



A Snapshot of Developmental Relationships Between Parents and Youth



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Unpacking Parent-Youth Relationships

Researchers have long known that strong relationships between young people and their parenting adults is foundational for healthy development and thriving. But what makes these relationships strong? And what happens in these relationships that contributes to young people’s development and thriving?

Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework (next page) helps to answer these questions, identifying five elements of relationships that shape young people’s development, learning, and well-being. Within each of the five elements are specific actions that build the relationship and contribute to growth.

This report summarizes the results of a 2017 survey of 671 U.S. parenting adults with children ages 9 to 18, based on the Developmental Relationships Framework. It shows areas where parenting adults show strength in their relationships. It also identifies gaps that offer opportunities for learning and support. Some highlights:

- Parenting adults from many backgrounds report similar levels of developmental relationships with their children and teenagers.
- Parenting adults are most likely to report strength in “expressing care.” They are least likely to report strength in “expanding possibilities.”
- Similarly, parenting adults see their children most commonly “expressing care” to them as parents as well.

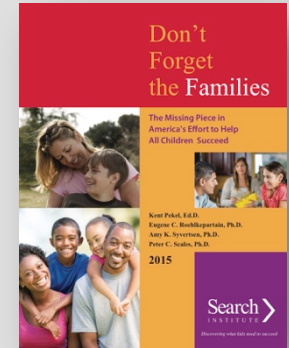
These findings invite families and those who seek to empower, educate, and support them to become more intentional in attending to the power of family relationships as a critical resource for young people’s learning, growth, and well-being.

* This report does not indicate associations between the Developmental Relationships Framework and measures of well-being. See *Don’t Forget the Families* for information on the correlations between developmental relationships and social-emotional strengths and other areas of development.

An Update

This snapshot builds on a 2015 study, *Don’t Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America’s Effort to Help All Children Succeed*. Since that time, Search Institute has refined the Developmental Relationships Framework based on ongoing qualitative and quantitative research. Because the framework and survey have been changed and because the two studies focus on parents with different ages of children, the results of the two studies cannot be directly compared. However, the findings between the two are consistent.

Download *Don’t Forget the Families*
www.searchinstitute.org/dff



Developmental Relationships

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives, including parenting adults. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives.

				
Express Care	Challenge Growth	Provide Support	Share Power	Expand Possibilities
Show me that I matter to you.	Push me to keep getting better.	Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.	Treat me with respect and give me a say.	Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be dependable. Be someone I can trust. • Listen. Really pay attention when we are together. • Believe in me. Make me feel known and valued. • Be warm. Show me you enjoy being with me. • Encourage. Praise me for my efforts and achievements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect my best. Expect me to live up to my potential. • Stretch. Push me to go further. • Hold me accountable. Insist that I take responsibility for my actions. • Reflect on failures. Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate. Guide me through hard situations and systems. • Empower. Build my confidence to take charge of my life. • Advocate. Stand up for me when I need it. • Set boundaries. Put in place limits that keep me on track. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect me. Take me seriously and treat me fairly. • Include me. Involve me in decisions that affect me. • Collaborate. Work with me to solve problems and reach goals. • Let me lead. Create opportunities for me to take action and lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire. Inspire me to see possibilities for my future. • Broaden horizons. Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places. • Connect. Introduce me to people who can help me grow.

NOTE: Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.

About the Sample

This study involved 671 U.S. parenting adults with children between the ages of 9 and 18 between April and June 2017. They were recruited through the online platform Amazon MTurk ($n= 551$) and through several community organizations that were piloting Search Institute’s family engagement program, *Keep Connected* ($n= 120$). The sample is diverse, but should not be considered nationally representative.

