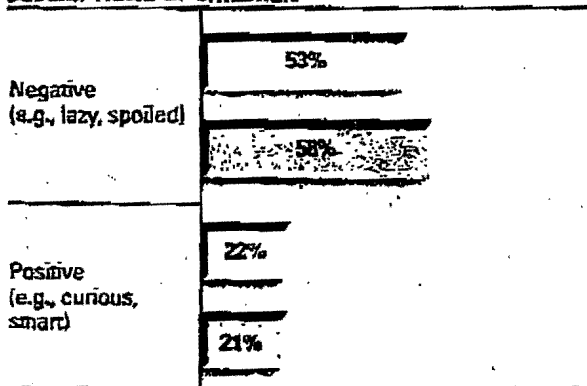


FINDING ONE: Negative Reactions

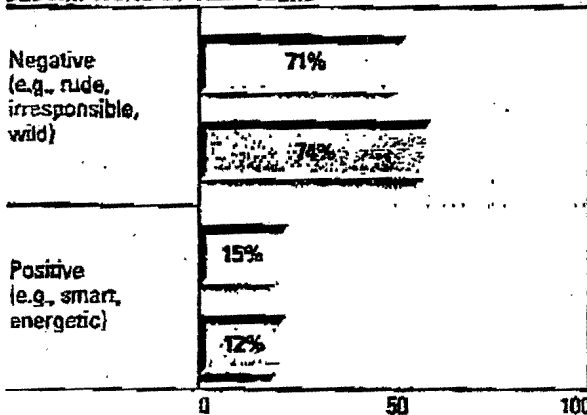
Most Americans are deeply disappointed with "kids these days." More than seven in ten adults resort to words such as "rude," "irresponsible," and "wild" to describe today's teens, and more than half also describe young children disapprovingly. On the whole, high hopes for kids are wanting—no more than two in five adults, parents or teens themselves say youngsters today will grow up to make America a better place.

Most Americans describe children and teens in negative terms.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CHILDREN



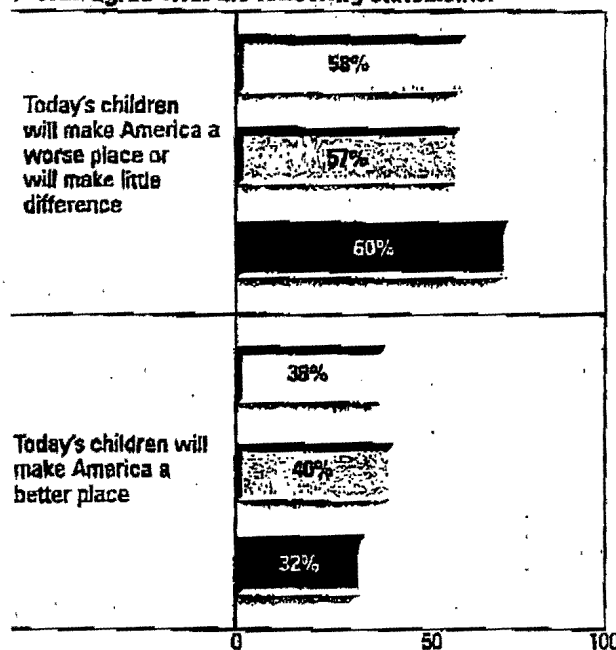
DESCRIPTIONS OF TEENAGERS



General Public Parents

Neither adults nor teens believe the next generation will make America a better place.

% who agree with the following statements:



General Public Parents Teens

Readers wishing to obtain more detail about the findings outlined in *Kids These Days '99* can refer to the benchmark study Public Agenda prepared in 1997. See page 11 for more information.

Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

FINDING TWO: A Focus on Values and Respect

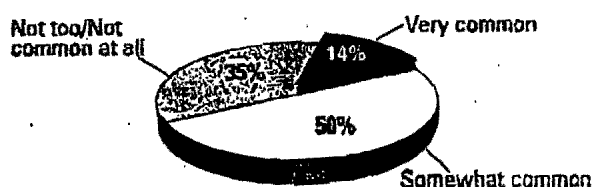
The American public believes too many youngsters today lack values and character and are severely short on basic civility. More people today than two years ago pick "failing to learn such values as honesty, respect and responsibility" as the number one problem affecting kids, and an overwhelming majority say this problem is widespread, not confined to kids from lower income families. Only a handful of adults say it's typical to come across children or teens who are friendly and helpful towards their neighbors, or who treat people with respect. These findings are consistent among both white and minority Americans.

