

**Message Strategy Research  
to Support Development  
of the Youth Media Campaign (YMC)**

***Revealing Target Audience Receptiveness  
to Potential YMC Message Concepts***

**Prepared for:  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Background
- II. Executive Summary
- III. Conclusions and Recommendations
- IV. Detailed Findings—Youth Triad Interviews
  - Key Insights and Discussion Themes
    - How Tweens Make Healthy Choices
      - Role of Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem
      - Role of Goals and Aspirations
      - Role of Activities and Interests
      - Role of Support from Friends and Family
      - Role of Other Positive Role Models
    - Description of Tween Target Audience Segments
    - Reactions to Message Concepts
- V. Detailed Findings—Parent Focus Groups
  - Role of Activities and Interests
  - Role of Negative Influences
  - Role of Positive Influences
  - Reactions to Message Concepts
- VI. Detailed Findings-Industry Professional and Prospective Partner Interviews
  - How to Communicate Effectively With Tweens
  - How to Communicate Effectively With Parents
  - How to Elicit Support from Local, Grassroots, and Community Based Organizations
- VII. Summary of Message Strategy Research

## **BACKGROUND**

In year 2000, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was designated by Congress to take the lead in planning, implementing, and evaluating a national Youth Media Campaign to change children's health behavior. This campaign will ultimately help youth develop habits that foster good health over a lifetime, including appropriate behaviors related to diet, physical activity, and avoidance of illicit drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. More specifically, CDC has been charged with designing and testing messages with various youth audiences, involving young people in campaign planning and implementation, using tactics employed by today's best youth marketers, and enlisting the involvement and support of parents and other role models.

Aeffect, a strategic marketing and communications planning firm, was selected by CDC in mid-November 2000 to provide research and consulting services to facilitate the Youth Media Campaign. Aeffect specializes in integrated marketing communications – the process of evolving communications from an understanding of the target audience. As a result of this focus, Aeffect research consultants and communications strategists frequently help organizations gather insights from today's youth and leverage these insights into effective communications.

In the following report, Aeffect documents the December 2000 findings regarding message strategy research conducted with tweens (9-13-year-olds), parents, other adults and teens who influence the tween's lifestyle (adult and tween influencers), and industry professionals who are also CDC's prospective partners. In particular, the report provides information on psychographic audience segments that exist within the tween population and what messages resonate with each audience segment. Overall, this report will:

- Identify specific youth segments within the tween population that warrant tailored and unique message strategies,
- Reveal the mindset of youth within these segments in order to facilitate message development,
- Document how target audiences responded to "mock" or conceptual test messages developed for the purpose of eliciting audience feedback and,
- Isolate the main message and message components that appear best able to generate appeal, relevance, and desired behavior among targeted segments.

In order to complete this message strategy research, Aeffect conducted numerous research sessions with targeted audiences in which feedback was elicited. More specifically, Aeffect consultants led:

- Forty-eight triad interviews with tweens
- Six focus groups with parents of tweens
- Two focus groups with adult and teen influencers
- Eight individual interviews with industry professionals

Youth triad interviews were conducted in New York City, Greensboro (NC); Dallas; and San Francisco. Youth participants were recruited by telephone to participate in the triad interviews approximately one week in advance. A local recruiting firm in each city was hired to place recruiting calls, screen youth participants using a pre-qualification questionnaire, and secure parental approval for their participation. Confirmation cards were sent or follow-up calls were placed to remind individuals of their commitment to participate. Tweens were paid an honorarium for their time in order to secure their participation. This honorarium ranged from \$50–\$75 depending on the market location.

Across all cities where the triad interviews were conducted, respondents were segmented and assigned to interview sessions by their level of physical activity, gender, ethnicity, and age. More specifically, there were 12 triad interviews held with respondents representing each of the following segments: involved males, involved females, uninvolved males, and uninvolved females. Respondents were classified as involved and active if they spent at least 20 minutes playing hard or exercising hard enough to break a sweat three times a week or more. Level of involvement in other activities varied across the interview segments.

Participants were also assigned to interview sessions according to their age and ethnicity. Interviews with Caucasian respondents were conducted in all four markets. Interviews with individuals of mixed ethnicity were conducted in New York City and San Francisco. Similarly, interviews with African American participants were conducted in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and interviews with Hispanic participants were conducted in Dallas. The chart on the following page shows a breakdown of the number of triad interviews within each segment.

2 Triads	Physically active, Male, Caucasian, 9 –10-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Male, Caucasian, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Male, Mixed Ethnicity, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Male, Mixed Ethnicity, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Male, African American, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Male, African American, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Male, Hispanic, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Male, Hispanic, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Female, Caucasian, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Female, Caucasian, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Female, Mixed Ethnicity, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Physically active, Female, Mixed Ethnicity, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Female, African American, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Female, African American, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Female, Hispanic, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Physically active, Female, Hispanic, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Male, Caucasian, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Male, Caucasian, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Male, Mixed Ethnicity, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Male, Mixed Ethnicity, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Male, African American, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Male, African American, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Male, Hispanic, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Male, Hispanic, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Female, Caucasian, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Female, Caucasian, 12–13-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Female, Mixed Ethnicity, 9–10-years-old
2 Triads	Non-Physically active, Female, Mixed Ethnicity, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Female, African American, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Female, African American, 12–13-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Female, Hispanic, 9–10-years-old
1 Triad	Non-Physically active, Female, Hispanic, 12–13-years-old

Twelve triad interviews were conducted in each location, and three tweens typically participated in each session. The sessions ran one hour in length and were led by Aeffect research consultants. The interviews were held late afternoon or evening on weekdays (after school) and on Saturdays in order to facilitate youth participation and allow for parent-provided transportation.

During each session, tweens were exposed to five written message concepts. After exposure to each concept, tweens discussed their impressions of the concept. The appeal, relevance, and meaning of each concept was probed in the discussion that ensued. In order to minimize the effects of order bias, the order in which concepts were shown to respondents was changed across interviews. That is, each message concept was shown before, as well as after other concepts. This rotation is believed to have minimized the opportunity for order bias that may result when showing concepts in the same order in each interview.

Focus groups with parents and adult/tween influencers were held in Chicago. Respondents were recruited by telephone to participate in the sessions approximately one week in advance. A local recruiting firm in Chicago was hired to place recruiting calls, screen participants using a standardized questionnaire, and secure their agreement to participate. Confirmation cards were sent or follow-up calls were placed to remind individuals of their commitment to participate. Respondents were paid a \$75 honorarium to secure their participation.

Due to inclement weather in Chicago on the days focus groups were held (December 13–15), fewer respondents turned out for sessions than anticipated, although this did not appear to impede the quality of insights that were gathered. In general, groups turned out to be mini-groups consisting of 4–6 participants each instead of sessions of 8–9 as had been originally planned. Each group ran approximately 1½–2 hours in length and was held in the evening. Of the six groups of parents, two groups included African American parents, two groups included Caucasian parents, and two groups included Hispanic parents. An African American qualitative research specialist was contracted to assist with African American focus groups.

In order to prepare for interviews with industry professionals, Aeffect assembled a list of private and not-for-profit organizations that are engaged in the development of communications targeting tweens. A variety of different sources were tapped in order to build this list, including CDC contributors, other youth research specialists at Aeffect, contacts identified in the earlier literature review, and others recommended by friends and colleagues. The resulting list of approximately 30 organizations was then reviewed with CDC and narrowed to an optimal list of 10–12 organizations that were deemed ideal for representation in the research.

Personal telephone calls to identify, screen, and set appointments with the most appropriate individual were then initiated. Although nearly all individuals initially agreed to participate, only eight interviews were ultimately conducted due to respondent schedule conflicts. As this report is being prepared, several potential partners still hope to share their insights.

Industry professional interviews were conducted at a convenient time for the respondent, and typically ran 30–60 minutes in length, depending upon the respondent's availability. During the call, a moderator explored the respondent's efforts and insights into youth marketing, as well as their perspectives and recommendations as they relate to the Youth Media Campaign. Interviewees held a variety of positions, including vice president of communications, program and campaign manager, and director of media relations. Respondents held positions with Children Now, Kaiser Family Foundation, Nickelodeon, WNBA, Kraft Foods, Nike Foundation, and Kodak.

Once interviewing was completed, senior consultants at Aeffect analyzed findings from the triad interviews, focus groups, and in-depth interviews and prepared the following

report. This report captures insight into the target audiences and depicts their receptiveness to the message concepts to which they were exposed.

To uncover these insights, Aeffect synthesized notes, observations, session exercises, videos, and interview transcripts. While content analysis was performed on key aspects of the research, the primary objective of our analysis was to quickly synthesize key discussion themes, rather than to specifically count or tally consensus on all points. Moreover, since tweens often speak quietly and in short sentences, formal content analysis is used less broadly for children's research than for research with adults. In addition, children tend to express reactions using nonverbal expressions (e.g., sticking out their tongue or shrugging shoulders), which can be lost in content analysis.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to target audiences, self-esteem or feeling good about yourself is the primary force that enables tweens to resist involvement in behaviors that could be damaging to their health both now and in the future. Having high self-esteem is said to give tweens the confidence to resist pressures that influence them to engage in unproductive or harmful behaviors. Kids who feel good about themselves say they don't need to use drugs or smoke cigarettes to feel cool, whereas those with lesser self-esteem appear to make bad choices as a means of achieving self-esteem.

### Tween perspectives on Involvement

A variety of important factors are said to influence or establish a tween's self-esteem. These factors include: 1) having a **sense of purpose**, which is achieved by finding an activity they are passionate about and can excel in; 2) feeling a **sense of accomplishment** which is achieved by setting and accomplishing goals over time; and 3) finding a **source of support**, which is provided through the encouragement and involvement of family and friends who show an active interest in their lives.

Across all 9–13-year-olds, there appears to be various and unique psychographic segments of the tween audience that must be considered and taken into account when planning the Youth Media Campaign. These youth segments cluster along a spectrum that is based upon their degree of mental and physical involvement. The spectrum ranges from kids who are completely involved to kids that are completely uninvolved. While the majority of kids fall somewhere in between, the mindset, motivating factors, and barriers for each segment are unique, hence requiring specific message strategies tailored to the segments.

For example, kids who are completely involved are typically those who are strongly involved in an activity physically and emotionally. They feel passionate about being involved in activities and see their involvement as a means to an end. They easily list goals that they are working toward, and often reveal successes they have experienced along the way. These tweens are committed to doing their personal best and are confident in their ability to excel. For this segment, message strategies need to reinforce the idea that being completely involved helps you feel good about yourself and helps you achieve your hopes and dreams.

On the other hand, kids who are completely uninvolved are typically those who are not involved physically or emotionally. Oftentimes, these tweens do not feel passionate about any particular activity and, as such, do things out of boredom rather than interest. In many cases, completely uninvolved youth do not have clear goals or objectives. Similarly, they have never experienced successes from which they can derive confidence. In many cases, they do not feel good about themselves or feel that they will ever be the best at anything, although they do hope to do the best they can. For this



segment, message strategies need to help them find or discover their passion, providing reassurance that everyone is good at something.

For the majority of kids in the middle of the involvement spectrum, many are involved but not yet emotionally connected (or passionate about) the activities in which they engage. For example, this week they're involved in art and next week they'll try basketball. In some ways, they are in a period of discovery, trying to find their passion or that one thing they will be really good at. Many older tweens say their involvement levels decrease as they approach their teens because their period of exploration and experimentation has been completed and because they develop other interests such as dating, jobs, and school. More importantly, tweens say that they are likely to stick with a particular activity if they ultimately discover a passion for it. A passion is said to arise when they feel personally rewarded by an activity, enjoy participating in it, and/or feel good about themselves as a result of their participation.

### Parent's perspective on Tween Involvement

Not surprisingly, most parents argue that they, as parents, are the most important positive influence in their children's lives. They mention the importance of keeping the lines of communication open now so their kids will feel comfortable discussing difficult decisions with them as they grow older. Many parents say it is their responsibility to teach values at an early age so their children will be prepared to choose between right and wrong during their teenage years. Additionally, parents say they try to set a good example in the home for their kids to learn from.

Some parents recognize that teachers, coaches, and other family members also influence their tween's lifestyle. Some parents indicate that their children may be more likely to approach other adults with problems and concerns; adult influencers confirm this, saying their role is often to listen objectively to the tween, providing support parents are unwilling or unable to provide. According to both parents and influencers, it is also important that other adults set positive examples for kids. However, some parents do not assume other adults can take their place in this regard. Adult influencers agree that parental attention and support is the most important part of minimizing the risk that children will become involved in negative behaviors.

Most parents indicate that the negative influences their children face far outweigh the positive. Parents reveal that there are a number of things that negatively influence their kids, including peer pressure, the media, promiscuity, gangs, and the availability of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.

Parents agree that it is important for them to be involved in their children's activities, and many say they have made personal sacrifices in order to do so. They explain that they make an effort to attend their kids' games, recitals and activities. Parents of uninvolved children, however are somewhat more likely to indicate that work and family commitments make it difficult for them to become involved.

Many parents of uninvolved kids encourage their children to become more active and involved. However, they indicate that many factors affect whether their children will actually do so. These include: 1) talent, that is, their tweens have given up on various activities because they “weren’t very good,” 2) interests, that is, their tweens are interested in other things like creative and performing arts, and/or 3) injuries and chronic health problems exist, such as asthma.

Out of the message concepts that were evaluated with tweens, parents, and influencers, messages that focus on the idea of finding something you are good at appear to be most appealing and meaningful. According to tweens, the concept’s appeal is said to lie in the opportunity to discover what is right for you. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, or level of involvement, tweens say they are drawn to the idea of making their own discoveries about themselves and finding a way to be their best.

On the other hand, when messages suggest that being involved and active will allow them to be a star or be with other kids like themselves, some tweens balk, identifying these ideas as not relevant or important. Similarly, completely involved tweens respond to some messages differently than completely uninvolved tweens. Completely involved tweens appear to be more receptive to emotional messages that blatantly draw a direct connection between being active and feeling good about yourself or making good choices. These messages appear to be less appealing and relevant to those who are presently uninvolved and may have lower self-esteem.

Messages that focus on the belief that every child can be good at something resonate most favorably with parents. Nearly all parents say they want to help their child discover his or her talents, to make good choices, and have fun along the way. While messages that relate to helping tweens learn lessons such as respect and discipline through involvement also appeal to parents, several other prototype messages do not.