Some summary characteristics of the sample:

89% Birth or adoptive parent

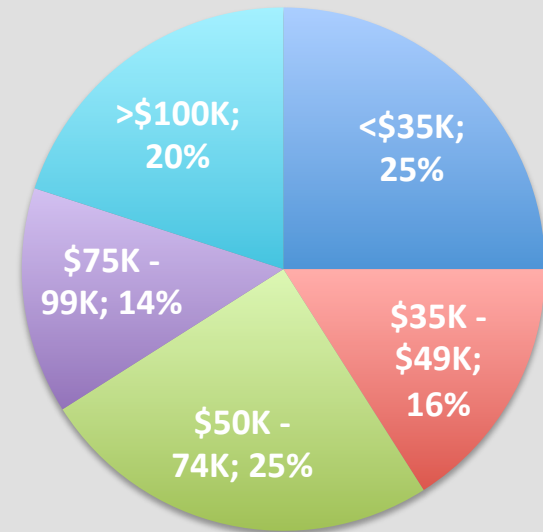
33% People of color

64% Female

67% Married/civil union

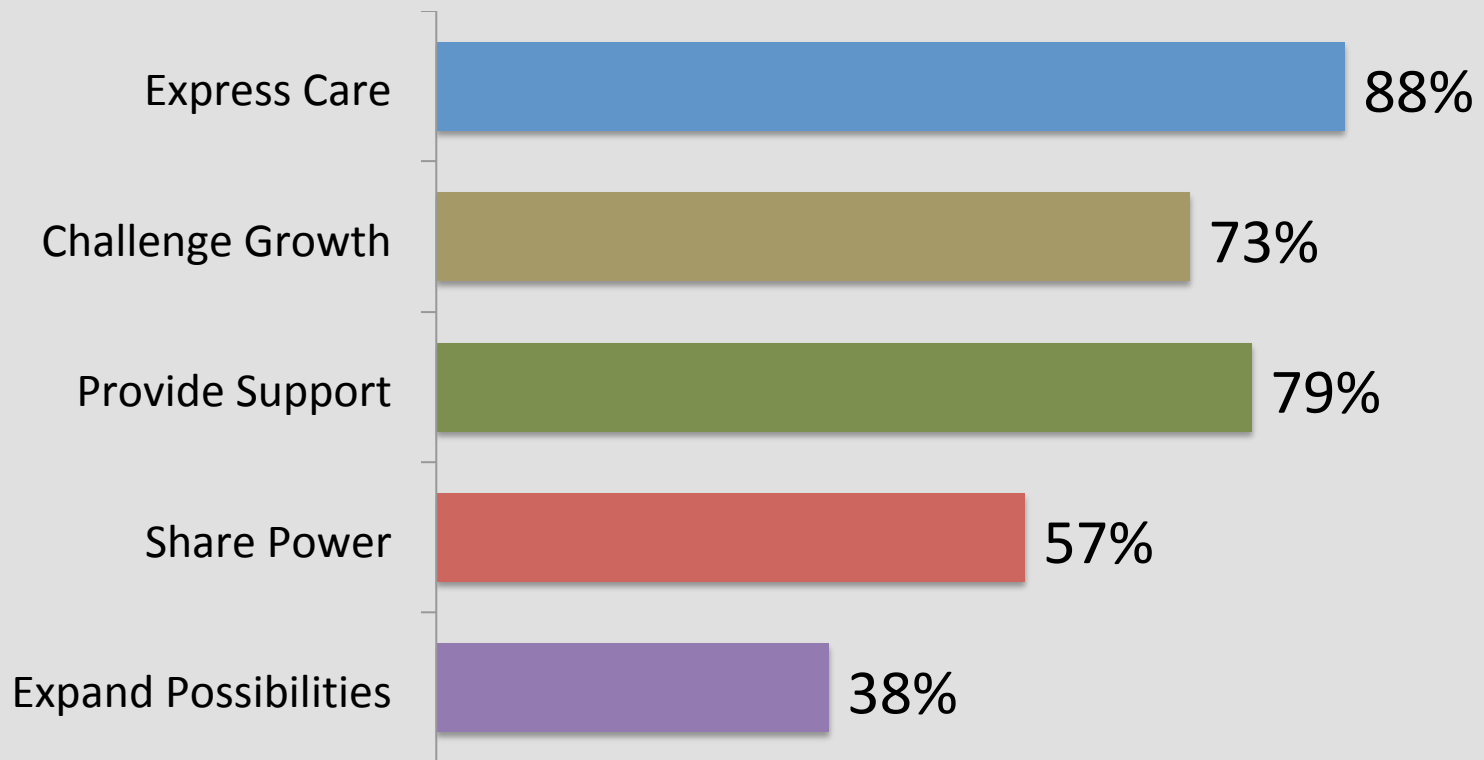
53% Less than college degree

Annual Family Income



Overall Findings

Consistent with the findings from the earlier study, *Don't Forget the Families*, the parenting