



Voices for Two-Generation Success: Seeking Stable Futures

Findings from 10 focus groups with low and moderate income mothers, and teenage boys and girls.

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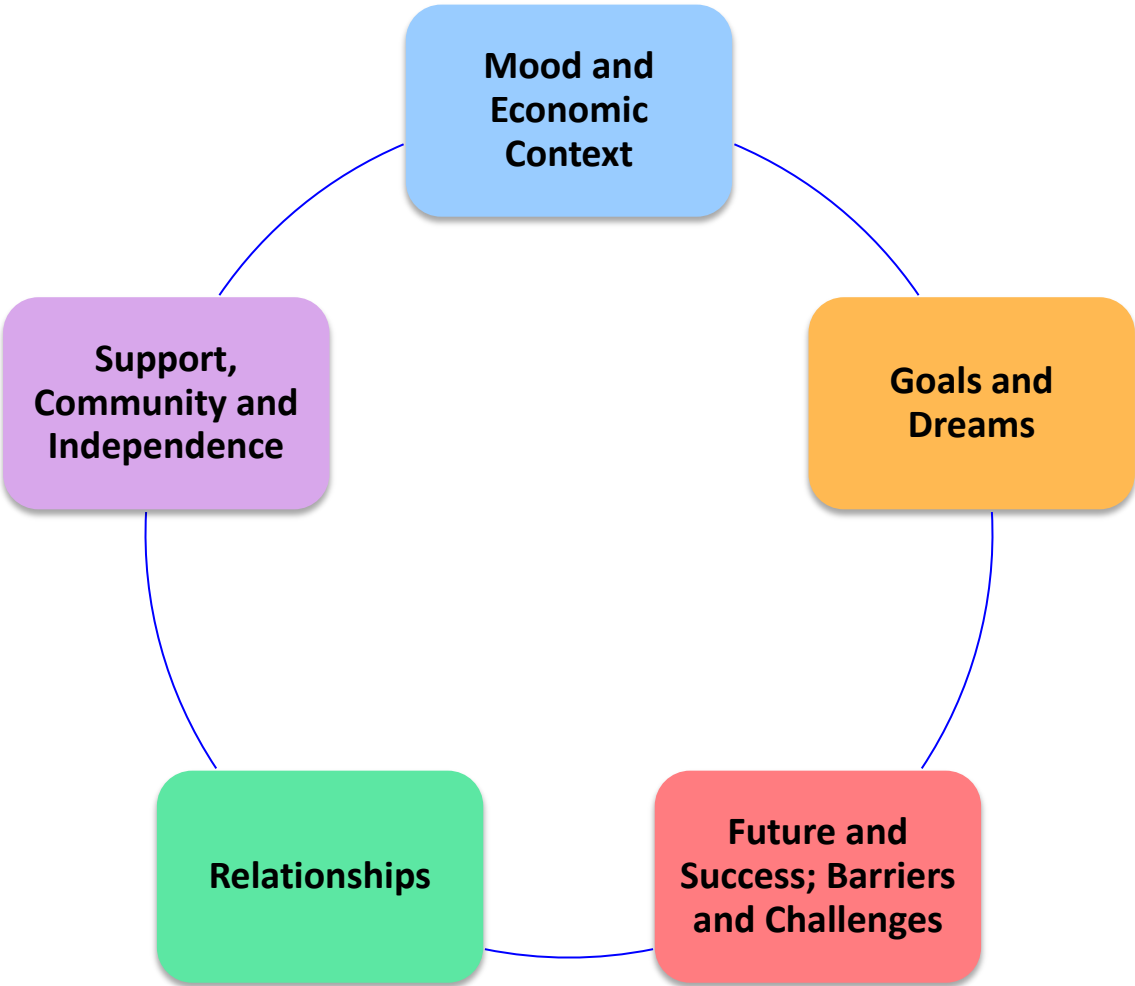
Methodology

Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting conducted 10 focus groups with single and married mothers across races, separated by income levels, as well as of boys and girls of mixed racial backgrounds between ages 12-14 and 16-18. Participants in the mothers groups were recruited to reflect a mix of educational attainment, employment status, and marital status. Participants of the children's groups were recruited to reflect a racial mix as well as to come from a mix of family backgrounds (single & married parents, non-college educated, currently enrolled, and college educated).