Not learning values tops the public's list of problems facing kids.

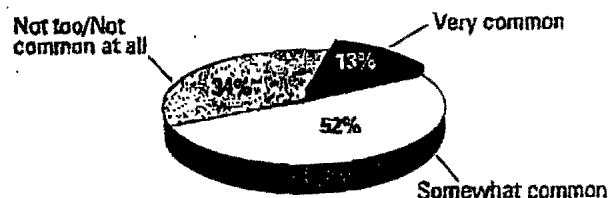
% ranking item as "most serious" out of 10 very serious problems	White Adults	Minority Adults
Not learning values like honesty, respect, and responsibility	33%	31%
Drug and alcohol abuse	23	29
Crime and gangs	9	10
Welfare programs that encourage single-parent families and teen pregnancy	8	6
Too much violence or sex in the media	7	3
Poor public schools	4	5
Fewer families teaching religious faith and values	3	4
Economic pressures on parents	3	3
Shortage of strong communities	3	5
Shortage of government programs that support kids	3	1

It's not very common to come across friendly, helpful, respectful young people.

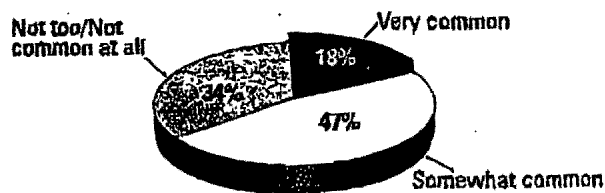
Teens who are friendly and helpful towards their neighbors



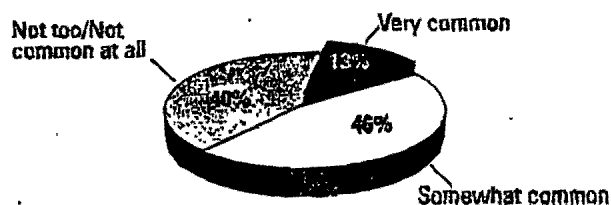
Teens who treat people with respect



Children who are friendly and helpful towards their neighbors



Children who treat people with respect



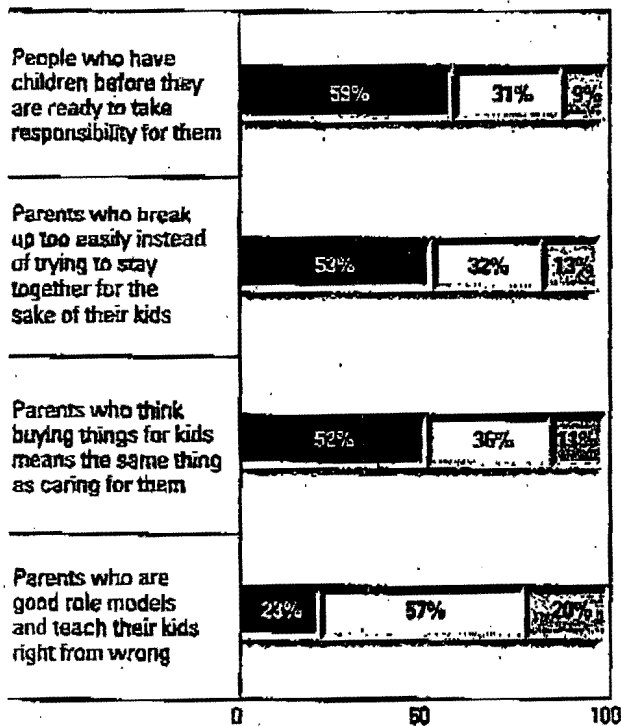
FINDING THREE: Putting the Blame on Parents

The public holds parents fundamentally responsible for how well—or not so well—kids are doing. Criticism about parents is plentiful—majorities believe that too many parents have children before they are ready, that too many hastily divorce without regard for their kids, and that too many equate buying things for kids with caring for them. Fewer than one in four say parents who are good role models are very common. If anything, the poor reviews for today's parents are getting worse. People are more likely to blame parents—rather than social forces—for problems with kids than they were just two years ago.