adults in this sample were most likely to report strength in expressing care, challenging growth, and providing support. They are less likely to report that they share power (though a majority do) or expand possibilities.

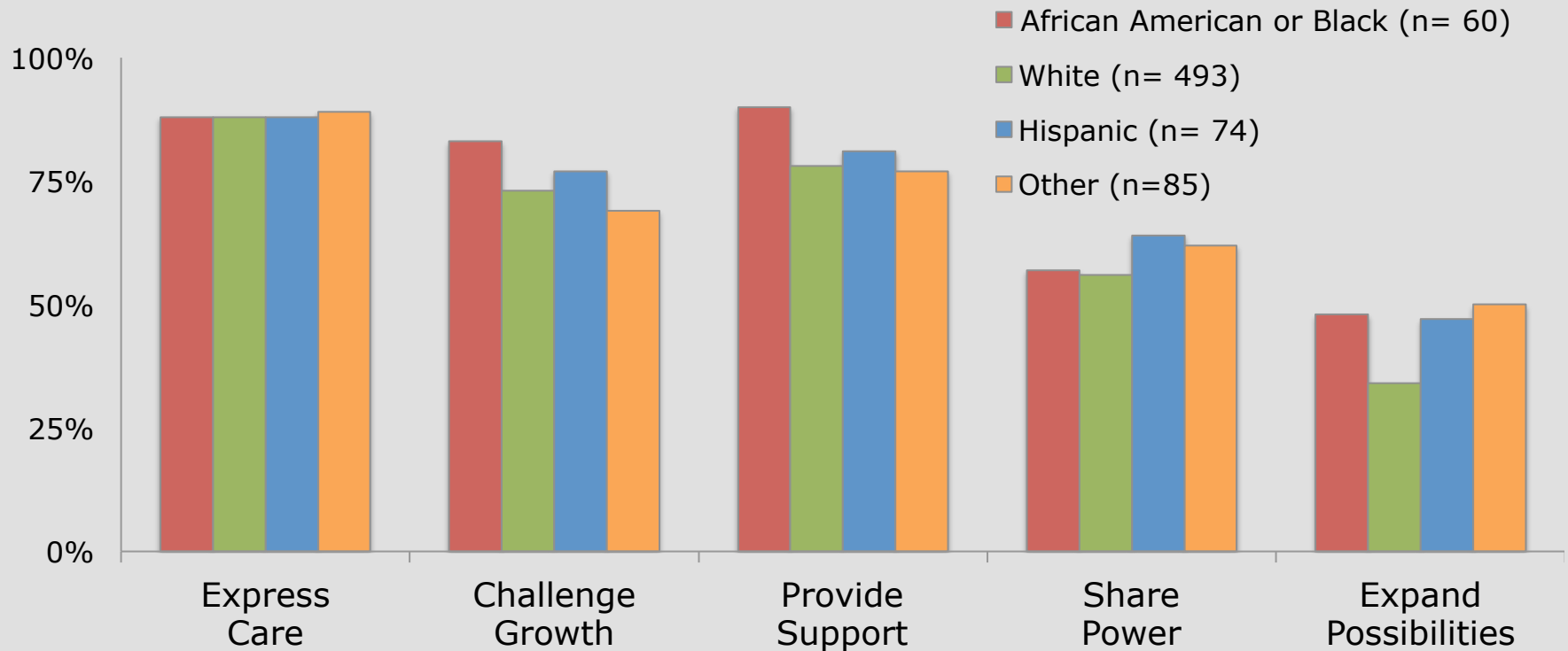


Percentages of parenting adults whose average responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each scale.