Chicago, IL June 17 th	Boys, ages 16-18 Moderate income white mothers, ages 35-50 (between 200%-400% FPL) Mixed-income Asian American mothers, ages 35-50 Moderate income African American mothers, under 35 (between 200%-400% FPL)
Denver, CO June 20 th	Boys, ages 12-14 Girls, ages 16-18 Low-income Latina mothers, under 35 (below 200% FPL)
Richmond, VA June 24 th	Girls, ages 12-14 Low-income white mothers, under 35 (below 200% FPL) Low-income African American mothers, ages 35-50 (below 200% FPL)

The following findings use the terms “mothers,” “single parents,” and “parents” to refer to participants in the parents’ groups, and “teens,” “teenagers,” and “pre-teens” to refer to participants in the boys’ and girls’ groups.

Areas of Focus



Three Top Watchwords Emerge

Stability

Seeking stability in a period of economic uncertainty

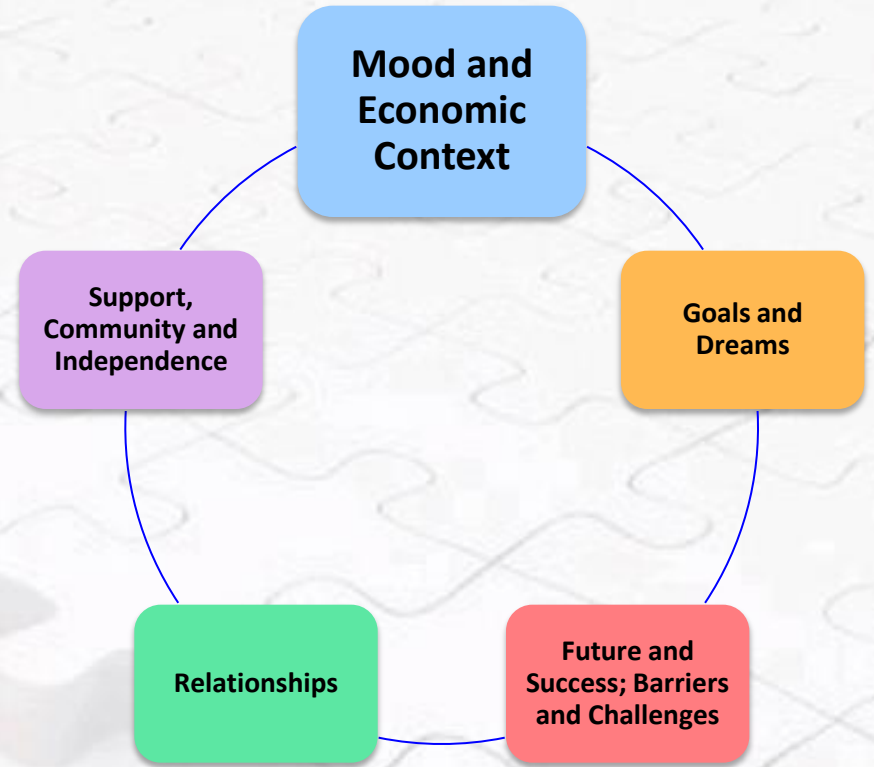
Independence

Valuing independence and succeeding on your own

Optimism

Maintaining optimism, resiliency despite challenges

Mood and Economic Context



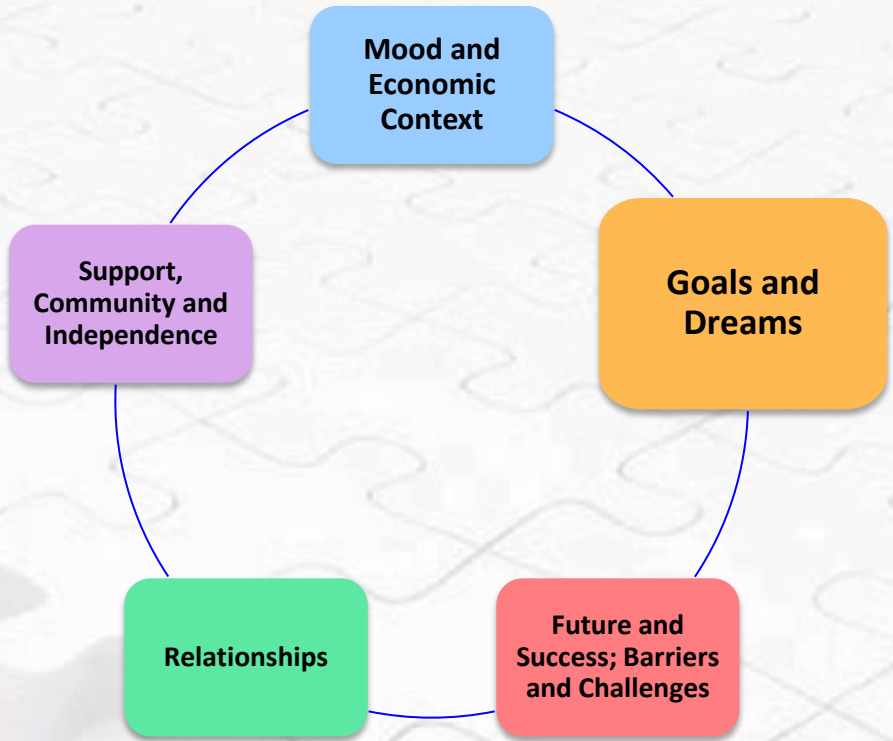
Stressed, but Better and Optimistic

- Mothers say things have gotten better compared to a few years ago (and seem better than their peers from 2011).
- They are still stretched thin for time and money, particularly single mothers.
- Most remain optimistic about their own futures and their children's futures.
- They seek stability: financial stability, a stable relationship, and a respite from stress.