For example, parents reject messages that associate activity with life-long health benefits for their child. According to many parents today, their challenges of parenthood are focused on ensuring their kids health and safety today, not 20 years from now. Similarly, many parents suggest that because so many other factors can affect their child’s health, a correlation between activity and good health is not guaranteed. Parents also react less favorably to messages that suggest they can feel proud of their children when they participate in activities; most say they feel proud of their children regardless of whether or not they participate. Lastly, parents react negatively to messages that remind them of the difficulty or challenges of parenting; many say they don’t need to be reminded of these challenges in order to relate to a message.

### Perspectives on Involvement from Adult and Tween Influencers

Industry experts provide a variety of insights and suggestions to guide CDC in its campaign development effort. These ideas focus on giving tweens a voice in campaign

development and securing the support of parents and community-based organizations. More specifically, they suggest that CDC:

- **Give tweens a voice.** Experts suggest that successful youth marketers give tweens opportunities and outlets to express themselves, which helps establish a relationship between the brand/, the message, and the tween. These marketers say tweens seem to respond positively to programs that have various mechanisms for feedback. According to these experts, this effort shows tweens that this company values what I have to say. Additionally, successful youth marketers say they actively seek out feedback from tweens from tweens on an ongoing basis and use this data to update and/or drive future programming and messages.
- **Appeal to tweens through reflections of their everyday life.** Experts agree it is important to accurately portray the day-to-day events and issues tweens face. According to these experts, tweens respond to familiar settings, and language, and kids that they can identify with.
- **Continuously monitor and update communications according to the wants and need of tweens.** Experts indicate that an ongoing commitment to tween-focused research is necessary to ensure that communications are relevant and cool to this ever-changing audience. Experts explain that it is necessary to continually evolve with tweens, which requires constant feedback and research. Some suggest that talking to tweens in focus groups is an ideal method of gathering feedback; some organizations report conducting 250 –300 focus groups with tweens each year.
- **Respect tween individuality.** When it comes to marketing to tweens, experts remind us that one size doesn't fit all. Experts also indicate it is important to recognize the diversity of this generation. According to them, messages should include tweens from different cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, and family compositions. Not all tweens look alike, talk alike, or wear the same clothes. Many experts say tweens will be better able to identify with a character or message that relates to their personal experiences and background.
- **Utilize grassroots organizations for support in delivering messages.** While a national message is generally effective for raising awareness, it is unlikely that it will be enough to change behavior. Several organizations express beliefs that national efforts supplemented by efforts at the local level result in more effective communications. Successful youth marketers utilize many community-based organizations across the country as a resource to effectively reach out to the community and to bolster support for programs. Community-based organizations can lend credibility to a national campaign because they are generally well known within the community, are often trusted sources for direct outreach support services, and generally provide the personal, human factor lacking in a broad-based campaign.
- **Communicate effectively with parents.** While they are seeking a certain amount of independence, tweens still admire their parents. Several experts underscore the importance of parents in effectively communicating with tweens. They say parents

often know what they need to talk about with their kids, but need advice on how to talk to them about various issues.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to help kids make healthy choices, intervention strategies should focus on helping tweens enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence by participating in fun activities where they can achieve success. That is, all intervention efforts should be grounded in the theme that **participating in activities can help tweens feel good about themselves.**
- A variety of intervention strategies may exist for engaging tweens in positive, goal-directed activities to help them develop self-esteem and self-confidence. These interventions include:
  - Local or grassroots efforts to help communities involve their tweens;
  - Partnerships with for profit and not-for-profit organizations that already communicate with tweens;
  - Programs to help parents or adult influencers keep kids involved ;
  - In-school programs to creatively build tweens' interest in and commitment to participating in activities; and
  - National social marketing efforts to communicate the benefit of participating in activities to youth and their parents.
- Because this research specifically focused on identifying effective messages that can be used in these interventions, a summary of recommended messages for primary (youth) and secondary (parents) target audiences is shown below:
  - **Messages for tweens should focus on helping tweens discover their passion.** Tweens are engaged by messages of self-discovery and seeking out their identity. Both involved and uninvolved youth are attracted to self-discovery messages and, more importantly, want to feel good about themselves. Involvement in activities must be positioned as a vehicle for self-discovery and self-esteem enhancement. Additionally, the idea that everyone is good at something will be an important motivational message for uninvolved youth with lower self-esteem.
  - **Messages for parents should focus on how they, as parents, can help their tweens discover their passion.** Parents want to help their children succeed and be happy. However, parents need to be reminded that their involvement is important and can help their kids feel good about themselves and that they can be instrumental in helping their children discover what they enjoy and are good at.

- **CDC should focus intently on the manner, tone, and approach used to convey these messages to tweens and their parents.** According to experts, the manner in which messages are delivered is oftentimes just as important as the message itself. For example, they say that messages for tweens must be empowering, contemporary, cool, individualistic, and relevant to their lives. Similarly, they recommend that messages for parents should stress the importance of parent-child interaction and accentuate the positive.
  
- **In order to keep messages for tweens contemporary and relevant to their lives, CDC must invest heavily in ongoing research that elicits feedback and insights from tweens and the people who influence their behaviors.** According to nearly all experts, one of the most critical dimensions for success in youth marketing is acquiring ongoing feedback from youth, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the communications that target them. To support the Youth Media Campaign on a level similar to other organizations involved in youth marketing, CDC should consider some of the following research parameters, planning for:
  - Ongoing focus groups with tweens (240 –300 groups per year),
  - Continuous quantitative tracking of tweens’ response to the Youth Media Campaign,
  - Quarterly in-home, tween-friendly ethnographic research, including immersion interviews, videocams, and/or photo journals,
  - Online feedback mechanisms that provide tweens with an opportunity to share their ideas and feedback in an unstructured manner, and
  - Quarterly point-in-time surveys with parents and other influencers in order to track their responsiveness to campaign efforts.
  
- **It will also be important for CDC to initiate a current audit of organizations that might serve as effective partners for the Youth Media Campaign.** According to experts, an audit must determine the degree to which partnering organizations:
  - Have resources at the local level that can be effectively leveraged under CDC’s leadership and direction,
  - Have existing relationships with target audiences to offset CDC’s lack of brand familiarity,
  - Have brands that are considered relevant and meaningful to tweens or their parents,
  - Are considered cool by youth today and will be listened to, and
  - Are considered contemporary and not preachy to spur receptiveness to messages.

- **Beyond the campaign itself, interventions should focus on how to help parents and influencers help kids feel good about themselves.** Unfortunately, many opportunities for such reinforcement are currently lost because some tweens often do not receive appropriate attention or praise from adults, influencers, and peers in their lives. This is especially true for tweens who are currently uninvolved. In order to encourage tweens to participate in activities, interventions must attempt to change the current paradigm for adults as it relates to positive reinforcement; that is, stressing that it is appropriate for them to praise and reward youth simply for participating in activities not exclusively for performing well in them.
- **Interventions should also focus on how to help kids balance academic challenges with extracurricular activities.** Tweens indicate that performance pressures levied on them by parents, coaches, and teachers discourages them from participating in activities. In order to counter such difficulties and help them find balance in their lives, messages for school personnel need to convey the importance of helping kids integrate activities into their schedules. Three hours of homework each night, while apt to increase academic performance, can at times serve as a barrier to getting kids involved in extracurricular activities of greater benefit to them from a long-term health perspective.

## DETAILED FINDINGS—YOUTH TRIAD INTERVIEWS

### Key Insights and Discussion Themes

The following section of this report documents key insights and discussion themes that arose in discussions with today's tweens. Verbatim tween comments have been included and are presented in italicized type.

**With support and confidence, kids can make healthy choices.** Many tweens suggest they have already faced decisions in their lives about drugs, cigarettes, and the type of people they hang around with. According to these tweens, several factors influence them to make healthy choices, including:

- Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem,
- Goals and Aspirations,
- Activities and Interests,
- Support from Friends and Family, and
- Other Positive Role Models.

Insights into the role of each factor are detailed on the following pages.

### **Role of Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem**

**For tweens, self-esteem and self-confidence is vital.** Most tweens agree that self-esteem is the most critical factor that influences their decision making and quality of life. While their self-esteem is still fragile and in development, many kids say it can affect anything from whether they choose to participate in a certain activity to their future goals and career aspirations.

*“If they don’t have confidence, then they are never going to.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

More specifically, tweens indicate that feeling good about themselves gives them the confidence to try new things and the motivation to stick with something even when it becomes difficult. Conversely, many tweens indicate that if they don't feel good about themselves, they may just give up on something or not even try it at all. Self-esteem is described by tweens as both a feeling and a belief.

- **A feeling.** Many kids suggest that when they *feel* good about themselves, they are less likely to want to experiment with drugs and alcohol. More specifically, some say certain kids use drugs or smoke cigarettes to help themselves *feel* good or cool, but kids who already feel good about themselves don't need to do those things.



*“Feeling good about yourself makes you feel that you don’t need to do these things [drugs, smoking, gangs] to help yourself feel good because you already feel good.” (9 – 10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“Feeling good about myself helps me reach my goals. I have a lot of high goals I want to reach in life.” (12 –13-year-old, African American girl)*

- **A belief.** According to many kids, it is especially important for them to *believe* in themselves. Specifically, many say when they *believe* they will do well, they usually do. For example, one boy says he tells himself he is good at something so he will start *believing* it, which ultimately helps him do better. Similarly, some kids say when they don’t *believe* in themselves they end up doing poorly.

*“If you believe in yourself, you can succeed in everything or at something that you really like.” (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

*“You have to believe in yourself. If somebody makes fun of you, and like 10 years from now, you’re like a big star, a softball star and they only make like five dollars an hour. They shouldn’t have made fun of you. Maybe they could have gotten somewhere in life if they’d had the self-esteem.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“When you say to yourself, ‘I am good at something’ you are going to start believing you are good at something and you are going to start doing good. But if you say, ‘I am bad,’ you are going to start doing bad. You are going to start believing you are bad.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If you’re focusing on getting 100 on your first test, you got to stick with it. And if you don’t believe that you’re going to make that 100, you’ll do bad.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

### **Role of Goals and Aspirations**

**Setting and achieving goals helps tweens maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Some kids also suggest that they do not want to make bad choices now because it may hinder their ability to reach their goals in the future. For example, some say they want to be professional athletes, and drugs and cigarettes could negatively affect their athletic performance. Some others say their future profession requires years of education and a lot of studying, so they have to stay on track and out of trouble. Furthermore, many kids indicate setting and achieving goals, large and small, helps boost their confidence and helps them feel good about themselves.

*“Because there are better things in life than doing things that will be wrong. I want to become a basketball player. That’s my goal.” (12-13-year-old, Ethnic boy)*

### **Tweens’ ability to set and achieve goals successfully affects their self-esteem.**

Many tweens suggest reaching a goal enhances their self-confidence. Whether their goal is scoring a touchdown in football or getting straight As all through school, most kids say, no matter what, they feel good about themselves when they accomplish it. On the other hand, kids reveal they need a certain amount of self-confidence to strive for

their goals in the first place. According to these kids, they won't attempt something if they think they might fail.

*"I think it's important to feel good about yourself because if you don't, then it's just like you don't feel like you can do anything...When you accomplish like a goal, it makes you feel really good. And you feel like I'm really happy because I completed this." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"If you work hard and ...[follow] your goals, you feel really good about yourself." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"I like to sing and I want to be a singer. You know, stuff like that. And feeling good about myself, I think it would help people, not just me. Feeling good about themselves just helps people reach their goals because they feel good about what they're doing." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

### **Role of Activities and Interests**

**Staying active and involved helps tweens make good choices.** Many kids indicate that certain activities and sports can help encourage them to make healthier choices. More specifically, some suggest that when they excel extracurricular activities help boost their self-esteem and self-confidence is boosted. Some others say they attempt to make good choices so they can continue to participate in certain activities. For example, a few kids mention they work hard to get good grades so they can stay on the basketball or softball team.

*"Sports help you feel good about yourself. Usually, you'll smoke to make you feel better about yourself." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Success in extracurricular activities fosters self-confidence for tweens.** Many tweens indicate that self-confidence comes from their past history of success and their ability to demonstrate skill in activities. According to these tweens, it is important for them to do well so other people will like and look up to them. Additionally, many kids suggest they feel more confident and better about themselves when they know how to do something and do it well. Some say they enjoy receiving compliments from other people on their performance because it makes them feel good. Conversely, many kids suggest they feel poorly about themselves when they don't do well because it makes them doubt their abilities in other areas. Many tweens say other kids make fun of them when they do poorly, which also lowers their self-confidence, and, some suggest that kids often tease others who don't know how to do something or aren't good at certain things.

*"When I was little and I wanted to play hockey, I didn't really trust in myself that I can play. And now I trust in myself because I can play." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"When you're good at something, you feel really good because you know that you're doing something right." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"If you are very successful in the things that you do, you will feel good about yourself." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Success is where you have been able to complete something. Like complete it with doing it right and not doing it wrong.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If people know you did your best, they respect you.” (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*“It makes me feel good about myself and special. Because I can do it and I know how to do it.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“In football, if you make a good run and get a touchdown and you get the winning touchdown, you feel good about yourself. You did really great at something.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Cheerleading helps me forget about myself. Like every night at cheerleading practice, everyone complements me on how good I am, and then I just come home and feel better.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“I’m not good at anything. So you really get depressed and you are just mad at yourself.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Because it makes me feel that I can do it. And that nothing will happen, no one will make fun of me because I know how to do it.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Excelling in extracurricular activities carries over into other aspects of tweens’ lives.** More specifically, some say when they do well at certain activities, they feel more confident and positive about their ability to do other things well. For example, several kids mention that if they score points in a sport or perform in a music recital, they think they can also do well academically.

*“Say you just made the winning goal at the soccer game, and you are going in for a big test. You are going to feel confident. ‘I did good at that. I am going to do good at this.’” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Involvement in activities enables tweens to be more resilient.** Some tweens indicate that the good feelings they get from succeeding in extracurricular activities help them brush-off disappointments in other things. Specifically, some say they try to keep remembering times when they have excelled, even if they do badly in something else.