Similarities and Differences

Most groups of parenting adults reported similar patterns of relationships

Parenting adults from a wide range of backgrounds reported relatively consistent levels of developmental relationships.* There were no statistically significant differences in parenting adults' reports of developmental relationships across differences in the parenting adults' education level, immigrant status, marital status, and sense of financial strain. However, developmental relationships were slightly less common for white parents when compared to the other racial-ethnic groups in the sample.



* Percentages of parenting adults whose average responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each scale.

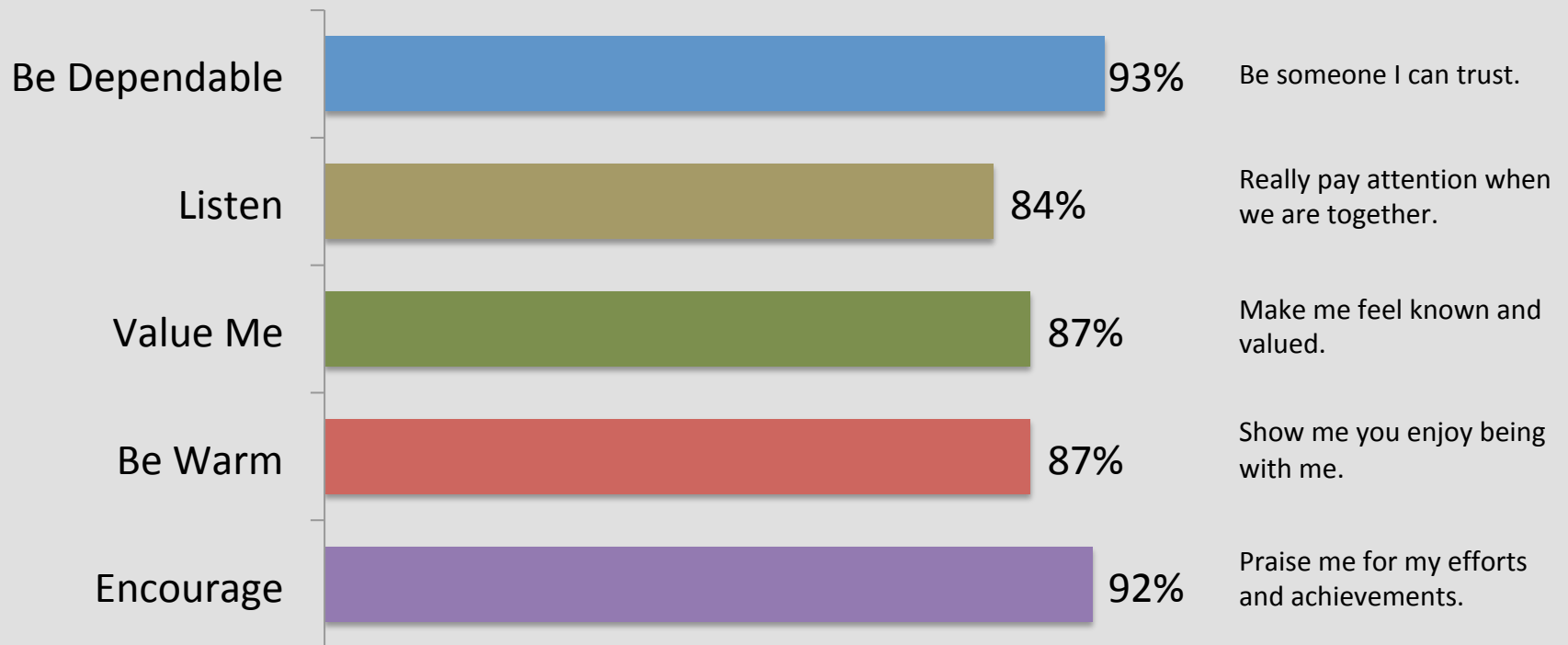
Express Care

Show me that I matter to you.

