

IN BRIEF

Toward Quality and Equality
Fulfilling Our Promises to America's Children and Youth

The Question

How well do America's children and teenagers experience the five Promises identified by America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth that they need to build their character and competence? Those Promises are Caring Adults; Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time; A Healthy Start and Healthy Development; Effective Education for Marketable Skills and Lifelong Learning; and Opportunities to Make a Difference through Helping Others.

The Bottom Line

America is breaking its promises to its children and youth. Millions of young people ages 6 to 17 experience very few, if any, of the five Promises. That gap sets them up for higher levels of negative outcomes, including violence and poor academic achievement.

The Evidence

America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth commissioned the Gallup Organization to conduct national polls of more than 2,000 teenagers (ages 12–17) and their parents, and more than 2,000 parents of children (ages 6–11). The study, which was designed by Search Institute and Child Trends, found the following:

Only one in four adolescents (25%) and one in three children ages 6–11 (37%) experience four or all five of the Promises. Thirty percent of 12- to 17-year-olds and 13% of 6- to 11-year-olds experience none or one of the five Promises.

Non-Hispanic White children and youth

are much more likely to experience the Promises than are Hispanic or African American young people. As income and mother's education rise, so does the likelihood of young people having four or all five Promises.

Young people do better with some Promises than with others (Table A). Most American children and youth seem to have Caring Adults in their lives and Opportunities to Make a Difference through Helping Others.

Young people experiencing more Promises are more likely to have positive outcomes. Experiencing these Promises is more strongly related to most outcomes than are demographics such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, or family income or education.

The America's Promise November 2006 report to the nation, *Every Child, Every Promise* (on which this article is based), is available at www.americaspromise.org and www.search-institute.org.

TABLE A

U.S. Young People Experiencing the Five Promises

	6- to 11- Year-Olds	12- to 17- Year-Olds
Caring Adults	90%	76%
Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time	31%	42%
A Healthy Start and Healthy Development	49%	36%
Effective Education for Marketable Skills and Lifelong Learning*	79%	39%
Opportunities to Make a Difference through Helping Others	55%	53%

*Age-relevant differences in how this Promise was calculated may account for most of the disparity between percentages for the two age groups.

This page is condensed from Scales, P. C., & Benson, P. L. (2006, December). Toward quality and equality: Fulfilling our promises to America's children and youth. *Search Institute Insights & Evidence*, 3(2), 1–10, which is available for free downloading at www.search-institute.org/research/Insights.

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