“They are getting better. I got a new job. As far as the stability with my significant other too, it was pretty shaky before we started dating and things are a lot better with that. My life has pretty much took a 360. A lot of things were going downhill. They are better now.” - African American Mother, Moderate Income, Chicago

“Compared to a couple of years ago, where I am right now is the best I can imagine.” –African American Mother, Low-Income, Richmond

Goals and Dreams



Mothers' Dreams and Goals

“Everything is about her. You know seeing her do okay with her life and her career and watching her grow and become a woman.” - White Mother, Moderate Income, Chicago

“I know no matter what is going on with me, I always put my daughter first. So if she needs something over what I need, it’s going to always be her... I think at this point...we focus on if we had dreams, they would probably go to our children.” – African American Mother, Low-Income, Richmond

- Mothers cite humble goals to be happy, healthy, and with less stress. They want to be financially stable and free of debt.
- Most say they put their own dreams aside once their kids were born, and now they live to ensure their children can pursue their dreams.
- Mothers identify being a good parent by setting a good example, encouraging their children to go to college, and raising a happy and healthy child as important priorities.
- Mothers aspire for their children to finish school and get more education than they had which they perceive as key to economic opportunity and success.

“My Child’s Future”

Mothers’ Dreams and Goals For Their Children



Word Cloud: Mothers were asked to write their associations to the phrase “My Child’s Future.” The larger the word, the more often it was written by participants. (tagxedo.com).