*“Say I scored every goal in hockey except one. You are going to go out through the whole day thinking, ‘Wow. I did really good. I am feeling happy about myself.’ So if you lose at something else, you are still thinking about that thing and you are still going to be happy and you are going to go, ‘Wow. I am good at something. I feel really great.’” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Tweens seek out activities they are good at.** In addition to building their self-confidence, most kids say they tend to enjoy activities more if they are good at them. Nearly all kids say they participate in certain activities because they are fun, and it is fun to win and to do well in something. Additionally, some say that when they enjoy activities more, they are more likely to try harder and participate in them more often. On the other hand, many kids report having quit various activities because they were not good at them and, therefore, did not enjoy them.

*“You wouldn’t enjoy doing something where you are the worst at the sport.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If you’re good at something, then you will like doing it.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If you like it and it is so much fun, you don’t realize that you’re not just slacking off. You are just trying your hardest because you like it.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If you’re not having fun at a sport that you are doing, you will play it less.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“If you’re not successful, that will make you not want to do it.” (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Tweens keep trying to find activities they are good at.** Many tweens suggest that they need to keep trying different things until they find an activity at which they excel. More specifically, some say everyone is good at something, some people just have not found that something yet. Additionally, some kids suggest that once they have found an activity they are good at and that they enjoy, they will want to keep doing it.

*“You keep trying new things. And then you have to try, and try and try again until you find it.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Everybody is good at something. They just may not know what it is yet.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Everybody has like their own special talent that they like and that they want to... accomplish.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“Something that you can do for the rest of your life that you would be good at, and you can stick with that.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**The initial trial of activities is prompted by the idea of finding something they are good at.** According to many tweens, they thought of being good at something encourages them to try it. More specifically, some say the idea of excelling at something gives them the confidence to attempt new things. Additionally, several indicate they are more likely to put more effort into something if they feel they could be really good at it someday.

*“Knowing that I can be good at it, it makes me feel good about myself and it makes me willing to try and do it... it makes me want to try really hard.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Uninvolved tweens say they have not yet discovered activities they are good at.** While many kids indicate they have found activities they are good at, some kids say they have not. According to these kids, they do not have a specific extracurricular activity they really enjoy and want to stick with. Therefore, these kids indicate they don’t participate in many activities or say they are likely to quit if given the chance.

*“You just want to do good in something.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**For many tweens, involvement is considered a short-term commitment.** Most tweens say they participate in and enjoy various extracurricular activities now, but they are not sure whether or not they will stick with them when they get older. Many suggest they are more likely to keep doing something if they find it rewarding and feel good about themselves when they participate. According to these kids, it is important that they feel excited about an activity and accomplish something by participating in it.

*“I just don’t think it’s something that I’d do [kick-boxing]. It’s fun, and if you ever meet anybody in a dark alley it’s useful, but it just doesn’t seem like something that I’d really do for like a long time or anything.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“When I enjoy something, it makes me feel like doing my best because I enjoy it a lot. So it makes me really feel good.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

### **Role of Support From Friends and Family**

**Encouragement and interventions from friends and family help tweens differentiate good choices from bad.** According to many kids, their decisions are influenced by their friends and by their parents and other family members as well. For example, many say their friends and family provide them with advice and encouragement, which helps them make the right choices. However, some kids also say that friends and family, especially friends, can be a negative influence when they discourage them from striving for certain goals or encourage them to get into trouble. More specifically, some say they may be trying to do something positive, and other kids will attempt to get them into trouble or pressure them into smoking, drinking, etc.

*“When I’m in hockey and people are fighting, [they help me try] to not really fight. [Friends] help me avoid it. My friends say, ‘Don’t do that. Just walk away.’” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“People who stop you and make you do other things.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“You’re trying to achieve a goal, and they [people at school] want you to smoke a cigarette and do all this stuff.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Encouragement and support of friends and family can be motivational for tweens.** Many kids also mention that outside support and encouragement is important because it motivates them to try harder and it helps them improve and excel. For example, some tweens say when their parents and/or siblings teach them how to do things or practice with them, they have more confidence and feel good. Furthermore, many tweens indicate that having friends, especially good friends, helps them feel better about themselves because they are able to share experiences and support each other.

Conversely, some kids suggest that when they do not have someone around to believe in them and encourage them, they stop believing in themselves. According to these kids, it makes them feel like nobody cares about them. Additionally, some say they do not exert as much effort when there aren’t others there to cheer them on. A few tweens mention they have to deal with people who tell them outright that they will never achieve their goals or accomplish anything.

*"It's important to have the right friends to boost you up and give you encouragement."  
(12–13-year-old, African American boy)*

*"Because it [lack of encouragement and support] makes me feel like nobody really cares about me. And like that I don't really matter."  
(9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"If you know how to do it and you want to do it and you feel good about yourself, then you can do it. But if people say you can't do it, then you won't be happy and you won't do it."  
(9–10-year-old Caucasian girl)*

**Encouragement and support from peers is critical to tweens' evolving self-esteem.** According to many kids, their peers affect their self-esteem by either accepting them as part of the group or by treating them as outsiders. More specifically, many indicate other kids can significantly lower their confidence by teasing or being mean to them. Some say they stop participating in certain activities altogether because of other kids. Additionally, these kids suggest they are discouraged from trying new things out of fear of ridicule from their peers.

*"I just want to be able to play it and [not have] kids ...making fun of me that I don't know how to play it."  
(9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"I would mess it up for everyone, and every time I was goalie, if we lost a game, everyone would come yelling and screaming at me. When seven kids come up yelling and screaming at you and throw the ball at you, you don't want to play anymore."  
(9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Encouragement from adult influencers, such as coaches, can affect tweens' desire to participate and how they feel about themselves.** More specifically, tweens say they sometimes like an activity more because of their coach and sometimes they like it less. Some kids even say they have quit various activities because the coach was mean and yelled at them a lot. According to these kids, coaches who let them have fun and don't pressure them are better than coaches who shout or tell them they aren't doing a good job.

*"He [the coach] wasn't very nice, and I was just about like fed up with lots of pressure on me."  
(12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*"One summer we had one coach and he would yell at us too much, and we didn't like him. The other coach was gentler. So that was the coach we won the championship with."  
(9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"And he would yell at us [about] things that major league baseball players would do—and we are five years-old—and then he would start acting like we were in the playoffs and like we were famous and it was all on the line."  
(12–13-year-old, Hispanic boy)*

*"I never played like t-ball in my life before when I was little. So one day, the first day, the coach threw the ball up in the air and said, 'Catch it!' So I went like this and it hit me in the face, and then everyone starts laughing and then he yelled at me... I got mad because I like never played the game."  
(9–10-year-old, Ethnic boy)*

*"And it just seemed like the more he yelled at us, the more frustrated we got."  
(12–13-year-old, Ethnic boy)*

*"I like my one coach because she doesn't... yell at you or scream at you. She tries and gets you to focus. And even if you make a mistake she is calm and she helps us get better." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

### **Role of Other Positive Role Models**

**Positive role models encourage tweens to be their best.** Some kids say that strong, and positive role models give them more confidence to reach for their goals and motivation to try new things. Their role models include parents, teachers, coaches, celebrities, musicians, and professional athletes.

*"It [a role model] makes you feel stronger." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

*"If they talk to you, they can make you feel good about it and like raise your self-esteem about certain things." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*"And you got to find a role model to try to help you not do the wrong things and feel good about yourself when you do the goals you start.... If there's a role model that's in like a career, you want to move in a career like he is." (9–10-year-old, African American boy)*

*"It gives you inspiration... if they can do it, then I can certainly do it." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

**Admiration draws tweens to diverse role models.** According to tweens, they may look up to one person for their athletic or musical ability and another because of their strength of character. Regardless of who they admire, many suggest that what matters most is that the person has accomplished something and faced challenges comparable to those the kids face themselves. Additionally, some indicate the person does not have to be famous or the best at something, they just have to be engaged in similar activities and share similar experiences. For example, one girl says she could look to her teammates for examples and support.

*"You can look at other people who are doing it [accomplishing goals or having music or athletic ability] and that helps." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

*"The singer that I like [Lil' Bow Wow], well he was only like six years-old when he first started, and now he's only 13 and he's a singer and a star." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

*"She [Amelia Atwater Rhodes] wrote a book when she was 13, and she wrote Demon of My View when she was like 15. And she's like 16 now or something like that. And I love to write. Like I decided I want to write a book and stuff like that, and I think I really could. And I think it's kind of like inspiring because she's like not really all that much older than me, and she did it when she was my age. So...you think, 'Okay, if they can do it, why can't I?'" (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

**Accomplished peers or older siblings serve as a source of motivation for tweens.**

Some tweens point to other young people who are similar to themselves and identify them as good role models. According to these kids, they look up to them because they accomplished a lot at a young age. Additionally, some say these role models are a lot like them so if they can do something, then “why can’t I?”

*“My brother, when he taught me how to skate, I really enjoyed it. He helped me ...and he took time off like from going to play with his friends. Instead, he would stay and teach me.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*



## DESCRIPTION OF TWEEN TARGET AUDIENCE SEGMENTS

Based on this research, there appear to be two distinct groups of youth in terms of their attitudes toward and participation in extracurricular activities. These groups are involved and uninvolved kids. The following section provides more detail on the characteristics of each group.

### **Understanding Involved Kids**

**Involved kids are devoted to certain extracurricular activities.** According to them, they really enjoy and are good at a specific activity and intend to stick with it for a long time. These kids mention a number of activities including sports, art, theater, music, school, church, and their future careers (e.g., law, science, politics). Sometimes, these kids indicate they want to participate in this activity as part of their future career. For example, some involved kids say they want to become professional athletes, artists, or Broadway singers and actors.

*I really want to become like a ballet star. I think that's a career for me...because I love to dance." (9–10-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*"I want to become a basketball player, to go to the NBA." (12–13 year old Ethnic boy)*

**Involved kids realize a variety of benefits through participation.** They say these benefits include:

- Fun and enjoyment—more like play than work.
- Diversion and relaxation—get away from stress and worries.
- Sense of personal accomplishment gained from helping the team or from reaching individual milestones—rewarding to “win” and do well.
- Outlets for expression—reflect personality and choose interests.

*"I do dance and acting because like if I have a bad day I just think about how I move with myself and I just forget about everything and I just feel so free." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"I like to go on the mountains and I love that. I am just that kind of girl." (9–10-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

**Most involved kids want to do well and accomplish a lot in life.** Additionally, many indicate they are confident that they can excel and achieve their goals. More specifically, many say they have dreams they are working toward, and they know they can do it if they work hard and never give up.

*"When I grow up, I want to be like a lawyer...a judge, superior court judge, and a Supreme Court judge, and so, um, I know there's a test you have to take before you become a lawyer. I know that I have to work real hard to get to it. By making my good grades, I'm like, always thinking when I get that 'A'...if I can do that now and I stay like that and I keep on adding on to that, I know that I can pass that test." (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*"It's important for me to do well. It's always been important for me to just try, you know, to strive and do the best I can. And I know I can succeed at something that I really like. I know I can do that because I put a lot of effort into anything...if I really and truly like what I'm doing." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

*"I like sports and it's important for me to do well. Like if I'm trying, I'm going to give it my all. I like to succeed in everything I do." (12–13-year-old, Ethnic boy)*

*"I know if I try hard and I don't just give up...I can do it if I wanted to." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Involved kids do face barriers to their involvement.** While involved kids indicate they are quite devoted to their favorite activities, many say there are a number of things that interfere with how much time and attention they can give these endeavors. They include:

**Academic Pressure.** According to many kids, school can sometimes interfere because it takes up so much of their time. More specifically, some indicate they have a lot of homework every night and difficult subjects to study. Therefore, these kids say, they cannot spend as much time as they would like on their preferred activity.

*"I used to be in cheerleading and I quit this year because of my grades. They were coming down. I used to be an A and B student." (12–13-year-old Caucasian girl)*

*"They give us tons of homework." (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*"School and homework get in the way [of doing other activities]." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Social Interests.** Many older tweens, especially girls, say they do not spend as much time as they used to on extracurricular activities because sometimes they would rather hang out with their friends or go out on dates. While some say their friends are involved in the same activities, many indicate their social life is usually separate. Again, this seems particularly true for girls.

*"[Friends] are basically most of a teenager's life. I mean, I know other people that are wrapped up in sports, and they just love them. But I think a big majority of teenagers have a social life and they have to contain the social life, so it's really hard to say play sports at the same time and kind of make time for friends when you're always going to have ball games and stuff." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Other Activities.** Many involved kids say they participate in numerous extracurricular activities and that these activities can conflict with each other. According to these kids, while they may have a favorite activity they really enjoy, they sometimes have to spend less time on that activity because they have other things they have to do.

*"I really like art, but sometimes basketball practice gets in the way." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

## **Understanding Uninvolved Kids**

**Uninvolved kids do not have a particular activity they enjoy and want to focus on.**

According to these kids, they have tried various things and quit because they were not very good at them. Additionally, many indicate they don't really know what other activities to try or how to find something they might do well.

*"I used to do...soccer, but I don't anymore. [Because] I wasn't very good at it." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Most uninvolved kids spend more time on sedentary activities** such as reading, watching television or movies, playing video games, or using the computer. While involved kids do these things too, most uninvolved kids suggest they do them to occupy their attention or out of boredom, not because they are especially interested in them.

*"[After school,] I usually just watch TV." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Many uninvolved kids do not have any specific goals or dreams they are working toward.**

While most say they want to do the best they can, many uninvolved kids indicate they aren't sure whether they could achieve certain goals. More specifically, most say they could never be the best at something even if they tried extremely hard. Instead, many say it is more important to them to try their personal best in activities they enjoy, and to perform at least moderately well.

*"[I'm] probably not the best. You [can] classify it [being the best] [in two different ways] yourself [doing the best you can] and... with the statistics and stuff...if you classify it with statistics...then I wouldn't be." (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

**Uninvolved kids face barriers to involvement that are more restrictive than barriers faced by involved kids.** More specifically, uninvolved tweens say that several things that get in the way of their participation in various activities. These barriers include:

**Psychological Factors.** Several uninvolved kids indicate they are extremely shy or have behavioral problems, which prevents them from participating in extracurricular activities. Some say they would prefer to spend their free time with their parents or siblings. Additionally, some indicate they have difficulty focusing and controlling their tempers and tend to get into a lot of trouble at school.