Americans think too many parents fail to do their job.

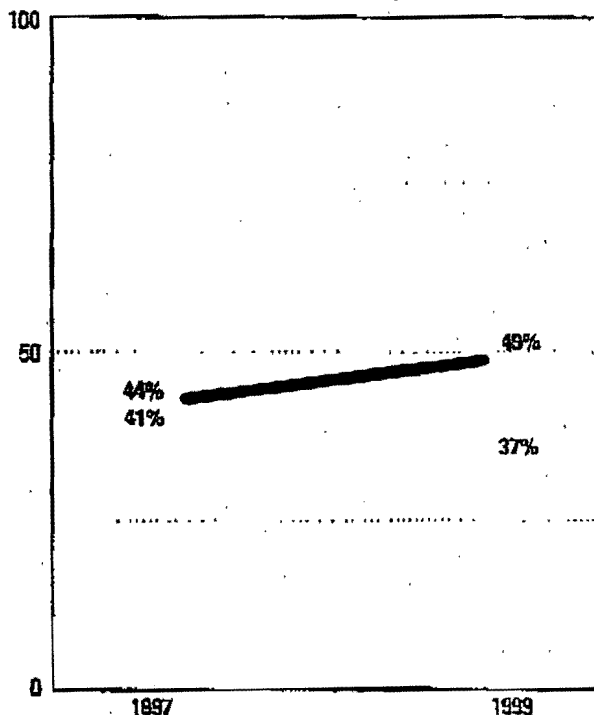
% of general public saying each item is:

Very common Somewhat common Not too/Not common at all

**Today, more Americans blame irresponsible parents rather than economic pressures for the problems kids face.**

% of general public who blame the following for the problems kids face:

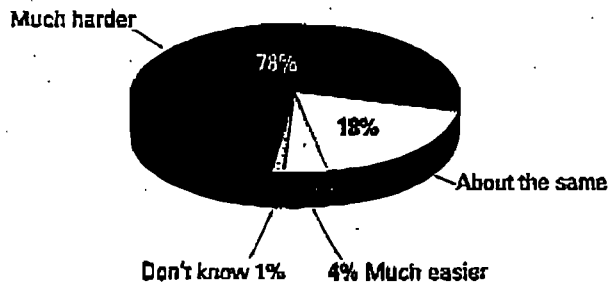
Blame irresponsible parents who fail to do their job
Blame social and economic pressures on families



FINDING FOUR: Difficult Circumstances

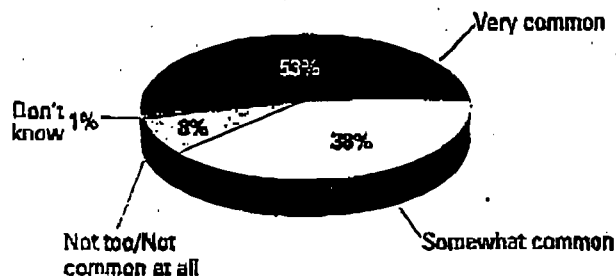
Despite their criticism of parents, most Americans acknowledge that families have a tough job to do under difficult circumstances. More than three in four adults believe it's much harder for parents to do their job these days, and a majority says it's not unusual to find parents who make sacrifices for their children. Likewise, the public is sympathetic to parents, recognizing that outside forces—such as drugs, violence and crime—sometimes undermine their efforts to raise good kids.

People believe it's harder to be a parent today...