Teens' Dreams and Goals

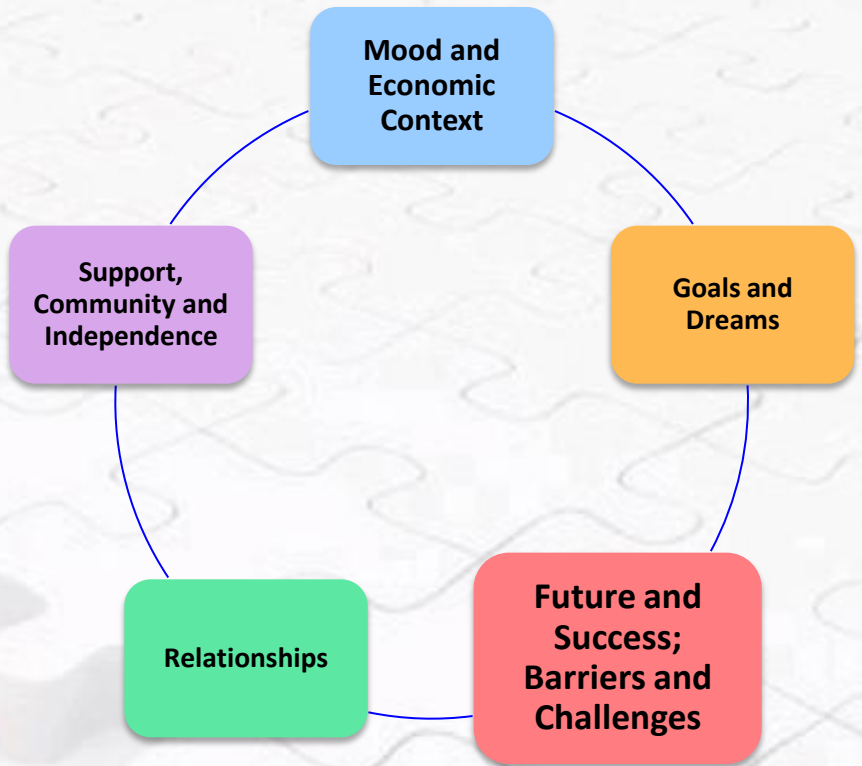
- Teens and pre-teens almost all indicate they want to go to college which leads to a good job, career choices, and financial stability.
- Many identify specific careers they want to pursue ranging from psychologist to NAVY Seal.
- Most say they want a family one day. They want the companionship of a partner and to raise children of their own.

“Well I want to later become a psychologist...get my Ph.D. in Psychology so I can help people..” – Teenage Girl 16-18, Denver

“Because nowadays you need really a college education to have a steady job that could support you. “ – Pre-teen Boy 12-14, Denver

“If you don’t get into college, then you can’t do what you want to do. You can’t learn about it and everything.” – Pre-teen Girl 12-14, Richmond

Future and Success



Mothers' Ingredients for Their Children's Success

"I want them to be able to express themselves so that they can pick and choose what they want to do and not be afraid to say whatever they want to say."

***- Asian American Mother,
Chicago***

"Be yourself, be strong, keep your dreams, and never give up... Just so that you can always stay focused and never give up on whatever they want to do in life."

***- Latina Mother, Low-
Income, Denver***

***"You have to finish school to be successful." - African American Mother, Moderate Income,
Chicago***

- Mothers think confidence and being true to oneself are important ingredients for their children to succeed.
- They want their children to be independent; to take care of themselves, but also to think for themselves and not follow potentially bad influences.
- Mothers think a college education is key for their children to succeed and they are doing what they can to ensure their children attend college after high school.

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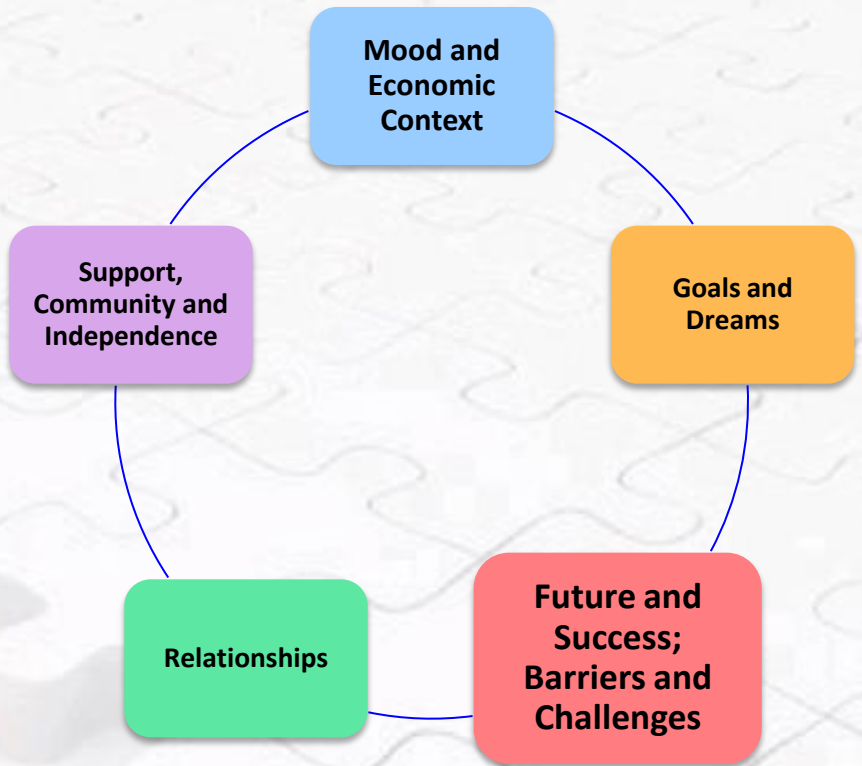
Teens' Ingredients for Success