*"I kind of tend to space out." (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*"I'm mad like sometimes. Cause I can't have my way or things like that, and sometimes I throw things around, and I know that it's wrong, but I do it anyway sometimes." (9–10-year-old, African American boy)*

**Physical Factors.** According to many uninvolved kids, they do not participate in certain activities because they physically do not have the talent to do so. For example, some say they are not very coordinated or good at sports so they tend to avoid them. Some other kids indicate they aren't very good at music or dancing, which is frustrating, so they no longer do those things either.

*"I used to play soccer and I would get tripped and kicked and hit, so I didn't want to do that anymore." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

**Lack of Parental Support.** Some of these kids suggest their parents are not very involved in the activities in which they do participate. According to them, their parents have to work or have other commitments that prevent them from attending games or taking them to practice. These kids are especially likely to live in low socioeconomic status neighborhoods and/or have a single, working parent.

*“When she worked she worked from three in the afternoon to eleven at night and she missed all of my sports events and everything. And I kind of participated in sports for my mom and my dad. When they didn’t come and they weren’t a part of it, I said screw it. (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Lack of Interest.** Most uninvolved kids say they are not highly involved in a particular activity because they have not yet identified an interest. According to these kids, they have tried a variety of activities but have not found one they are willing to stick with over the long term. Many of them suggest it is because they have not really enjoyed any of these activities or found them particularly rewarding.

*“I think it is being motivated to...to have something to do, to have a goal, to have something you want and I don’t really have any of those things.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Most tweens indicate they fall somewhere between these two groups.** This research suggests that as kids age, they will likely become more or less involved depending on their ability to find an extracurricular activity they really enjoy and can do reasonably well. Some kids indicate they may try to seek out activities like this, while others say they would probably never find anything so they don’t really try.

The following page summarizes relevant findings and characteristics of these youth segments.

# YOUTH SEGMENTS\*

The majority of kids fall somewhere  
in the middle of this continuum

Completely  
Uninvolved

- Uninvolved in positive activities and/or not passionate about anything
- Do things out of boredom
- Unaware of the possible alternatives; don't know how to find something they can be passionate about
- No clear goals or dreams to strive for
- Not confident of their abilities
- Do not think they could ever be the best at something, although they want to do the best they can

Most Kids

- While most kids are involved in various positive activities now, as they age, their involvement may decrease
- Kids are more likely to stick with an activity if they are passionate about it, and:
  - They feel personally rewarded and good about themselves when they participate
  - They are good at it
- They will probably move one way or another on this continuum based on their ability to find something they are passionate about
  - Some kids will find something more easily than others
  - Some kids will be proactive, while some are more passive and need to have options shown to them
- Kids need to find activities that foster a sense of personal accomplishment and excitement
  - They can achieve some measure of success and feel like they do well
  - They enjoy participating and have fun while doing it

Completely  
Involved

- Involved in and passionate about a specific activity or activities
  - Sports
  - Church
  - Arts
  - Music
  - School
  - Future Career/Life Plan
- Have goals and dreams they are working toward
- Are self-confident and motivated
- Success and doing well are important to them
- Committed to doing their personal best, and confident in their ability to excel

\*These segments reflect dimensions of passion and devotion to particular activities. Overall activity level or busyness may vary across segments.

## **REACTIONS TO MESSAGE CONCEPTS**

Within the context of triad interviews, tweens were exposed to five message concepts that had been developed by Aeffect based upon insights derived from earlier consumer immersions and secondary research. These concepts attempted to position the need for activity and involvement in different ways, that is, ranging from an opportunity for self-discovery (something for everybody) to a way you can feel part of a larger group (belonging).

The ideas presented within each concept focus on delivering a message that spotlights an emotional and rational benefit that is appealing, relevant, meaningful, and persuasive for tweens.

### **Something for Everybody**

**Belonging**

**Be Your Best**

**Liking Myself**

**Lifelong Skills**

Although tweens sometimes have a tendency to be somewhat critical of advertising and messages developed for them, nearly all tweens who participated in this research reacted favorably to at least some aspect of the message concepts listed above. In many cases, they found an entire concept appealing, while in other instances they responded favorably to specific elements of a message.

*“I really like them all. What if they all describe me?” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

Despite these differences, there appears to be strong preference for the concept that promotes self-discovery and finding your passion (Something for Everybody). Reactions to this winning concept and others are profiled on the following pages.

## Something for Everybody

It's important to me to do well. And, I know I can succeed at something I really like. Who knows? I may even become a star. It could be in math or art, music or sports. Or maybe it's something else entirely. It doesn't matter to me what it is. Even if I don't succeed at it today, just knowing that I could be good at it someday makes me want to give it my all.

**Nearly all kids express positive reactions to this concept, saying that they like the idea of finding something they are good at.** According to these tweens, they like this statement because it suggests that they could excel in an activity, and that different people do well in different things.

*"We are all so different. Some people don't like choir and you know, some do." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**However, involved and uninvolved kids tend to respond differently to this concept.**

- **Kids who are currently uninvolved say the idea of being a star is not very pertinent to them.** According to these kids, they will likely never be stars, which is okay with them.
- **Conversely, some kids, especially those who are involved, say they would someday like to be a star,** which they associate with having a lot of money and being famous. Some other kids say being a star simply means doing something you really enjoy and succeeding at it. These kids suggest that almost anyone can become a star by this definition.

*"I don't see myself being a star in basketball or football or anything. I see myself...doing something in an office or somewhere else." (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

*"The part where it says I may even become a star. It's like if you believe in yourself...you can succeed on everything ...you can be a star." (12–13-year-old, African American girl)*

- **Uninvolved kids are also more likely to say that the activity could be anything, it doesn't really matter to them what it is.** Perhaps, this tendency is due to their desire to find anything that they are good at, since they say they are not good at very many things.
- **Conversely, most involved kids say that it does matter to them what the activity is.** According to these kids, they prefer activities that are appealing and fun for them personally and wouldn't want to do something if it wasn't. Since many indicate they are good at a variety of things, involved kids may have more opportunity to pick and choose their activities.

*"It does matter to me what it is." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“All except for the part where it says it doesn’t matter to me what it is. It does matter.” (9-10-year-old, Ethnic girl)*

- **Many uninvolved kids say the final sentence of this concept—relating to future success—is especially relevant to them.** According to these kids, this sentence describes them because they are not very good at any particular activity right now but like the idea that maybe they could be one day. Highly uninvolved kids tend to be most likely to respond this way.



## Belonging

Sometimes I wish I could spend more time with people who are like me and share my interests. Participating in \_\_\_ gives me an opportunity to be with people who share my interest. I like being with people just like me because in some ways they bring out the best in me. When we're together doing \_\_\_, we have a lot of fun.

**Many kids react favorably to this concept**, indicating that they enjoy extracurricular activities because they give them an opportunity to spend time with their friends and make new ones. According to these kids, they feel good about themselves when they make new friends and become part of a group.

*"I feel like we're [friends] really close and that you don't really have to worry about anything because you're just playing [with your friends]." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"One reason why I like basketball is it's an activity where you have fun with your friends." (12–13-year-old, Ethnic boy)*

## **Older and younger tweens react differently to this concept.**

- Some younger tweens say they like the idea of spending time with people who share similar interests and experiences.
- In contrast, while many older tweens indicate that extracurricular activities allow them to spend time with their friends, they say they are less interested in meeting people who share their interests, perhaps because they already have a set group of friends.
- Additionally, many older tweens react negatively to the idea of spending time with people who are just like them. According to these tweens, they would get bored if all of their friends were just like them. Many indicate they like hanging out with different kinds of people because it gives them an opportunity to try various things and have new experiences. Additionally, several older tweens indicate people just like them do not bring out their best. Instead, these tweens say people who are better than them bring out their best. Older tweens also say their friends are all interested in different things, and it really doesn't matter because they are all still friends.

*"I don't like being with people just like me. I like it when I'm with somebody that's different. And maybe we can like learn something from each other." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"I don't think it describes me because I don't like being the same as everybody else. My friends aren't exactly like me, and I still like them a lot." (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*“If you want to talk to them [your friends] about something like a sport, then you can...it don’t matter if they do the same things.” (12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**According to many tweens, especially those who are involved, they enjoy being part of a team and spending time with their teammates.** Many of these kids indicate they get to know their teammates really well and have a lot of fun with them. Additionally, some say their team members help motivate and teach them and encourage them to try harder.

*“It makes me feel good because I’m with my teammates. And I really like these teammates. They really help me with what I’m doing, help me in progress.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**In contrast, many highly uninvolved kids say this concept does not describe them very well at all.** Specifically, these kids suggest, since they have not found an extracurricular interest of their own, they can’t really share it with someone else.

*“I can’t think of anything [to put in the blank]. I don’t know; I just can’t think of anything.” (9–10-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

*“Well, for this one, I really don’t participate in...organized stuff.” (12–13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

## Be Your Best

With so much to do, it's important to be your best both mentally and physically. \_\_\_ can help you be your best. When you believe that you're performing at your best in the things you enjoy, you'll feel good about yourself.

**Active and involved kids, especially boys, are particularly likely to say they like this concept and that it describes them.** Many say they agree that it is important for them to be their best mentally and physically. According to these kids, both aspects are necessary to excel at something. Tweens mention a number of things that help them be their best. These include:

- Practice
- Friends and family
- Believing in yourself
- Being good at something
- Activities
- Sports
- Motivation
- Goals
- Working hard
- Working together
- Role models
- School and teachers
- Learning and trying new things

*"Because if you don't practice at all, then you're never going to accomplish anything."  
(9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**In contrast, many uninvolved kids say they do not really know what to put in the blank for this concept.** Perhaps they are unsure of what their best is or how to achieve it.

**Most tweens, both involved and uninvolved, say they appreciate the attention they receive when they participate in certain activities because it makes them feel good.** According to these kids, they especially like it when they win or when the crowd cheers for them. Many suggest that receiving recognition shows them that they are good at something and that they have performed well. Additionally, many kids say they feel good when they win awards and prizes and score points in sports. On the other hand, many indicate when they do not score points or receive recognition they feel bad about themselves.

*"I like softball because I get a lot of attention when I'm out there on the pitching mound."  
(12–13-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

*"When people cheer for me, I get really excited and I feel like I can do it." (9–10-year-old, Caucasian girl)*

**Many involved kids suggest that extracurricular activities give them an opportunity to show off their talents.** Some indicate they know they are good at

certain things, and they are striving to be the best. For example, some say they want to be acknowledged as the most valuable player on a team or to win a championship game. Additionally, many of these kids say it is important to them to improve and enhance their skills and to constantly learn new things.

## Liking Myself

The activities that I participate in help me feel good about myself. When I feel good about myself, I'm happier about life in general. Feeling good about myself helps me make good choices in life and helps me avoid doing things that I know will be wrong for me. Feeling good about myself helps me reach my goals. That's why I stick with those activities even when I'm tired or not in the mood.

**While active and involved kids respond positively to this concept, uninvolved tweens tend to react neutrally to it.** More specifically, most involved kids say this statement is true and relevant for them, but many uninvolved kids indicate it is not. Perhaps because these kids tend to feel less confident and have lower self-esteem, the idea of feeling good about themselves may not be as relevant. Additionally, according to uninvolved tweens, they may feel good for a brief time, but it usually does not last long and it does not help them feel happier about life in general because they know their problems have not gone away.

**Many uninvolved kids also say when they do feel good about themselves they tend to get into trouble.** Specifically, some say they get overly cocky, and do and say things they shouldn't.

*"When I feel good about myself, right, I get overly...I get too much confidence and then I like do things that are bad...It's like okay, 'Well, I feel good about myself so I'm gonna go, you know, beat up this girl named Nicki who hates me.' And then you're in trouble. It's bad." (12-13-year-old, Hispanic girl)*

**Involved girls are especially likely to say they like this statement and that it describes them.** According to them, feeling good about themselves really does help them reach their goals and stay on track. Kids mention a variety of other things that help them reach their goals as well including:

- Trying hard
- Hope and courage
- Not quitting
- Never giving up
- Practicing
- Being smart
- Keeping your head up

**Tweens also mention some things that get in the way of their goals.** They include:

- Bad grades
- Being or getting sick
- Getting discouraged

**Some kids react negatively to the final sentence of this concept.** These kids say sometimes they aren't in the mood even for their favorite activity. According to them, when they are tired, it usually means they don't want to do anything.

*"When I'm not in the mood I just don't do it." (12-13-year-old, Caucasian boy)*

## **Lifelong Skills**

The activities that I participate in help me to learn skills that I can use for the rest of my life. I learn how to get along with other people. I learn how to focus on a goal and stick with it. I learn how to listen to my coach. I make friends that I'll keep after high school and beyond.

**Most kids interpret this concept very literally.** Many indicate they think it means that once they learn how to do something—e.g., play basketball or chess—they will know how to do it for the rest of their lives. While most say they agree with parts of this statement, overall reactions to it are generally neutral. Furthermore, many kids, especially older tweens, say they do not like the last part of this statement. According to them, it is unlikely that they will have the same friends all through high school and beyond.

*“I learn how to play basketball, which I could do for the rest of my life.” (12–13-year-old African American boy)*

**On the other hand, some kids, especially physically active and involved boys, say this concept describes them best.** Specifically, several say they want to be professional athletes when they get older so they expect to use their athletic skills in the future. Therefore, they say, the activities that they participate in now really do teach them skills they hope to use for the rest of their lives. Additionally, these kids say it is particularly important for them to learn how to listen to their coaches.

*“Listen to my coach. Because if you don't listen to him, you mess up the play for everybody.” (12–13-year-old, African American boy)*

## DETAILED FINDINGS-PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

The following section of this report documents key insights and discussion themes that arose in discussions with parents of tweens. Verbatim parent comments have been included and are presented in italicized type.

### **Role of Activities and Interests**

**Parents feel participation in activities improve their tweens' self-esteem.** In group discussion, many parents reveal their belief that activities provide a positive outlet for kids in terms of building self-esteem and keeping them away from negative influences. Parents also say that activities help prepare kids for challenges that they may face in life by teaching them skills such as teamwork, discipline, organization and respect for others.