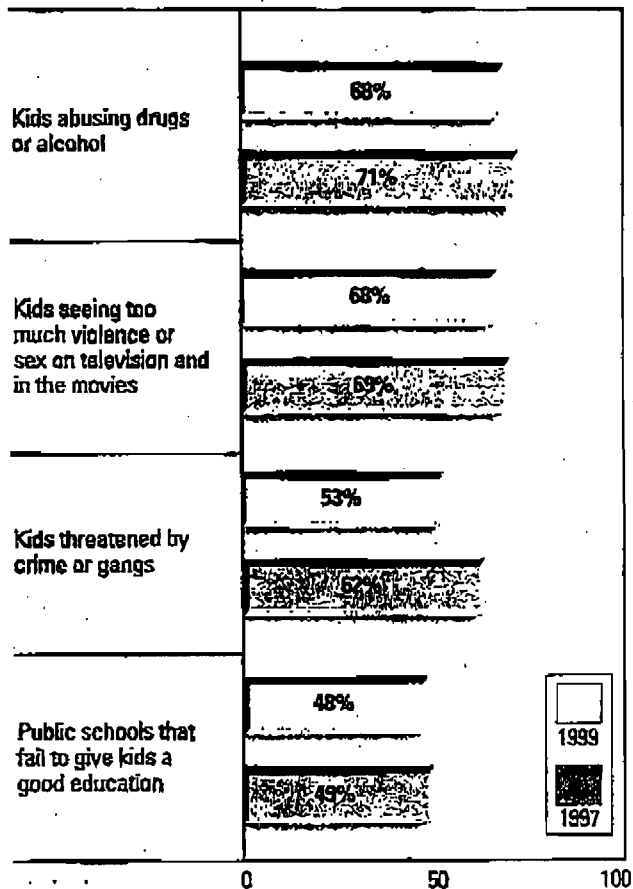
...And that many parents make sacrifices.

How common is it to find parents who sacrifice and work hard so their kids can have a better life?



People also recognize that kids face many dangers and temptations.

% of general public saying item is a "very serious" problem:



FINDING FIVE: Little Willingness to Write off Kids

Despite their pessimism and concern about children and teenagers today, Americans believe that helping kids get a good start in life is one of the most important issues facing the country, even more important than creating jobs or reducing crime. And, by a margin of 13 to 1, the public believes that given enough attention and the right guidance, even the most troubled teenagers can get back on track.

Americans say helping kids is a top priority.

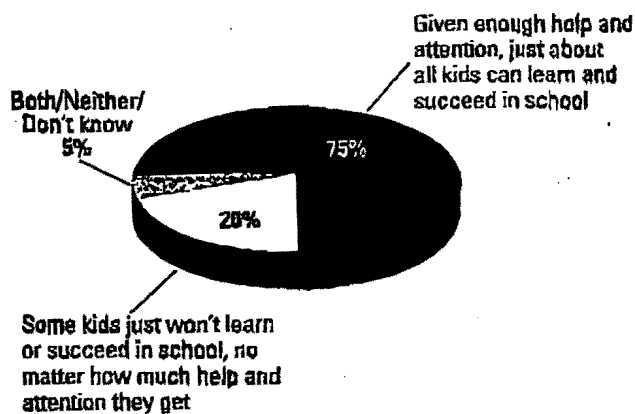
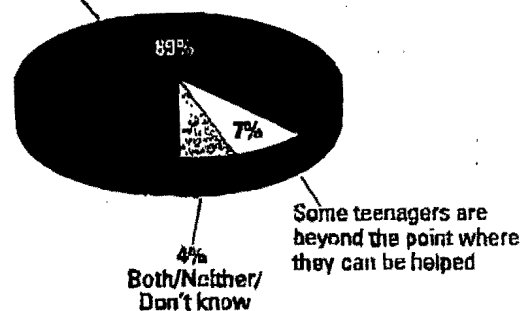
Asked to choose among four priorities, respondents easily rank helping kids as #1.

% saying each item is "the most important" priority	1999	1997
Trying to help kids get a good start in life	55%	52%
Trying to protect citizens from crime	14	18
Trying to create more jobs	14	16
Trying to help the poor and the homeless	13	10

And they believe even the most troubled youngsters can be reached.

Which comes closer to your view?