- Teens also believe that self-esteem and independence are important ingredients for success because it will help them make good decisions.
- Many identify college as an important step in achieving success later in life, though they have people in their lives who have been successful without college. Many are aware of the high costs and debt associated with college.
- Teens realize the importance of knowing how to spend money wisely, and wish to be smart with money when they are older.

“Don’t let nothing or no one get in the way. Keep at your goal. Keep being motivated. Be optimistic.” – Teenage Girl 16-18, Denver

“Not really manage; just to be smart with it and not just like...to know how much you have and to spend it wisely and to know what you can afford.” – Teenage Boy 16-18, Chicago

Barriers and Challenges



Barriers to Mothers' Success

“Money wise, I mean it’s a paycheck. I work to pay the daycare. It would save me a lot of money. It would save so much.” – White Mother, Low-Income, Richmond

“I think my challenge is more just to be financially stable in the long run, be able for her to go to college. That’s kind of like my challenge now. Like even though she is six, it’s good to think about it now just because you never know what’s going to happen in the future.” - Asian American Mother, Chicago

- Mothers indicate that access to child care is a barrier that if removed would free up time and money. The logistics of getting their child to and from, as well as the cost, creates stress.
- Many women say they seek financial stability. They constantly worry about being able to pay their bills on time and making enough money to provide for their family and save for the future.

Barriers to Teens' Success

- Teens say the biggest barrier to future success is themselves. They do not think of any structural barriers. They say it is up to themselves to have the confidence, motivation, and determination to avoid mistakes and pursue a successful future.

“Stay in school and play a big role in the community and do as much as you can to be successful and like set goals and achieve higher than them and really care about what you do and be yourself and be confident.” – Pre-teen Boy 12-14, Denver