*"Some of the... I wouldn't say 'bad kids', I wouldn't want to label them as bad kids, but they're just not interested. They want to hang with the older crowd." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"That hormone thing...I was lucky my daughter was very athletic and involved in track. I also got her involved in more things to keep, not her mind off of it, but to keep her so busy with what she had to...you can't stop [children from dating, but...] but you can keep them so focused and so busy." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I think they get more confident and stuff and feel like they have some control. It makes me feel successful as a parent because you want your kids to be independent and have a focus. Have something they know they're good at. I find one of the things kids have, there are so many things that occur in their lives that make them feel bad about themselves like some other students are smarter than they are. Some other kids are cute or prettier and there's always kids that can do things better, and kids are real sensitive and tuned in to that. So you have to constantly build them up and make them feel good, and when they find an activity that they like and they're good at, that's it." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"The elements are out there. Pregnancy, a lack of education, street life, corruption. The hazards are out there, and if you don't keep them focused on other things, positives, someone else will keep them focused on the negative." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

**Parents recognize a need for their own involvement.** All parents agree that it is very important for them to be involved in their children's activities, and many say that they have made personal sacrifices in order to be there for games, practices, recitals, and other events. Parents of involved and active children are especially likely to have done so. Parents of uninvolved children, however, are somewhat more likely to indicate that work and family commitments often make it difficult for them to become involved in activities. Several of these parents, especially single working mothers, mention that they have relied on extended family members to attend events when they can't be present.

*"I'm a single parent ...I get tired, but I won't miss a game or a meeting in the world, because my son expects me to be there, and I will always be there for him." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"Even if you didn't make the whole game...you were there to support them. Especially when they tell you how big of a game this is." (African American parent, involved child)*

**Parents of uninvolved kids cite numerous distractions.** As might be expected, parents of uninvolved children are somewhat more likely to say that their children spend too much time indoors in front of video games, television, or the Internet. Many of these parents say that they do encourage their children to become more involved and physically active. However, they indicate that many factors play a role in determining whether their children will actually do so, including physical talent, interests, injuries, and chronic health concerns such as asthma. Some admit that their children have tried to participate in sports, but gave up because they weren't very good. Other parents indicate that their children's interests lie elsewhere, often in the areas of creative and performing arts.

*"My son, he is an asthmatic. They say there are certain things that he can do and I let him do it because he needs the exercise to open up his lungs. So I let him, I try to get him to play a lot." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*"My daughter took soccer one time, and [she said] 'I don't want to do that.' But once she got on the field, she enjoyed it. I made her try it the first time. [I said] 'You get out on that field because I already paid for it'. Activities will again keep her grounded where she is at. She enjoys it. They don't want to do it. They would prefer to sit right in front of the TV or the computer and not be bothered." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

### **Role of Negative Influences**

**Parents say negative influences are everywhere.** In fact, most parents indicate that the negative influences in their children's lives far outweigh the positive. When asked about influences that work against them in raising their children, parents mention a laundry list of top concerns including promiscuity, drug use, smoking and gang activity. Almost all parents agree that their children face pressure to engage in these risky behaviors from two sources: friends and the media.

**Parents want to squelch "just hanging out."** Parents of older tweens, especially girls, frequently mention that their children spend too much time on the phone or hanging out with friends. A majority of parents say that they will not permit their children to attend sleepovers or parties with friends unless they have personally spoken with the parents of those friends. Several parents indicate that their older children have become involved in potentially risky situations with friends despite their efforts to monitor their whereabouts.



*“Having a girl and monitoring that behavior...I mean, girls are definitely more open and more receptive to the outside environment and everything. They will bring it in and go out to it. I stay involved in it. I met the parents, I met the kids. I went to the house. My son though, at nine-years-old, it’s a totally different world. It’s more out. Boys go out and they play, and they’ve got energy. So it isn’t so much inward involvement.” (African American parent, involved child)*

*“You’re trying to steer them in the right direction and then you have others out there, even kids their own ages, you don’t know the kind of lifestyle they’re leading, or what they’re living, or if their parents ... you know what I’m saying? (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

**Media and pop culture are considered a threat.** Almost all parents express concern that their children are exposed to negative images via the media and pop culture. Minority parents are especially likely to object to the graphic sex and violence depicted in music videos and rap music lyrics. Caucasian parents are likely to mention WWF wrestling as a negative influence on their children. Most parents agree that they attempt to shield their children from inappropriate sex and violence on TV and in the movies, but mention that their efforts often go in vain because it’s just as easy for their kids to “go to a friend’s house and watch it.”

*“You never know what’s going on in someone else’s home. What might be acceptable for them might not be acceptable for you, as far as television watching or just the way they speak amongst each other.” (African American parent, involved child)*

*“Before it was the thing with Clinton, and then, ‘Mom, what’s oral sex?’ You know? What do you say? You don’t want to explain it, but you don’t want them making up their own mind what it is. So, it’s kind of you worry about them getting wrong ideas about things because you don’t know, sometimes, what they’re hearing other places so you can tell them the right thing to do.” (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

## **Role of Positive Influences**

**Parents are Number One.** Most parents say that they, as parents are the most important positive influence in their children's lives. They mention the importance of keeping the lines of communication open so their children will feel comfortable in bringing difficult situations to them. Many parents say that it is their responsibility to teach values at an early age so their children will be prepared to choose between right and wrong during their teenage years.

*"To prepare them, we have to be parents and let them know they are secure and that we want the best for them. As long as we do that and take care of them properly and give them the things they need and invite them to positive things in life outside the household, then that's basically the part we have done for them growing up from 7–17. From 17–21 they mostly find their own personality." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"Just talk to them. Let them know that Mom and Dad are always here to talk to you. I always stress that to my son. Don't be afraid to talk to me, anything you want to say. Please come and talk to me. Even if you mess up on something." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"You have to constantly reinforce that they're good, that they're beautiful, they're smart. It's an ongoing thing, and you have to really tune in to what their fears are." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"It's showing them the positive things that you know are out there that they can strive for. What your goals are for them." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

**Parents try to scare kids straight.** Other parents point out that children are likely to learn by example, beginning with the example that the parent sets in the home. Some parents say that they use the example of older siblings or other family members who have been in trouble to scare their kids into behaving appropriately. In fact, several parents mention that fear messages have been used successfully by schools and the media to show kids the consequences of negative behaviors like smoking, pregnancy and drug use. However, other parents say that the best message a child can receive is that they are loved and important.

*"They have a pretty good program at school where they actually show them pictures of lungs and actually brought in some samples or specimens of organs that have been damaged from the cigarette or drug use." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"I think we are a great example of that. We are all working and participating in positive things. They can say, well my mom is not involved in that, she doesn't approve of that. So it gives them a sense of direction with peer pressure." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I learned from my oldest daughter the tricks of the trade and the lies...I try to show Shondy the things that Shana did. Shana has two kids. I ask her, 'Shondy, do you want two [children]? {She says} 'No, Momma, I don't want no kids.' So, her thing is basketball. As long as she wants to play basketball, I'm right behind her. Baseball, I'm right behind her. I'm not worried about her going*

*over to someone's house, because I don't let her do it yet." (African American parent, involved child)*

**Parents hope kids have role models outside the home.** Many parents indicate that teachers, coaches, and adult family members are an important positive influence in their children's lives. Some parents admit their children may be more likely to talk to these adult influencers about their problems or concerns than they would be to talk to their own parents. However, some parents point out that it shouldn't be assumed that children will receive needed discipline and support from these individuals. Adult influencers concur that parental attention and support is of primary importance in minimizing the risk that children will become involved in negative behaviors.

*"I have a cousin down here.... He has great input with my son as far as the worldly things in life, you know. Plus my sister, who is in the Navy...they [the children] are dealing with a lot of adults with certain standards and reasoning." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I think maybe tell them also if they don't feel comfortable talking to you they should at least talk to their teacher or their friend's mom or somebody, an adult who they feel comfortable talking to. I think it kind of helps them to know that there's other options." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

**Faith is viewed as positive force for youth.** Some parents also mention that involvement in faith-based activities is a positive influence for their kids. Hispanic and African American parents are especially likely to encourage, if not insist upon, their children's participation in these activities.

## **REACTIONS TO MESSAGE CONCEPTS**

Within the context of focus groups, parents were exposed to seven message concepts that had been developed by Aeffect based upon insights derived from earlier consumer immersions and secondary research. These concepts attempted to capture different reasons parents would encourage their tweens to become involved in activities (e.g., to prompt lifelong wellness, to keep them safe, to spur achievement).

The ideas presented within each message concept focus on delivering a message that spotlights an emotional and rational benefit that is appealing, relevant, meaningful, and persuasive for parents of tweens. These concepts are summarized in the list below.

**Tools for Life**

**Finding a Passion**

**Proactive Participation**

**Lifelong Wellness**

**Positive Force**

**Achievement**

**Parenthood**

Overall, parents' reactions to the concepts above were varied. While they reacted favorably to Tools for Life, Proactive Participation, and Finding a Passion, they reacted less favorably to the remaining four concepts. Interestingly, parents of involved and uninvolved children, regardless of ethnicity, tended to react similarly to each message concept presented.

## Tools for Life

*The world today can be a big and scary place. I want to do everything I can as a parent to help prepare my child for it. Encouraging involvement in (physical activity/exercise/fitness/sports) is something that I can do to help them learn skills that they can use later in life, like teamwork, compromise, discipline, and respect for others. These activities strengthen their bodies, but they also strengthen their minds. Involvement in organized activities will help my kids be successful in life.*

### **From parents' perspectives, the world is a big and scary place filled with pitfalls and challenges that their children will encounter along the road to adulthood.**

Many parents agree that today's world is different than the one in which they grew up. Parents acknowledge that their children are surrounded today by more negative influences than they were at the same age, making it necessary to continually teach their children to know right from wrong. Most parents agree that an emphasis on activities as a way to strengthen the mind is the main message of this statement.

*"It's different than when we were coming up. You are scared for them. You have to teach them things and...right from wrong." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*"Showing them a positive role, being there for them and their dreams so they can have a successful life so they can become something statistically versus a person who doesn't want to do anything. In other words, we deposit and we expect them to withdraw from us the positive and values and things like that in their lives. There is a lot of negative out in the scary world. It's a scary place for us, too." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"All these activities, if you add them up, are considered part of the education that you are giving your kid because you are involved in their life, and this example is what you are showing them." (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

**Most parents indicate that sports and group activities are especially helpful in reinforcing values that they try to instill in their kids, including respect and discipline.** Parents say that these activities help in teaching their kids to face challenges in life, and to understand that they won't always win.

*"They have to learn how to accept failure in order to appreciate success...that is integral...it's easy to succeed, you get rewarded for that, but it's how you deal with failure, and how you deal with the real world." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*"It's not about winning the game, it's how you play the game ...as you play with dignity, lose with dignity. That is the best pep talk they could ever get." (African American parent, involved child)*

*“Sometimes you have to stress that there is a losing also along with the winning. You know, but [you have to] be able to look to the next time and better yourself.” (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

**At the same time, some parents say that the world today is filled with more opportunities than they would ever have dreamed of as children, indicating that the emphasis on the negative causes the positive to be over looked.** Minority parents are especially likely to hold this view, as many admit regret that their own parents didn’t encourage them to expand their interests in activities because times were different.

*“The world today can be a beautiful and scary place. ... It only creates a more rounded kid if they interact with other races, other economic levels. ...As you would say, they[ kids] learn that other people still have blood, red blood. We are all the same. The interaction creates that understanding that you are not in here alone and that I have to respect your idealism and agree to disagree in terms of the sports activities.” (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*“My parents were in a different situation. They were first generation; they were straight from Mexico. They had a whole different thing to deal with. My dad worked nights, my mom worked days. It was a lot different from what my kids got. We’re more giving. Not that they weren’t, but you see what you missed and you try to give your kids what you wanted.” (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

**Some parents of uninvolved kids point out that the tools for life statement could be broadened to include non-physical activities,** indicating that sports are not for everybody and that academic or other leadership activities are just as important. Other parents mention that sports alone will not make a person successful.

*“My oldest one is not interested in sports. I think she didn’t have a lot of success with it. She doesn’t seem to be very coordinated, but she can get the discipline from the ROTC. I am not saying that exercise and physical activity isn’t important, don’t get me wrong, but I do think that there are some parents that are ... pushing for their kids to be on a team. I mean, not every kid has the potential.” (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*“I agree that being active gives them self-confidence.... But, if you’re a fat, little chubby kid you’re going to get picked on. But that [sports] is not all that’s to it. You also have to be smart.” (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

*“Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA can teach them a lot of that {discipline, etc} too.” (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

*“It takes more than involvement in organized activities to make a kid successful. It’s just one component of rearing and raising a child to have them involved in organized sports.” (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

## Finding a Passion

Every child can be good at something. It's important for kids to find what that something is, to find a passion that will occupy their time in a positive way. I want to give my kids as many opportunities as possible to find their passion. As a parent, I can help them find and develop interests, but the choice is ultimately theirs to make. I just want them to have fun and be happy with whatever they do.

**Virtually all parents agree with the idea that every child can be good at something.** They indicate that the something would not necessarily be a physical activity, but could be any productive or positive use of time. Many parents say that this statement would encourage them to search with their child for an activity that could become a lifelong interest.

*"I see this as a parenting statement. You know this can be used in a lot of different applications about making choices and how to make a kid feel good about themselves."  
(Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"I have one word for this. Untapped talent. You have to tap in on whatever it is. ...Even if they [other children] had the type of parents that taught them values or not, they had some talent."  
(African American parent, involved child)*

*"No two people are alike. Everybody has got something that they are good at. Art, even though to you as a parent it may seem silly, but you never know."  
(Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*"I was very involved with my niece when she was younger. All of a sudden we found that she liked to DJ and that became her passion. That developed into more of an arts, an arts and musical talent that we didn't know she had. Nobody in the family has it. And, that's what I'm waiting to see from my son. I've gotten him to try different things."  
(Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*



**The word passion especially resonates with Hispanic and African American parents.**

*“Passion. I agree 100% with that word passion there. Because if you don’t have a passion for something you don’t have anything.” (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

*It’s a beautiful big old world out there and there are endless possibilities. If we have to truck through the snow, and blizzards and everything else to go out there and find it, it is out there. [Passion] is what drives them, it’s what drives us. It is what wakes you up in the morning, it gets you out there to trudge along and seek.” (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*“To find their passion. That word is really great. When I grew up everything was somewhat held back, you were told what you can’t do and, don’t even strive for that, I grew up in the 60s so there was a lot of restrictions put on your life. Now I tell my kids the world is out there. You can find a lot of things and you are going to enjoy it. It was different for me back then growing up. Now I see that they can go out there and find their passion.” (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

**Most parents agree on the importance of leaving the final choice of activity up to the child,** but indicate that it is part of a parent's responsibility to introduce the child to activities that may be of interest on a long-term, even lifelong, basis. Some mention that they have learned the hard way with older children that forced participation in an activity of the parent's choice is not always enjoyable for the child. The vast majority of parents agree that fun and enjoyment are key components of any activity in which their child chooses to participate.