Given enough attention and the right kind of guidance, almost all teenagers can get back on track

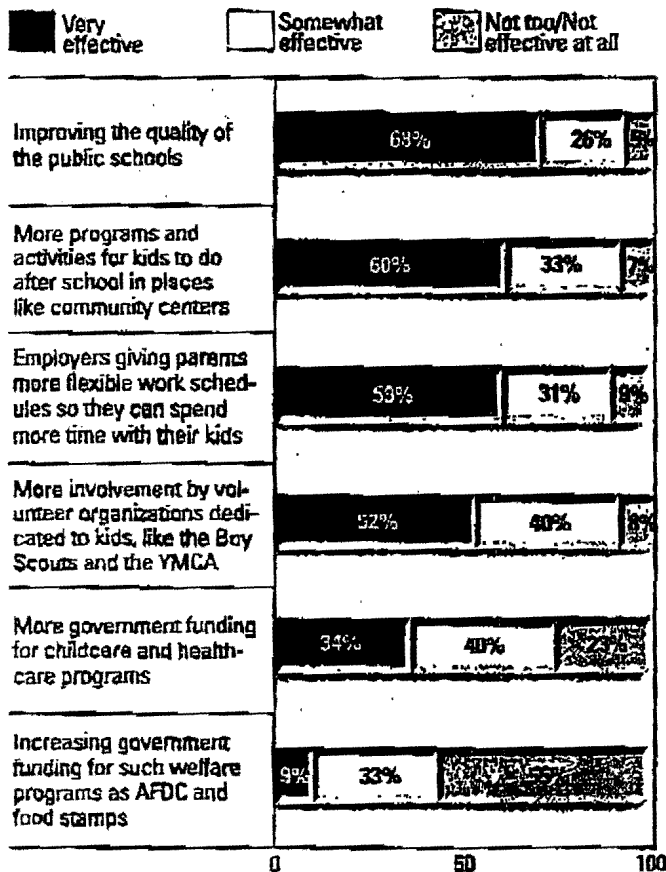


FINDING SIX: The Role of Government

Americans endorse a variety of solutions to the problems facing youngsters, but they focus mainly on those that build character and involve children in structured activities. The public is most likely to look to schools, employers, and community-based organizations for solutions, not government. On the whole, the public steers clear of traditional government programs to help kids, and relatively few consider a shortage of government programs as a major concern. Minority Americans, however, are more likely to see such programs as effective² and to believe a shortage of government assistance is a very serious problem.

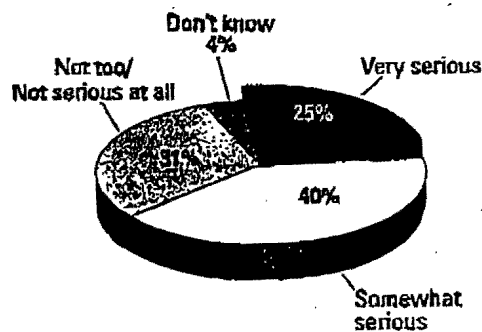
People support solutions close to home.

% of general public saying each item is:

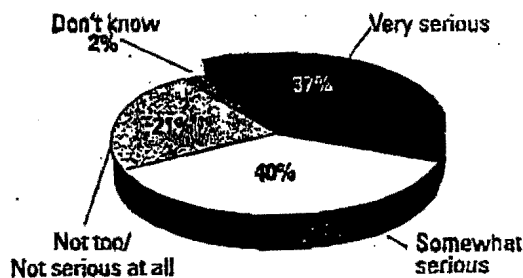


Few see a shortage of government programs as a very serious problem for kids.

How serious a problem is: families facing a shortage of government programs that support kids?



But minority Americans are more concerned.