Expressing care is the strongest element of developmental relationships, according to these parenting adults. All five express care actions were reported consistently by more than four out of five parenting adults who participated in the survey, with more than 90% showing strength in two areas (being dependable and offering encouragement). This foundation of care is a vital and powerful starting point for tapping the strengths of families to address the challenges they face.

Specific Actions that Express Care*

Definitions



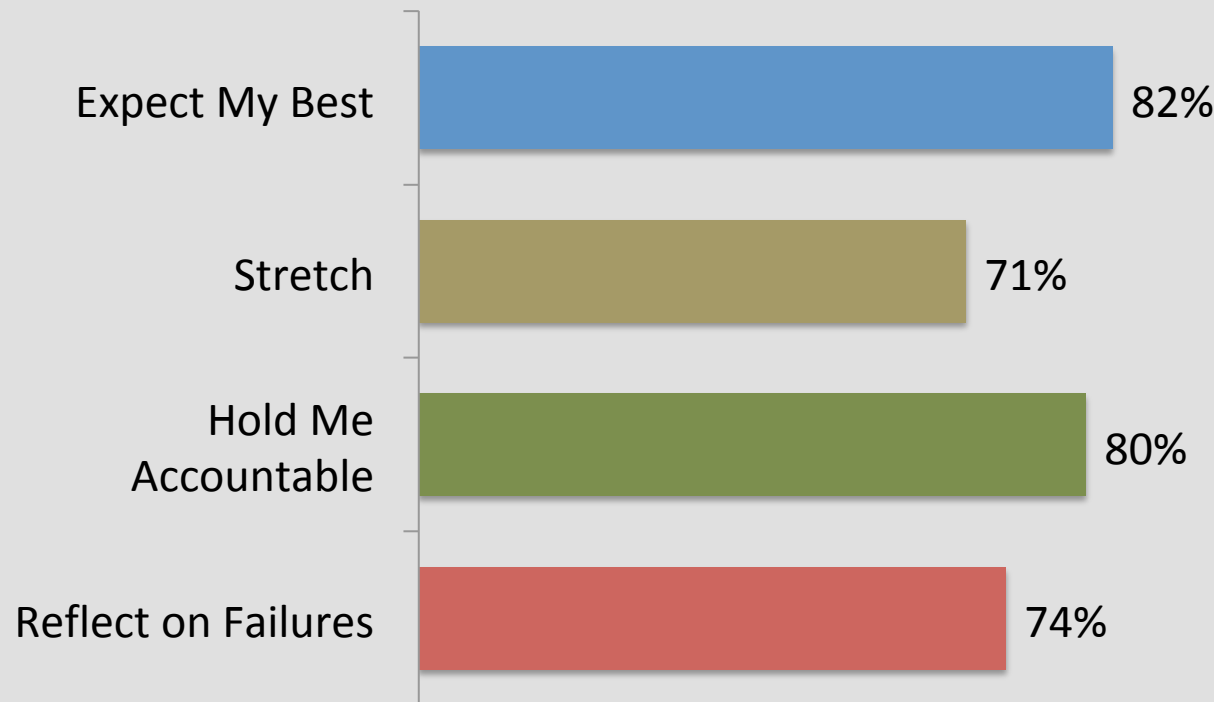
* Percentages of parenting adults whose responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each action in the Express Care element.

Challenge Growth

Push me to keep getting better.

Challenging growth focuses on the ways people seek to bring out the best in each other. Parenting adults play an important role in challenging growth, and most in this survey indicate strength in pushing their kids to keep getting better. This challenge is most effective when the relationship is also built on a foundation of care and when young people are being challenged to get better in areas where they have goals they are working toward.

Specific Actions that Challenge Growth*



Definitions

Expect me to live up to my potential.

Push me to go further.

Insist I take responsibility for my actions.

Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.

* Percentages of parenting adults whose responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each action in the Challenge Growth element.