*"You're giving the child a choice for one thing. You can't make a kid ride a horse when he'd rather read a book. It's like when I put my daughter in ballet. She was really little, but I asked her, "Do you want to go back?" I mean what was the point of sending her if she wasn't going to do it? If they're not happy with what they do they will not do it." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"It's the responsibility of a parent. You know there's a lot of things out there and the more exposure kids have, they can pick and choose and they make better decisions. With my older son, we insisted that he play baseball, and he did for about a year and it was real obvious that he didn't like it and didn't want to do it. So with the second child, now I can see that we can introduce him and see if he likes a certain sport, but it's really going to be up to him." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"They need to find their niche. I'm going to show them the good things about themselves, but if it's not their passion, then you realize that and I think you have to accept that. As parents we can give these opportunities, but it's up to them. I don't think you should force it on them." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I got him into fixing up cars and bikes as a hobby. I never thought of it until I read this. I thought maybe it was just a hobby, but that's his passion. That's what he likes doing. I tried to get him into music, tried to get him into sports, computer, whatever and he doesn't want it." (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

*"I have one that's beyond athletic, but my other two aren't. With my son, he felt that he failed when he didn't play baseball. He couldn't play, he wasn't good at it. He couldn't play basketball because he wasn't good at it, but yet, he is a great writer, so I have encouraged his writing. I feel that they will find their own niche in life and their own way of what they want and what they are good at. I think it's important to encourage them." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

## **Proactive Participation**

*It's very important that I make time to participate in my child's activities. Sometimes he'll look up during an activity to make sure I'm there and that I'm watching; I can see how much that means to him just by the look on his face. It's little things like that—being there for him, talking to him about his activities and interests, helping him with encouragement and advice—that let him know I care and that I'm in his corner. In fact, it strengthens our relationship by giving us an opportunity to bond and spend time together.*

**Parents overwhelmingly agree that it is crucial for them to be involved in their children's activities.** They agree their children notice and are encouraged by their presence. Most parents agree that the concept of participation in activities as a way to strengthen the relationship between parent and child is the statement's main message.

*"I think that is what they want. When I take my daughter to swimming, she sometimes stands there and she will look over and see if I am watching. ...My daughter sometimes [says], "Oh did you see Tiffany, her mother never comes." You know? They say stuff like that. They notice." (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

*"I was the coach of my daughter's basketball team and cheerleading squad for years, and it is so true because her comments to me, speaking of friends on her team, was 'Mom, I feel so bad for so and so because her mom and dad never come to the games.' I know it's real hard to get there but it would make so much difference to the kids." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*"The kids feel like they are important. They feel like they are loved. And that their efforts in that particular activity, whether it be trying to get on the honor roll or the sport or whatever, are not going unnoticed or wasted because my parents will at least appreciate it." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*"You have to make that bond that they know that everything they do, if it is positive, that you are right there with them. You are walking the same path. I may not be able to shoot the hoop, but when you shoot it, oh, baby, I'm looking right at that net too as it goes down. They're going to know, 'There's your mom.' (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*"You are there reaping the reward as a parent. They love that part. My daughter, when she's got the microphone and she is up there, she lets everyone know she wants to see her mom." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

**Working parents are somewhat more likely to disagree with parts of this statement, indicating that it isn't always possible to be there.** However,

several of these parents acknowledge feelings of guilt when thinking of times that they haven't been there for their children. Several working parents, especially those who are single, say that they attempt to have a family member present for their children's events if they can't be there themselves.

*"I wasn't always there for my older daughter, because I couldn't be. Well, that was a choice I made. Then I can remember probably about her junior or senior year, I thought I better start going to her athletic events. And, when I finally came, I finally realized what a beautiful runner she was, but by that time she was like, "Mom, you don't have to come," because what she had done was made her way. You know what I mean? She was the star. When I was there, she would almost get nervous." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I have a hard time because I have Lupis, a chronic illness, and I had all kinds of problems when she was younger. But I did have a family. And my mother, at that time, or my sister, you know networking with the family, somebody participated in being there. They would go to different events that I couldn't be at. But, it's not like you being there. It is really important to the kids. Then you see signs that they don't want you to be there after something like that happens. Like a punishment." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"I think it's kind of almost a negative thing where if you're a working parent or you're not able to go, it kind of has a negativity about it where you feel like if you don't go you're not a good parent. You know, and there's just not that option for a lot of people. It's not just always a question of making time, some people just can't do it." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*

*"If you want them to go to a good school, a private school, and you want all this stuff you're going to have to work hard. So you kind of sacrifice. This is what I wish I could do, but the time is really limited." (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

## **Lifelong Wellness**

*As a parent, there's nothing more important than your child's health. That's why it's important to encourage physical activity. If kids become involved in a (physical activity/sport) now, they will continue to be involved for the rest of their lives. This lifelong involvement reaps many benefits, including increased energy and stamina for the daily grind and increased strength that will protect them as they grow older. It will also lower their chances of developing heart and other chronic diseases. The more physically active my kids are, the less I worry about their health.*

### **Most parents agree that long-term health benefits are not top of mind reasons to encourage their children's involvement in physical activity.**

Rather, they encourage involvement due to short-term benefits associated with activity, such as keeping kids off of the streets and building self-esteem. In fact, many parents indicate that the mental benefits of physical activity are more important to them than the health-related benefits. Parents also agree that, rather than worrying less about their child's health during physical activity, they actually worry more given the increased risk of injury associated with sports. They also point out that a physically fit child may not necessarily be mentally happy or healthy. In addition, many parents express skepticism that lifelong involvement in physical activity during pre-teen years leads to lifelong involvement, citing their own experiences as evidence.

*"Our health is important, but just having peace of mind and being happy is also important. You can have them in everything, and if you don't have peace of mind, they're never going to be happy. I don't care what sport they are playing. If they play these sports and don't have inner peace, it's not worth it." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"The most important thing is to have your kids involved in certain activities that will get benefits mentally because health [can be achieved in other ways]." (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

*"It's not necessarily true if they are physically active when they are younger they are going to be physically active when they are older, and I think they could be healthy or not healthy whether they are involved in a sport or not." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*"Just because they are in sports and doing active things all the time, that doesn't make them healthy. They could still be eating the wrong things and doing too much of this and too much of that." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*“I have seen my girls repeat the same pattern that I did. I did tap, jazz, ballet, gymnastics. I was on the cheerleader, drill team, pom-poms. You know, because you do all that doesn’t mean that you are going to be involved [in these activities] the rest of your life.” (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

**Despite the overall negative reaction to the statement, some parents admit that it does make them think about whether their kids are as healthy as they could be,** especially in terms of nutrition. Parents who react positively to this statement are likely to be those who have had difficulties with weight or other health issues themselves.

*“I think I would have wanted my parents to see this message about health. I have two younger sisters, so it was like three women growing up at the same time and we weren’t allowed to go outside because there was always like gangbangers around or guys. So we were just always in front of the TV and we were overweight. We were and I still am and I struggle with that and I wished they would have put me in activities earlier so that I wouldn’t have had to struggle so much. That’s why I want my kids to be active and healthy.” (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

## Positive Force

*Being a parent has its ups and downs. I want to be there for my kids, but don't always have time due to work or other commitments. That's why organized activities are so important. If kids are involved in those activities, they will meet other kids like themselves who keep their minds and bodies occupied with a positive task. By staying focused on an activity that they enjoy, kids will have less idle time to make the wrong choices. Involvement in activities also helps kids to feel good about themselves. If they feel good about themselves, they will be more likely to reject things that are bad for them. When they're involved in organized activities, I worry less about where they are and what they're doing, making my job as a parent easier.*

**Working parents are especially likely to relate to this statement,** in that organized activities help them maintain some peace of mind regarding how their children are spending their time when they can't be with them. However, parents are mixed in their reaction to the idea that activities will help prevent kids from making the wrong choices. Some agree that any positive use of time will minimize the chance that kids will become involved with the wrong people. Others say it is the parent's responsibility to teach values to their children that will prepare them for tough choices, indicating that activities cannot take the place of parental guidance.

*"The more important thing is the time and quality time that you provide to your kids. This is a very easy way to get rid of your kids. You cannot say that the parent can make his job easier. Regardless, it's not about a job. I believe a place cannot give the same or give better [than parents do], like it says here." (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

*"I think them focusing on activities helps. They're safe. It's like a safety thing. The parents are safe with the idea, with them not having that idle time to do the wrong things." (African American parent, involved child)*

*"It's true, parents go up and down and for the after school activity that was my main thing. I don't have to be worried about my child being on the corner, where certain people are doing drugs or...hanging around. I know where she's at, I know what she's doing.... It's good for her future, and it just keeps her going because she does so good in there...it makes her feel good." (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

*"The message I got is like saying, 'Oh, find something so you can occupy your time and I don't have to worry about it. Find someone else to be with.' ...You like them involved and their mind is occupied and their time is occupied, but it's almost like pushing them off." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

## Achievement

The activities that my kids enjoy the most are those in which they perform well. I am very proud of their accomplishments, whether it's scoring a touchdown, learning a new gymnastics move, getting an A on a science project, or singing a solo in the church choir. When my child achieves success, I feel proud to be their parent. It's my success, too.

**Most parents object to this statement's implication that they would only be proud of their children when they achieve success.** While parents generally agree that they are proud when their children achieve something tangible, they indicate that they are just as likely to be proud when they know that their children have done their best. Many parents maintain that the success of their children varies depending on their capabilities, and that a C may be as big a victory for some children as an A would for others. Most parents react negatively to the idea that a child's success is also the parent's success, although some admit that they feel justified in taking some credit for their children's accomplishments.

*"I would feel proud of my child even if he didn't get an A. Even if he got a B, I would feel proud. So I think it should just be I feel proud of my child. " (Hispanic parent, involved child)*

*"If they come up short, sure you are disappointed. You know they worked all year and they came in second or third in the state meet or something.... I mean you feel bad for them. You have to be there no matter what [or] the pressure will be too much for them and they will drop out of anything." (Caucasian parent, uninvolved child)*

*"Achieve is trying and doing the best you can. They're achieving if they've given me 100 percent of what [ever they do] even if they give me 80 percent and I know they have that 20 percent somewhere else." (African American parent, uninvolved child)*

*"It's pride, it's not something that's your success. I don't understand that. I didn't get her there because I never pushed her with homework, and I told her, 'I will not help you with homework' because I would have ended up giving the answer. So that's their success. That's not your success." (Caucasian parent, involved child)*



## Parenthood

It's hard work being a parent. That's why I'm constantly searching for that special activity that will keep the kids focused and lighten my load. Encouraging my kids to participate in CHOICE, an after-school program that helps kids to select positive goal-directed activities, can help them learn and diminish their ability to be distracted by unproductive or harmful activities. I can feel more confident and relaxed knowing they're off the streets and involved and can ride the waves of parenthood with my head above water.

**Many parents react negatively to the tone of this statement,** explaining that it implies that parents should use after-school programs as surrogate parents when the job becomes too hard. Other parents say that they don't want their load to be lightened, and that they accepted the pitfalls of parenting when they made the choice to have children. Several parents mention that this statement is more likely to appeal to parents who consider their children more of a burden than a blessing. Some working parents admit that they would feel more comfortable knowing that their kids are involved in a productive activity rather than home alone after school. However, others mention that it would be possible for their children to come into contact with "bad kids" in a program such as the one described.

*"I don't have enough time to talk to him, you know, play with him. So, I would send him [my son] to one of those programs to help him learn and develop his intelligence." (Hispanic parent, uninvolved child)*

## DETAILED FINDINGS—INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL AND PROSPECTIVE PARTNER INTERVIEWS

### How to Communicate Effectively With Tweens

In order to communicate effectively with tweens, experts and prospective partners agree that communications must be tween-focused. More specifically, they explain that successful youth campaigns must:

- Create an Atmosphere of Empowerment
- Reflect Tweens' Everyday Life
- Be Contemporary
- Use Aspirational Approaches
- Be Inclusive, not Exclusive
- Ground Efforts in Communications Research

Each of these suggestions is explained in the paragraphs that follow:

#### **Create an Atmosphere of Empowerment**

**Experts indicate that creating an atmosphere of empowerment rests in giving tweens the opportunities and venues to express themselves.** Capitalizing on efforts that empower tweens, they say, will help establish a more meaningful relationship between the company, the product and/or the message, and the tween.

*“One of our core goals is to make kids feel empowered and feel good about themselves.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“[Tweens] want to feel empowered. That comes up again and again and again.... It’s about empowering kids to speak up for themselves if they don’t think something’s fair or something’s not right.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“You let them tell you what is fun versus you, as an older person, trying to draw back upon your youthful experiences and use them to telegraph what’s fun today.” (Kodak)*

**Many experts say they encourage tween feedback to reinforce and support the empowerment of tweens.** Moreover, these feedback loops are, built in data collection tools that can be used on an ongoing basis to update and drive programming and messages targeting tweens. Some of these feedback loops take the form of simple online forms that allow tweens to react to specific programming or voice their likes and dislikes.

*“We get a ton of feedback from kids. We have a whole department of reviewer services where kids are writing us and telling us and going online and e-mailing*

*us and telling us that this was good, I didn't like when you did that, you know. [Empowerment] is talking to [tweens directly].” (Nickelodeon)*

**Other innovative ways experts have tried to empower tweens has been through the use of programming dedicated to providing tweens with opportunities to voice their preferences.** An example of this is Nickelodeon's Kids' Choice Awards where tweens can vote for their favorite movie or musical act and actually see the results of their votes.