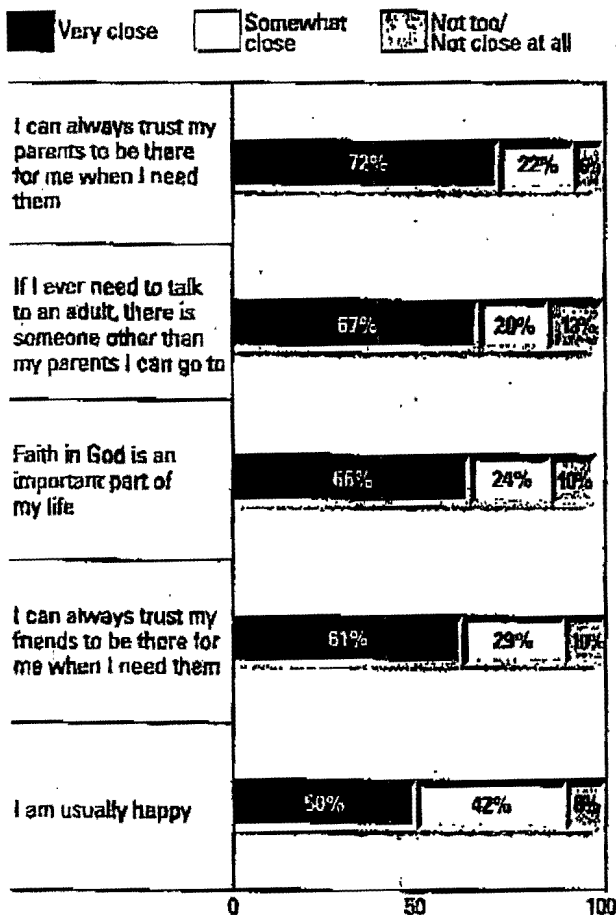


FINDING SEVEN: Positive Attitudes among Teens

Teenagers today, just as they did two years ago, say they have warm relationships with parents and other adults, strong faith in God, and reliable friends. Few say they confront gangs on a daily basis, and no more than a handful are frequently worried about being hungry or having a place to sleep. Nevertheless, teenagers do report they have a lot of time on their hands, suggesting that potential trouble is not far away.

The news from teenagers is good...

% of teenagers saying how close each item is to how they feel:

**...But they have plenty of time to go astray.**

% of teenagers who say they:

Do <i>not</i> belong to any clubs or organizations outside of school such as the Scouts or the Y	75%
Usually get together with friends to hang out without anything specific to do	74
Feel bored every day or almost every day	42
See people their age using drugs or alcohol every day or almost every day	39

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is the second part of a multi-year survey being conducted by Public Agenda to document the American public's attitudes regarding the nation's youth. It is based on two national telephone surveys: one with 1,005 adults age 18 years or older, including 384 parents of children under 18, and one with 328 young people age 12 to 17 years old. In essence, it is a repeat of the benchmark study, *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*, prepared by Public Agenda in 1997.

The telephone surveys were fielded between December 1 and 8, 1998. The adult interviews averaged 31 minutes, the youth interviews 21 minutes. For the survey of young people, interviewers were instructed to provide details about the purpose and content of the study, and to encourage parents to contact Public Agenda if they wished to know more about the study.

The surveys were conducted using national random samples of households and a standard, random-digit-dialing technique whereby every household in the region covered had an equal chance of being contacted, including those with unlisted numbers. The margin of error for the sample of adults is plus or minus three percentage points; for the sample of young people, plus or minus six. The margin of error is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

The questionnaires were designed by Public Agenda, and all interpretation of data reflected in this analysis was done by Public Agenda. As in all surveys, question order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these, including extensively pre-testing the survey instruments and randomizing the order in which some questions were asked.

Sample was supplied by Survey Sampling, Inc., of Connecticut. Interviews were conducted by Robinson and Munster Associates, Inc., of South Dakota.

ENDNOTES

1. Ninety-three percent of adult respondents described "kids failing to learn such values as honesty, respect and responsibility" as a very or somewhat serious problem for today's kids. Of these, 91% said the problem is widespread, and 8% said it mostly affects kids from lower income families.
2. Fifty-one percent of minority respondents described "more government funding for child care and health care programs" as a very effective way to help kids, compared to 31% of white respondents.
3. Nine percent of teenagers said they "come across gangs" every day; 3% said they "worry about having enough food or a place to sleep" every day.

ABOUT RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES

Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) provides comfort and care to children and their families through its 27-country network of local charities. RMHC makes grants to not-for-profit organizations and provides support to the Ronald McDonald House program. Nearly \$200 million in grants to children's programs has been awarded by RMHC and its global network of local charities. Its cornerstone Ronald McDonald House program, with 195 Houses in 15 countries, has provided a "home-away-from-home" for nearly two million family members. In conjunction with America's Promise, RMHC has committed to award \$100 million in grants over five years.