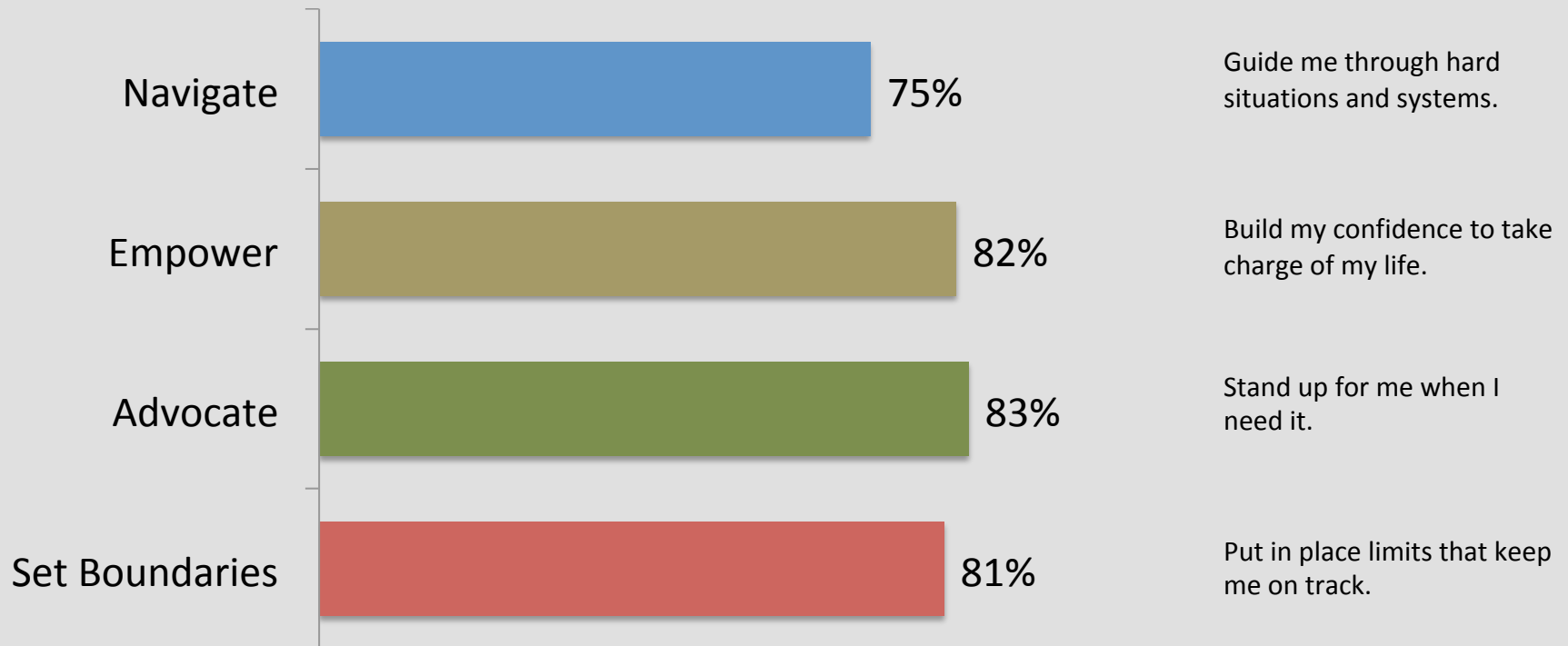
Provide Support

Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.

Each of us is more likely to complete tasks and achieve goals when someone is encouraging us and helping us navigate difficult situations and systems. On the one hand, we sometimes need to advocate for each other. On the other hand, we sometimes need to set boundaries and limits that help us stay on track. Many parents revealed a lot of strength in providing support, with at least three-fourths of survey respondents indicating strength in each of the four actions related to providing support.