*“We do a lot of programs where kids vote on topics. We do something called the Kids' Choice Awards, which is exactly what it sounds like. It's like an Oscar, Emmy, Golden Globes all rolled into one, and kids pick all the winners. We're not sitting in some laboratory eeking out that Will Smith should win every award, but What do you guys think? What are your choices? So that's such a core kid value... empowerment.” (Nickelodeon)*

**In creating an atmosphere of empowerment, some organizations have created forums and outlets right in the community.** Here, tweens are given a vehicle to speak up and speak out about issues that are important to them and their communities. These vehicles have taken the form of physical objects like soapboxes and pledge walls to facilitate and encourage tweens to voice their concerns. Experts indicate that community based organizations or shopping malls are safe and effective places to deliver these communications.

*“We're doing speak out sessions at malls [for our initiative with Seeking Harmony In Neighborhoods Everyday (SHINE)]. We're holding...teen summits. We're allowing teens to come up and talk about social topics that are relevant to them. And as part of that, we are going to have what we call a pledge wall where a teen can write on this wall whatever social pledge...in terms of anti-violence or diversity. We're allowing them to put their handprint on the wall and sign it as their pledge” (Kodak)*

*“We came up with an idea which was, 'We want to empower you.' We want to give kids an opportunity to speak out.” (Nike Foundation)*

### **Reflect Tweens' Everyday Life**

**Everyday life is real life for a tween, say many experts.** The everyday is what is most relevant to them and what they can most identify with. Experts assert that creating messages that both resonate with and appeal to tweens requires the marketer to reflect this understanding.

*“[Tweens would say] communicate to me. Tell me or show me your product. Give me something I can really relate to. And finally, and importantly, entertain me.” (Kodak)*

*"We're...taking a look at what's out there and who is watching our network and what the population of America looks like and we want our network to reflect that. ...Most of the shows are rooted in real life. If you watch the Rugrats, one of the stars of the Rugrats comes from a single-family household, another one has a stepsister and a stepmother. ...What we're finding is that kids want to watch and feel like, oh that's happening in my life, or my best friend's going through that. ...Our shows are true to life, based on true to life." (Nickelodeon)*

**Experts contend that in order to relate to tweens, the marketer must be genuine in his appeals.** Coming across as authentic and cool are fundamental to resonating with tweens. Furthermore, explain experts, it is very important to tap into familiar settings, language, and images relevant to tweens in order to show tweens that your communications are real and genuine.

*"Realize that [tweens] see through advertising. If you are not authentic..., then your message will never be heard. ...Authenticity is Gen Y's definition of quality. There's a heritage. It's real. It's aspirational. It's focused, and it's relevant to their lifestyle or the company depicts an understanding of their lifestyle, which, therefore, makes it relevant." (Kodak)*

*"I don't mean that cool automatically has to be hip and hip-hop.... To kids, cool is sometimes synonymous with 'I get it and it relates to me in a way that works on my level.' So even for a nerd, the cool factor may be talking in a language that maybe is techno-speak, if it's an online kind of nerd or a technocrat. For someone who's cool and hip-hop it's introducing it [this appeal] into the messaging or the scenery [to spark their interest]." (Nickelodeon)*

*"[Tweens] are getting a little smarter and a little wiser, and you can't talk down to them.... You have to just talk in their language and that really has been the most effective." (Nickelodeon)*

**Experts also offer pearls of wisdom on how to avoid some common communications pitfalls.** For example, messages that preach to tweens or are authoritative in tone may cause tweens to ignore or reject a message. Moreover, attempting to be cool can be more complicated than expected, according to experts. For example, one expert says, both the concept and brand behind the message may need to be accepted as cool in order to reach tweens.

*"The shows that I've seen come and go, or the things that don't go over so well are things where we're a little preachy. No, [preachy] doesn't work at all because who wants to be told to do anything?" (Nickelodeon)*

*"Cool is somewhat of a nebulous term for marketers and [using it in communications] often backfires because marketers don't understand what cool actually means. Teens can see through a brand that tries to be cool but isn't, and they recognize the brands...[that] are not all that cool in the first place. So what ends up actually happening is a marketer will come out with a message that perhaps has resonated with groups they spoke to. But when distilled to a larger*

*audience and put into a framework of a piece of copy, that seems like corporate chest beating, teens see right through that.” (Kodak)*

**Another, more hands-on, strategy to avoid sounding preachy would be to allow tweens to create your messages for you, offers one expert.** Let them show you how they would record dialogue, images, settings, etc., that reflect how they talk about the issue.

*“I would give a bunch of kids a handy cam for a month, a week, a weekend. Tell them to record how they would deliver whatever message you are trying to deliver and get 100 hours of images and dialogue on tape.... These kids are real, and they tell it like it is.” (Kodak)*

Given the fact that tweens are a very media savvy generation and they tend to be highly tuned in to communications, they immediately reject messages that are disingenuous, not straightforward or ones that come across authoritatively. A few experts offer some tips for combating these idiosyncrasies of Generation Y.

*“The narration is in a kid’s voice. The casts are kids and it’s shot from a kid’s perspective. Even a show like the Rugrats, which is our top show, it’s the world from a kid’s point of view. It’s even shot from [the] feet up, so everything is the world below your knees.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“When we launched The Big Help it was during a time [when] there was gang violence on the rise, people were concerned about shootings and carjackings. We chose not to preach ‘don’t fight, don’t use drugs, don’t do whatever.’ Instead, we said if we developed programs and activities that would engage kids in constructive activities, they would be less likely to get involved in destructive activities later on. If they were removing graffiti from the walls, this meant a number of things. ...It was getting them out of the house, it was getting them involved in an activity, and it was giving them a sense of ownership for something in their own community. Then they weren’t going to let anybody else come along and diss it later because they had a vested interest.” (Nickelodeon)*

### **Be Contemporary**

**Using contemporary themes that incorporate elements of tween values and popular culture can be effective strategies for appealing to this audience, say experts.** Integrating pieces of their daily life and routine situations into the creative strategy and materials will help marketers demonstrate a more proficient understanding of today’s tween.

*“I think putting kids in their element [helps you be contemporary visually and suggest to them that you understand them]. Are they at school? Are they at the playground? Are they on a sports team? Putting them in their own setting, maybe not necessarily having adults in the picture all the time.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“There are two qualitative factors you absolutely have to communicate [when talking to tweens], and one is cool. Your brand...or your message has to be cool and it has to be fun. This generation, their number one defining value is fun. The number two defining value is technology. So fun has to have an element in everything they are doing.” (Kodak)*

*“Music is always really important to kids and in their lives. It’s part of their every day. You walk to school; you’ve got to have a Walkman on. You sit in your room and do your homework; you’ve got MTV or Nick on. Music is a big part of kids’ lives.” (Nickelodeon )*

*“The more you can wrap [messages] in humor and in fun instead of a real heavy duty serious tone, the more successful it’s likely to be.” (Kraft)*

Some experts caution, however, to always be mindful that while music, sports, technology and fun may generally cut across the tween audience, the use of specific icons, stars or idols that a sub-segment of tweens identify with, may not appeal to the wider tween generation as a whole.

### **Use Aspirational Approaches**

**Experts reveal that another key aspect of developing tween-targeted communications is appealing to tweens aspirations to be older.** They explain that tweens often admire their teen counterparts and look to them as the influencers that set the latest trends. One approach experts say they use to account for this gap is to “age-up” creative materials often tailoring messages so that they appeal to the aspirations of tweens, but still account for the subtleties in their emotional and developmental stages.

*“What we did in the [Take One and Pass it On] campaign... is we aged-up our creative [end] because to appeal to a 12-, 13-, 14-year-old you need to depict characters in the cast as 4 to 5 years their senior. There is this aspirational age gap.... Yes, I am 12 –years old, but I want to be 16 – years old. Or I am 13, but I want to be 17–years old. So we aged-up our cast and then took the situation out of school because, yes, school was relevant to them but it wasn’t aspirational. They wanted to see themselves depicted in more social situations.” (Kodak)*

*“What we’re seeing...is this phenomenon called age compression where a 9-year-old now is acting like a 10-year-old. That’s not a huge jump, but there’s subtleties in that emotionally they’re still a 9 –year-old and they still have the feelings of a 9-year-old, but the trends and the aspiration is almost an age and a grade jumped higher.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“We’ve been doing a lot of research with developmental and...age compression.... We’re also realizing we can skew up a little in some of*

*the edginess in the messaging because your 9 –year-old is no longer a 9–year-old now, in the old way of thinking.” (Nickelodeon)*

### **Be inclusive, not exclusive**

**Most experts say they advocate for communications that place an emphasis on inclusion rather than exclusion.** To do this, they note, messages must set the stage for tweens to succeed, rather than creating an environment in which they are bound to fail. For example, in the case of physical activity—an uncomfortable and often highly personal topic for many tweens—experts indicate that messages that, in essence, categorize tweens according to their abilities, like athletic and uninvolved, may serve to discourage and alienate them from participating in physical activities altogether. Instead, experts suggest taking a broader approach when looking at physical activity; one that allows for personal choice in a wide range of activities in order to find a good fit.

*“Your message has to be broad enough to reach enough kids and be relevant to enough kids’ lives. So, your messaging can’t all be about basketball and it can’t all be about macramé. It’s got to be broad enough to say ok, what sparks you? ...Find something you’re good at.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“We have a new channel that’s called Nickelodeon Games and Sports...and it’s the celebration of play. ...But play can mean anything. It can mean [anything from] a checker championship to opening season at major league baseball to an Oreos stacking competition down at Orlando. It really is just play, and what’s wonderful about that is it doesn’t ostracize the kid who is not incredibly athletic or isn’t the best pitcher on the team or someone who is embarrassed at maybe being overweight and they can’t participate in team sports or feel uncomfortable about participating.... So, I think what you do [to capture tweens interest and make them feel comfortable] is to identify what that kid is good at, and it may not be a fastball. He may be the video king champion of his town and it may not be the girl who can swim 400–meter races, but she can do something else. And, I think you have to identify what a kid is good at and flourish that.” (Nickelodeon)*

*“It’s a challenge [to get people to be physically active].... Organized sports-type activity...has created a very polarized situation. ...Organized sport tends to exclude...the lower 50th percentile and tends to attract...the upper 50th percentile in athletic ability. ...The more organized a sport is and the more it feels like visible public competition, the more likely [a tween who is]...not particularly adept physically, [will] to want to avoid it because it’s a source of embarrassment and humiliation.” (Kraft)*

**Recognizing the diversity of tweens today and harnessing it into communications is important.** Experts say that it is a difficult task to try to find the right balance between the many regional, cultural, racial, and gender differences that exist among tweens today. For example, tweens have grown up in varied home environments from single family households, to two-family living

arrangements. Needless to say, tweens don't all look alike, talk alike, or wear the same clothes. Taking care to represent the diverse backgrounds of this generation and not take a cookie-cutter approach to messaging will lend itself to success, say experts. Tweens will be better able to identify with a character or message that ties into their personal experiences and backgrounds.

*"We basically take an approach at Nick that there's not a one size fits all."  
(Nickelodeon)*

*"You're looking at a broad audience so you have to factor in all of the cultural differences. One, that exists between races, cultural activities or cultural norms and changes that exist based on region. So if you're going on the air with one national spot, you've got a lot to worry about in terms of all of the cultural challenges that exist across any number of demographics." (Nickelodeon)*

*"Moreover, the communications need to be tailored to the individual needs of the family or community in which they live. ...Messages need to be personalized, especially on physical activity.... Suggestions for an inner-city, low-income family will not be the same for a middle-class family living in the suburbs.... One size does not fit all." (Kraft)*

*"You have to make it diverse...put braces on a kid. Put glasses on a kid. They can't all be wearing Gap Kids clothes. Not every kid looks like that."  
(Nickelodeon)*

### **Ground Efforts in Communications Research**

**Experts agree that developing strong communications and maintaining relevance with your targeted audience rests in the research.** Without a keen dedication to research, it will be a hit or miss effort to develop communications that appeal and resonate with your audience.

*"We do about 300 plus focus groups a year. We're constantly talking to kids. I sit on the 42nd floor of a high-rise in the middle of Times Square, and I don't propose to know what's going through an 11-year-old's head anymore. We get on our knees and we ask kids what they think" (Nickelodeon)*

*"Everything we do is grounded in research. ...We're constantly refreshing and responding based on what we hear from kids themselves...[And that] is not just sitting in a focus group room...[but] we go into the schools, we go into the shopping malls, we go wherever kids are" (Nickelodeon)*

*"We very much strive here to use numbers to guide our judgment but not to finalize decisions. ...[We] really try to spend a period of time where we are eating, breathing, living a teen's life. We will take a group of teens and take them to the mall and go shopping with them, let them lead us. We will set up interviews*



*in a teen girl's bedroom and talk to them about their life and tape it with a handy camera." (Kodak)*

**Experts imply that one of the challenges in appealing to tweens and staying relevant is keeping abreast of the constantly shifting trends in youth culture.** What may be cool and appealing today is not necessarily going to be what's cool and appealing tomorrow. Staying ahead of these fluctuations requires an ongoing commitment to collecting insights directly from tweens.

*"I think [the challenge is]...staying on top of the genre of things that continue to interest them...[coming up with] story lines that are more reflective of their everyday life." (Nickelodeon)*

*"If we want to keep them, we have to evolve with them." (Nickelodeon)*

*"Understanding that to be relevant with this audience you need to constantly be new. You need to constantly reinvent yourself and constantly have news or products that are talk-worthy. (Kodak)*

*"Trusting kids themselves to know what will reach them, that's what becomes important to us." (Nickelodeon)*

## How to Communicate Effectively with Parents

Many experts and prospective partners identify the ongoing importance of communicating with parents when attempting to influence the behavior of their children. More specifically, experts suggest that effective communications efforts must:

- Encourage Parent-Child Communication, and
- Connect with Parents and Accentuate the Positive

### **Encourage Parent-Child Communication**

**Many of the experts involved in communications targeting tweens underscore the importance of parent-child communications as an integrated piece of an overall campaign or program strategy.** These experts explain that the quality and depth of parent-child communications fundamentally determines how a tween will approach problem solving and decision-making surrounding difficult issues in their future.