ABOUT THE ADVERTISING COUNCIL

The Advertising Council is a private, nonprofit organization, which has been the leading producer of public service communications programs in the United States since 1942. The Ad Council supports campaigns that benefit children, families and communities. The communications programs are national in scope and have generated strong, measurable results. Ad Council campaigns have helped to save lives and resources and to educate the public about issues and concerns of the day. The Ad Council is financed through contributions from more than 300 corporations. In 1995, it launched a 10-year children's initiative to focus the majority of its resources on developing campaigns which improve the circumstances for children in this country.

ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view. Public Agenda's in-depth research on how citizens think about policy forms the basis for extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum.

An online version of this report is available on Public Agenda's Web site at www.publicagenda.org. For additional information please contact: Public Agenda, 6 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016; (212) 686-6610.

Readers wishing to obtain more detail about the findings outlined in *Kids These Days '99* can refer to the benchmark study Public Agenda prepared in 1997. Contact Public Agenda for copies.



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TO: Ruby Shriver
Fax: 6-2878 Phone: _____

FROM: Brenda Costello

Date: 5/7/99

Number of pages (including cover): 3

Comments: _____

April 30, 1999

RECEPTION WITH THE AD COUNCIL

Date: Monday, May 3, 1999
Time: 5:00 pm
Place: Indian Treaty Room (Room 474)
Old Executive Office Building
From: Mary Beth Cahill, Assistant to the President
and Director of Public Liaison

I. PURPOSE

To address and thank the members of the Ad Council for its continued work, including its public awareness campaigns that benefit America's children, families and communities.

BACKGROUND

The Ad Council is a non-profit organization of communications and corporate executives that affects social concerns through public service advertising. Throughout its 55-year history, the partnership between the government, private industry and the Ad Council has had an indisputable impact on American culture. Created by President Roosevelt and originally called the War Advertising Council, it has donated resources and developed important and enduring public service messages such as the World War II slogan "Loose Lips Sink Ships" leading to memorable slogans as "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste" and "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk."

In 1995, the organization made a commitment to focus its energy and resources to benefit children. Each year, the Ad Council receives over \$990 million worth of media time donated to its public service campaigns – ranking it among the top twenty advertisers in the United States. In fact, the Coalition for America's Children campaign that featured you and the President garnered over \$100 million in donated media in 1997 – number one among all Ad Council campaigns.

During its current visit to Washington, the Ad Council has released an update to its 1997 study *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think about the Next Generation*. The study has received wide recognition for revealing through extensive surveys a concern among Americans that today's youth face a moral crisis largely in part because adults have failed to teach them about character and values. The update shows that adults continue to be very concerned about the moral health of their children. The results of the updated study are attached for your review.

PARTICIPANTS

You

Mary Beth Cahill, Assistant to the President and Director of Public Liaison

Ann Lewis, Counselor to the President

Governor Roy Romer, Chair, Ad Council's Advisory Committee on Public Liaison

Ruth Wooden, Ad Council President

Members of the Ad Council (please see attached for full list)

II. PROGRAM

Pre-program

Mary Beth Cahill makes welcoming remarks, introduces Ann Lewis

Ann Lewis gives remarks

Program

Mary Beth Cahill introduces Governor Roy Romer

Governor Romer introduces you

You deliver remarks

Upon conclusion of remarks, you work ropeline and depart

III. PRESS

This event is open press.

IV. ATTACHMENTS

Copy of *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*

List of reception attendees

Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation

Summary of Findings

FINDING ONE: The Moral Meltdown

Americans are convinced that today's youth face a crisis -- not in their economic or physical well-being but in their values and morals. Most Americans look at today's teenagers with misgiving and trepidation, viewing them as undisciplined, disrespectful, and unfriendly.