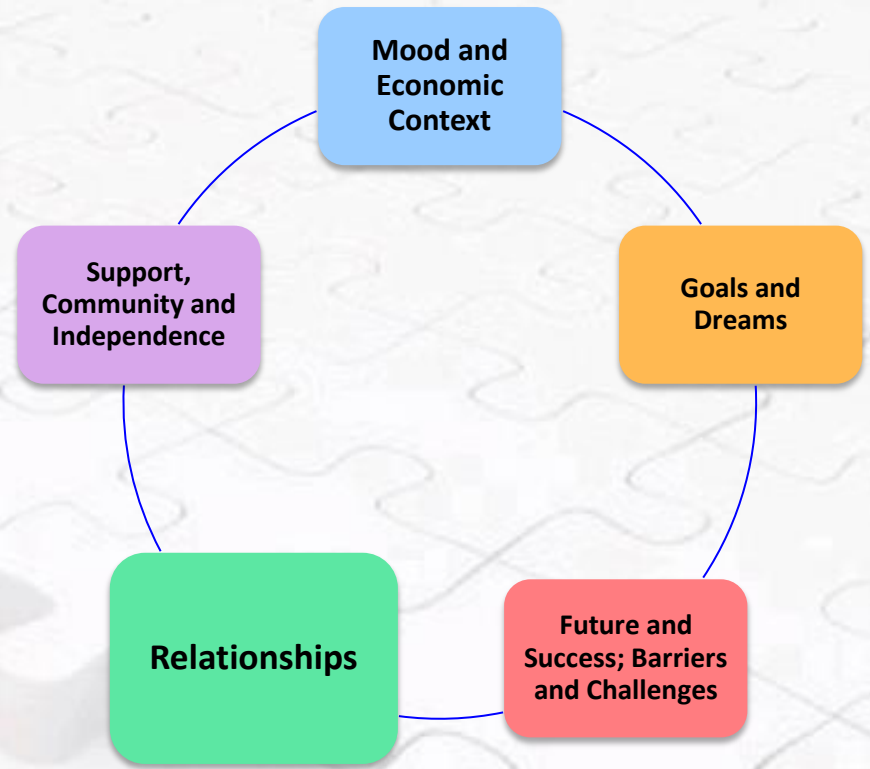
Shared Barrier: Student Debt

“I went back and got my bachelor’s degree, which only took me two years...I did it on a full-time basis and worked full-time, but I am in debt right now \$42,000. I think I was just so excited because I dropped out of high school and I looked at how far I had come. But now that they are wanting me to make these \$300 payments a month.” – White Mother, Low-Income, Richmond

“I am going out of state to college and it’s just going to be a struggle. Like I got a decent scholarship, but I don’t know because my sister is going next year and then parents are divorced. Like money is just a struggle.” – Teenage Girl 16-18, Denver

- Mothers worry about the choice they must make because of student loan debt; continuing their own education or providing for their children.
- Teens know how expensive a college education is, and already fear the debt they could accumulate. They understand how important getting a degree is toward future success, but the expense of college makes them consider alternatives.

Relationships



Marriage and Stability in a Relationship

- Mothers value the stability marriage offers, and many single mothers aspire to a stable relationship to help with parental responsibilities and provide more for their children.
- Single mothers also say they miss the companionship of a healthy relationship, and they hope to regain it one day.
- At the same time, many have been in bad relationships and believe it is important to get out of them.

“I want my son to have a family and I want to buy a house. I can’t do that alone.” – White Mother, Low-Income Richmond

“My husband and I are pretty much a good team. You know even from you know cleaning every Saturday morning. Everybody has their job, even my three-year-old. He has to take the shoes out of the front hallway so I can wash the floor or something or husband is doing this. We all have things that we are supposed to do, so just trying to make sure that everybody has a job, and if you shirk your job, like brushing your teeth, then you know what if you want to get cavities, then that means we don’t get to do XYZ because we just had to pay money for a cavity.” - White Mother, Moderate-Income, Chicago

Key value: Respect

“You have to have respect to get respect and vice versa.

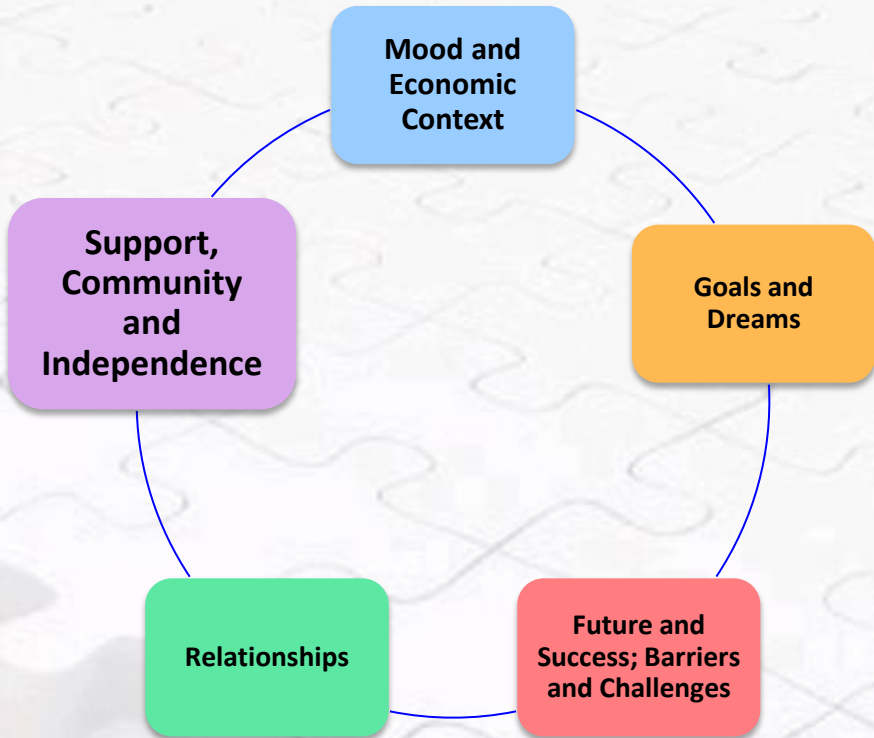
You know if you don’t respect yourself or if people don’t respect you, you are going to get walked all over.