*“If you look at the data...you see that parents talking with their kids early on about dangerous issues really is a genuine deterrent for those kinds of risky behaviors. ...Especially in the teenage years, when they have a basis to go back and talk to their parents. And they have a good thought, decision-making process.” (Children Now)*

*“Parent-child communication...I think, is a critically important part of any youth initiative aimed at this age group. Parents have to be a part of it, first of all, and we know that parental involvement and improving that kind of communication between parent and child has a significant impact on these kids’ outcomes and decisions later on when they’re facing these [tough] issues as adolescents.” (Kaiser Family Foundation [KFF])*

### **Connect with Parents and Accentuate the Positive**

**Communications that successfully appeal to parents, explain experts, are generally supportive and positive in tone.** In contrast, say several experts, parents shut down when communications blame them for the problems affecting youth today.

*“What we’ve found in terms of reaching parents is that it’s more effective to provide support to them—not to blame parents. I think they feel like they’re under siege quite a bit. Every time something happens around a kid—a shooting in a school or whatever it is—parents are the ones who are blamed.... In terms of reaching through and breaking through to the parents (the communication) needs*

*to be a supportive kind of message. To blame them for what they're doing just results in the parents shutting down.” (KFF)*

*“Keep the tone positive. ...A real negative approach—negative in the sense of here are all the dangers you are creating for yourself if you continue this bad behavior—is not as helpful as here's the good you can create for yourself if you engage in positive behavior.” (Kraft)*

*“I think the most effective way [to reach parents is through] positive reinforcement of behavior. ...The ONDCP [Office of National Drug Control Policy] have a campaign where they want to encourage parents to talk with their kids about drugs. So in their commercial advertising they show a father and a son not talking. There is [approximately] 30 seconds of blank space and [then] says, 'Another missed opportunity for talking with your kids about drugs.' We've found...that parents don't like that [approach]. They're offended by that and would much rather see reinforcement of what they should be doing” (Children Now)*

**Parents, like their kids, often feel overwhelmed by their day-to-day lives and are doing their best to juggle their personal and professional lives.**

Experts indicate that parents often know what they need to talk to their kids about, but tend to lack the tools and skills that show them how or when to talk to their kids about various issues.

*“We've found that parents generally know that they need to be talking [to their kids]. ...[The] biggest barrier is often that parents just don't know how or when to start, and they feel sort of just overwhelmed by the prospect and often think that their children will come to them when they need to talk to them.” (KFF)*

*“As a parent, I could feel beat up all of the time saying, 'These are all the things I'm doing wrong in my kids life. I feel I know these things, but what I don't know is if I'm driving down the freeway and my daughter's in the back seat and says, 'Daddy, what's masturbation?' How do I respond to that sort of thing.” (Children Now)*

*“Kids and Families and parents want...personal and actionable advice in easy to follow steps. ...They want help on how to deal with [sensitive issues].” (Kraft)*

*“Everyone already knows the basics of what a healthy diet is? ... That's not what the issue is. ... It's that I don't know how to translate [that knowledge into actionable steps]. ...I don't know how to change.” (Kraft)*

**Experts also suggest works the use of universal themes as an effective approach to teach parents.**

They explain that universal themes are images and situations that parents can easily relate to. This might include the use of kids that look and sound like their own kids, kids who could easily represent their own children.

*“Parents already recognize and feel that their kids are exposed to more difficult situations than they were as a child; but, at the same time, there’s a tendency for a lot of parents just to say ‘That’s just not going to be my child....’ So, trying to find those universal types of messages is important, and for us, that’s often been centered around one set of messages [which]...had kids...talking, unscripted, about [tough] issues and it was kids who parents could relate to. They could see their own child in [the video] and it was a matter of letting them know that these are the kinds of things that are on kids’ minds...” (KFF)*

*“We had a PSA [public service announcement] just...after the Columbine incident...with a group of kids, and they talked about violence. You hear the 8-year-old [say] that he knew a kid that brought a gun to school. You would hear a 10-year-old talk about how she saw a boy choked in front of her. Just a series of really surprising and shocking things coming out of everyday kids’ mouths. And these [kids] were not actors. They were actually real kids’ interviews...things that they were actually witnesses to.” (Children Now)*

**In contrast, using fear-based tactics to communicate with parents may not be the most effective approach, according to experts.** Parents may be in denial about the realities facing their tweens or simply believe that these dangers happen outside their own families and communities.

*“The sort of spots that are...centered around all of these things that are out to get your kid—the media, the predator on the corner, that kind of thing—is something that is going to cause more parents to...shut that out and say, well my child doesn’t watch television, my child isn’t going to be in that situation.” (KFF)*

*“I think there’s a tendency--and we’ve seen this across other message—for parents or whoever your intended audience is to say, ‘Yeah, I believe that but it doesn’t happen in my community. Not my child, not my neighborhood, not my school, and, I think, with these kinds of [tough] issues the critical messages are making it relatable. And I think for parents one of the biggest motivators is to be able to show them the ways that this is impacting their child. The gun in the school is a rare occurrence. Kids being bullied and teased and low self-esteem are much more common occurrences.” (KFF)*

According to experts, how you choose to address an issue may have a lot to do with how people process information. In general, experts who develop parent-directed communications say that parents typically think about issues affecting their tweens in a holistic fashion. Therefore presenting messages in a broader context, such as ‘this kind of goal-directed activity can be a deterrent to this other high-risk behavior,’ may be an effective appeal in reaching parents.

*“There are a number of groups out there from the anti-smoking people to corporate groups who are doing campaigns on drinking, talking to kids about drinking, talking to kids about smoking, talking to kids about violence, that are*

*segmenting out a lot of these issues. And for many parents and families, it's an issue of creating, [just] a more open dialog that cuts across topics, that makes it less overwhelming than this topic versus that topic. And the messages have increasingly been on not having these individual, sort of big talk kind of conversations, but creating a more open dialog...that does not shy away from difficult issues." (KFF)*

*"For the parents, I'd argue against going issue-specific. I think at a minimum--even if they're highlighting one issue at a time--it's important that the resources and the overall effort be framed as a broader initiative that cuts across a number of issues. I think with physical activity, for example, you can highlight that and its impact across a wide set of risky behaviors. The reason for highlighting that is to address a whole set of issues. So the kind of materials that can be developed for parents could address that wider set of issues and you want it to. ...If the goal is to target these risky behaviors, it's also to have open conversations about those topics." (KFF)*

## How to Elicit Support from Local, Grassroots, and Community Based Organizations

### **Most experts also agree that reinforcing messages at the local level helps to support an overall communications effort.**

To this end, many experts say they access community-based organizations across the country as a means to effectively out to communities and bolster support for messages and programming. Grassroots organizations can provide basic infrastructure and hands-on support for communications. Experts indicate that reinforcing messages at the local level helps to integrate communications into the fabric of the community where they become a seamless part of everyday life.

*“I think it’s very important [to partner with community level organizations]. ...Many of these sort of broad-based national campaigns don’t provide people and communities with enough of the hands-on support that they need. ...You want your national initiative to raise visibility for the issue, to provide the general messaging and the general support, and then look to the local community levels to actually carry that out.” (KFF)*

*“We like to say, ‘What do we leave kids with when they turn their TV off? How can they then navigate and make use of that messaging beyond just hearing it on the air?’ Well, that’s when the infrastructure is important. It’s important...to have (messaging) grounded in the community where kids can feel and see and touch it and live it everyday. And then it’s not preachy, and it’s seamless, and you see how it’s transcending through all aspects of their lives” (Nickelodeon)*

*“Just raising awareness alone isn’t enough anymore. I think you have to have resources and referrals and information, something tangible that people can turn to get the support that they’re looking for. To just raise awareness and not have a place for people to go or information to get answers to the issues that are being raised, I think diminishes the value of the public education work that you’re doing.” (KFF)*

### **Not only are community based organizations generally well known and trusted within the community, but they may, in fact be a more appropriate channel for delivering certain messages than the sponsor.**

One expert explains that community based organizations who have been involved in providing direct outreach services to a target audience may be better able to provide a direct, personal connection to the message than one that comes from an outsider.

*“The kids don’t want a bunch of people from Nike coming into the Bronx and St. Gabriel and saying, ‘This is what you gotta do.’ They want to hear [the message] from people that they’ve been mentoring with” (Nike Foundation)*

One expert cautions that while a community based organization may be equipped with the infrastructure to augment a campaign's efforts, they may lack the capabilities to deliver programming on a more strategic level. Therefore the expert suggests that the partnering or sponsoring organization dedicate staff and resources specifically to the task of overseeing and managing local-level communications and take responsibility for coordinating the overall strategic plan.

*"To make [community partnerships] really work you need somebody [on staff within your organization] who is dedicated...to organizing those relationships, and thinking about it on a more global scale. I think a lot of these groups are good at implementing initiatives that you give to them but I don't know that they always have the capacity to do it on a broader, more strategic level and I think that's what somebody externally can do [for community-based partnerships]."*  
(KFF)

When building a framework for communications, a few experts indicate that they utilize existing relationships, when applicable, and seek out new partnering opportunities with private and not-for-profit organizations that have invested time and resources building local level networks and establishing trust within the community. In addition, experts advise aligning with those partners that can lend credibility to a national campaign and who already have built a strong relationship with the community.

*"You're looking for groups that can reach the audience that you're trying to reach. [Partners who] have credibility with that audience but also have an infrastructure in place to be able to carry out that kind of an undertaking."* (KFF)

*"For this campaign to work and become seamless and resonate for kids, [CDC has] got to build partnerships with groups or agencies that have outreach or the ability to forge outreach at the community level so that [the campaign] becomes very pervasive and very in your face, but not in a preachy...way."* (Nickelodeon)

*"We're trying to find ways where you could maybe do an after school program in boys' and girls' clubs or some such existing groups that have extensive national networks at the community level to get engaged in this. [Create groups] to provide resources locally to supplement the more passive online, but nonetheless rich, information."* (Kraft)

*"If there's equity out there with the groups...organizations, agencies, networks who have already been out there partnering with young people on efforts, and have...issued a call-to-action that young people have responded to, and somehow [CDC] can tap into that and build upon it, that's a good thing."*  
(Nickelodeon)

A few experts have different perspectives with regard to national communications that are being implemented at the local level. For one expert's, experience working with nationally recognized community based organizations has yielded inconsistent results with regard to the level of commitment and contribution they have provided. However another expert says that partnering with nationally recognized organizations helps maximize the likelihood that your target audience will have such a resource in their community.

*"We're fortunate that we have somebody that we can go to that already has established relationships with community groups in all these different markets. But if you don't have that, it's very difficult to [organize efforts] on a national basis. ...Any national organization has strengths and weaknesses in various degrees in the different cities, so it's very difficult to approach a national group and ask for the same level of help and assistance in each one of those individual markets that you may be wanting to go in to." (WNBA)*

*"When we choose [partners] it is based on groups and organizations that share the core philosophy of doing right by kids.... [Organizations] that were national enough that when we went on our air and we talked about the potential of kids going to these organizations for more information, then it was a reasonable chance that in most populated communities, one of these organizations would exist" (Nickelodeon)*

Before considering developing new partnerships with outside agencies, however one expert suggests conducting an internal audit to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current CDC partnerships. Once these partnerships have been evaluated, she advises filling in the gaps, perhaps with partners who can bring new perspectives to the table.

**Another consideration when choosing partners, say experts, is the integrity brands.** If your brand is not well known among your target audience, consider partnering with private or not-for-profit organizations who already hold equity with your audience.

*"I think you...want to have credibility for these initiatives and that's some of what your partners can bring into it... Kaiser Family Foundation [is] not necessarily an organization that the average consumer knows about, but Nickelodeon certainly is. Or Seventeen is a very familiar resource for teenagers. So having [those partnerships] gives a tremendous amount of credibility to the initiative." (KFF)*

*"They've got to rely on partners. Number one, just the name itself, Centers for Disease Control presents a problem because for some that may connote preachiness, regulatory, governmental, or some sort of mandate, or fear. ...That [name] is not what...will resonate with kids. So they need partners, be it their ad agency, their creative agency, whoever it is, to help break it down and package it in a way that resonates with kids' lives." (Nickelodeon)*



## **SUMMARY OF MESSAGE STRATEGY RESEARCH**

(Aeffect consultants led: 48 triad interviews with tweens [stratified by level of physical activity, gender, ethnicity, and age], 6 focus groups with parents of tweens, 2 focus groups with adult and teen influencers, and 8 individual interviews with industry professional/prospective partners)

- Self-esteem or “feeling good about yourself” is the primary force that enables tweens to resist involvement in behaviors that could be damaging to their health now and in the future.
- A variety of important factors are said to influence or establish a tween’s self-esteem:
- Having a sense of purpose that is achieved by finding an activity they are passionate about and can excel in;
- Feeling a sense of accomplishment that is achieved by setting and accomplishing goals over time; and
- Finding a source of support provided through the encouragement and involvement of family and friends who show an active interest in their lives.
- Professionals/potential partners suggested that CDC:
- Give tweens a voice.
- Appeal to tweens through reflections of their everyday life.
- Continuously monitor and update communications according to tween wants and needs.
- Respect tween individuality.
- Utilize grassroots organizations for support in delivering messages.
- Communicate effectively with parents.
- Conclusions/recommendations:
- All intervention efforts should be grounded in the theme that participating in activities can help tweens feel good about themselves.
- Messages for tweens should focus on helping tweens discover their passion.
- Messages for parents should focus on how they, as parents, can help their tweens discover their passion.
- CDC should focus intently on the manner, tone, and approach used to convey these messages to tweens and their parents.
- In order to keep messages for tweens contemporary and relevant to their lives, CDC must invest heavily in ongoing research that elicits feedback and insights from tweens and the people who influence their behaviors.
  - *Ongoing focus groups with tweens,*
  - *Continuous quantitative tracking of tweens’ response to the YMC,*
  - *Quarterly in-home, tween-friendly ethnographic research including immersion interviews, videocams, and/or photo journals,*
  - *Online feedback mechanisms that provide tweens with an opportunity to share their ideas and feedback in an unstructured manner, and*

- *Quarterly point-in-time surveys with parents and other influencers in order to track their responsiveness to campaign efforts.*
- It is also important for CDC to initiate a current audit of organizations that might serve as effective partners for the YMC.
- More broadly, beyond the campaign itself, interventions should also focus on how to help parents and influencers help kids feel good about themselves.
- Interventions should also focus on how to help kids balance academic challenges with extracurricular activities.
- Several factors influence tweens to make healthy choices, including:
  - Self confidence/self-esteem
  - Goals and aspirations
  - Activities and interests
  - Support from friends and family, and
  - Other positive role models