FINDING TWO: It's Not Just Teens

Public dissatisfaction and disapproval extend beyond the nation's teenagers. Even young children are viewed in a negative light. Many Americans think children are spoiled and out of control, not friendly, helpful, or engaging. And people apply these criticisms to children across a broad economic spectrum, to children from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as children from the middle and affluent classes.

FINDING THREE: Careless Parents

Americans believe that parents are fundamentally responsible for the disappointing state of today's youth. People say parents fail to teach youngsters right from wrong and pass on the values children need to learn in order to become productive members of society. Too often, people say, today's parents have children before they're ready; give them presents instead of guidance and attention; and fail to provide necessary discipline. Even parents themselves from all income, ethnic, and racial backgrounds agree.

FINDING FOUR: Mitigating Circumstances

Americans acknowledge it is tougher to be a parent or a child in today's world. They recognize that more than ever, parents -- and especially mothers -- must work hard and sacrifice for their children. Americans also believe today's youngsters face threats from society that can undermine their parents' best efforts. People are extremely concerned about ubiquitous threats endangering all kids: drugs and crime; sex and violence in the media; and public schools that often fail to deliver education in a safe and orderly environment.

FINDING FIVE: Never Give Up

Notwithstanding their extensive criticisms of young people, Americans refuse to give up on kids. They care deeply about their well-being and believe that tackling the issue is of paramount importance to our society. Most encouraging, they are stubbornly optimistic about the chances of reclaiming the lives of even the most troubled teens.

FINDING SIX: Solutions That Miss the Mark

Government programs aimed at improving the health and economic circumstances of young people miss the mark in three important ways as far as the public is concerned. First, Americans define the children's issue as predominantly moral in nature, not one of money or health. Second, people believe the crux of the problem is parents, not a lack of government programs. And third, welfare has left a legacy of skepticism about government intervention on behalf of the family. Even when it comes to low-income, at-risk kids, Americans doubt that such programs could help. They suspect that parents who need such programs will fail to take advantage of them.

FINDING SEVEN: Solutions That Show Promise

Because they define the problem as one of values, Americans gravitate toward solutions that help develop young people's character. People believe the schools should help teach kids discipline, honesty, and respectfulness toward themselves and others. They believe community centers and volunteer organizations like the Boy Scouts could be effective because they lend moral structure to youngsters' lives.

FINDING EIGHT: Will Individual Americans Help?

Americans are convinced that young people need adults in their lives who will help guide them to responsible adulthood. But will Americans -- as individuals -- help in the task? People say all the right things about helping, but they also have concerns. Many are not sure that their efforts will be well received. They fear embarrassing those they are trying

to help. They want to make sure that they themselves are not taken advantage of. Finally, many Americans believe that those who receive help should show their appreciation, return the favor when they can, and take responsibility for helping themselves. As it is, only about a third of Americans volunteer regularly, although most say they could find extra time to do so.

SPECIAL FOCUS: The Views of African American, Hispanic, and White Parents

In order to compare the views of African American and Hispanic parents to those of white parents, supplementary interviews were conducted with 300 black and 300 Hispanic parents. The results: regardless of race and ethnicity, all three groups of parents are critical of how teens and children are turning out, of the job parents are doing, and for the most part, all are concerned about the same social problems threatening youngsters. Where there are differences, these are usually differences in degree, not in kind. African American and Hispanic parents are sometimes more critical of today's youth than are white parents, for example, and black parents are more attracted to government child and health care programs.

SPECIAL FOCUS: What Kids Have to Say

Teenagers surveyed as part of this study generally describe themselves as happy and say they have warm relations with their parents and other adults in their lives. But large numbers also say they have plenty of time on their hands and describe an environment filled with hazards and potential trouble. A third say there is no adult in the house when they come home and about a quarter admit they have engaged in risky behavior such as smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol.

Kids These Days was made possible by a grant from **Ronald McDonald House Charities** and was conducted in partnership with **The Advertising Council**, both organizations are committed to efforts to improve the lives of children.

Copies of *Kids These Days* are available from:

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Copies are \$10.00 each, or \$5.00 for 10 or more copies. (For all orders, please add \$2.50 shipping and handling on one book; \$5.00 for 2-5 books; or \$10.00 for 6-25 books.)