Specific Actions that Provide Support*

Definitions



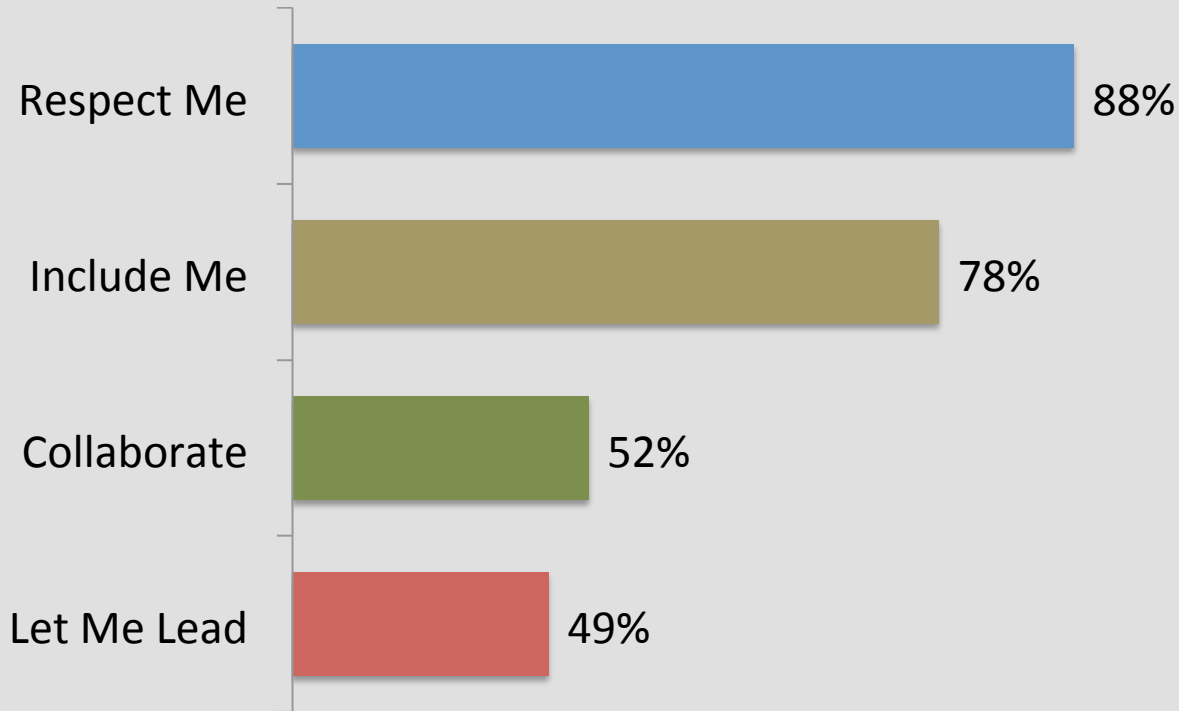
* Percentages of parenting adults whose responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each action in the Provide Support element.

Share Power

Treat me with respect and give me a say.

No element of the Developmental Relationships Framework generates more discussion than “share power.” It can be challenging to know when and how to share power, and the ways it is shared can vary considerably across cultures and contexts. Across these differences, giving children a voice and role in decision-making is vital for the development of self-regulation and other skills necessary to navigate choices and challenges on their own throughout life.

Specific Actions that Share Power*



Definitions

Take me seriously and treat me fairly.

Involve me in decisions that affect me.

Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.

Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.