And it’s a tough world nowadays, you have to stand up for yourself and not put yourself down or you are not going to go anywhere.”

– White Mothers, Low-Income Richmond

“Treat a lady the way you would want a guy to treat the special women in your life.” – Pre-Teen Girl, 12-14, Richmond

- Mothers think one of the most important components of a healthy relationship is respect, particularly those who have experienced bad relationships in the past.
- Teens talk about the importance of respect as well. Girls want boys to respect them and have ended relationships that lacked respect. Boys talk about the importance of girls respecting themselves, and want to make sure their younger brothers respect women as they get older.



Support, Community and Independence

Aspiring for Independence

- Mothers show strong desire for self-reliance and independence. They hesitate to trust people they do not know, avoid hassling people they do know, and aspire to resolve their issues on their own.
- They have narrow but strong support networks of families and friends who help with family responsibilities and logistics. They do not look to the traditional notions of community or neighbors for help.

“Be successful, independent... Because you have to be successful nowadays and always depend on yourself. You can’t depend on anybody to take care of you. You always have to depend on yourself.”

– Latina Mother, Low-Income, Denver

“[What networks of support do you have?] I put my mother, my aunts, my sister, and my son’s father.”

- African American Mother, Moderate Income, Chicago

“I mean it is not a lot of small kids on my block, and then I don’t think I would feel safe with him going to other ways, either behind me or the block in front of me.”

Moderate Income, Chicago

Support Networks for Teens

“Well see your family because it’s not all the times you can trust your friends unless it’s like a best friend because like a best friend is pretty much family.” - Teenage Boy 16-18, Chicago

“My mom and like two of my best friends. I tell my mom everything. My mom is like one of my best friends. And then my friends with like boys and like when I am down and stuff, but like otherwise, I tell my mom everything.” – Pre-teen Girl 12-14, Richmond

“My school counselor. She was literally my best friend, like my sophomore year, I hung out in there every single day. If it wasn’t for her I wouldn’t have graduated.” – Teenage Girl 16-18, Denver

- Many teens turn to their parents, especially their mothers, or siblings for some issues they do not feel like discussing with their friends including health issues (with parents) or relationship/friend issues (with siblings).
- Teens also have important friendships with their peers, and value sincerity rooted in mutual respect, while trying to avoid people who are “fake.” They share with friends many issues they do not feel comfortable bringing to their parents.
- Teachers and coaches emerge as strong mentors who offer guidance and adult perspective for some teens.

Examples of Advice

Advice Mother Would Give Their Kids, Teens Would Give Their Younger Siblings (Top Themes Shown)

Mothers

Advice for their child

- ✓ Be positive and true to yourself
- ✓ Be independent and choose your own path
- ✓ Pursue your dreams and never give up

Boys

Girls

Advice for younger sister

- ✓ Be independent, don't let bad influences affect you
- ✓ Be confident, true to yourself, and believe in yourself
- ✓ Do not grow up too quickly

- ✓ Be confident, true to yourself, and believe in yourself

Advice for younger brother

- ✓ Be confident, true to yourself

- ✓ Be respectful, treat others well especially women
- ✓ Be independent



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