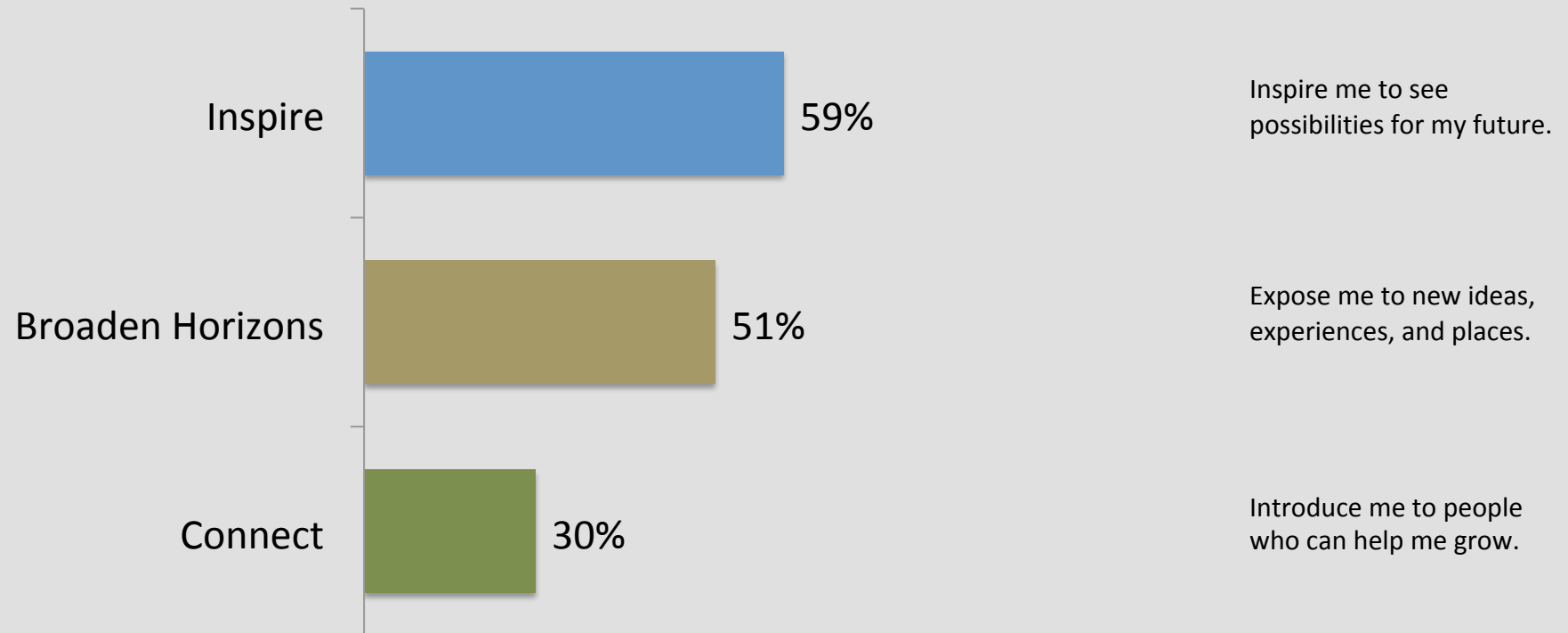
* Percentages of parenting adults whose responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each action in the Share Power element.

Expand Possibilities

Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.

Expanding possibilities is the element of developmental relationships that parenting adults are least likely to say they do consistently with their child or teenager. Although more than half indicate that they inspire their kids to see possibilities for the future, only about one-third consistently introduce their children with other trusted adults who can help them learn and grow.

Specific Actions that Expand Possibilities*



* Percentages of parenting adults whose responses yielded a score of 75% or higher (considered an optimal level) for each action in the Expand Possibilities element.

Children’s Role in the Relationship

Parents are most likely to see their children expressing care to them.

Not only do parenting adults influence and contribute to their child’s growth, but children influence their parents. The survey asked parents about some of the ways their children contribute to their relationship based on the five elements of the Developmental Relationships Framework. It is notable that parenting adults also see their child as most consistently “expressing care” and least consistently “expanding possibilities”—just as parents described in their relational actions with their children.

Percentages of parenting adults who agree or strongly agree with each statement.



Questions for Reflection and Action

Helping families explore and be more intentional in their relationships.

This survey adds to the growing research base supporting Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework. The findings can trigger dialogue and exploration among families (and those who seek to engage, support, and empower them) about ways they can be intentional, consistent, and responsive in how they nurture relationships that help children and teenagers thrive.

For Parenting Adults and Families

- Reflect on your own relationships with your children and teenagers. Which elements of developmental relationships are hardest and easiest for you to do on a day-to-day basis?
- How might your perceptions of your relationship differ from how your child sees it? When could you have a conversation to explore your perspectives together?
- What might you do to be more intentional in practicing an area of your relationship that you know is important but is harder for you to do?
- What elements seem to be particularly important for your child or teen to experience right now? How might you ensure that they experience this element—either in your relationship or in other trusted relationships?
- Who are some of the people you trust who can encourage and give you tips when you’re struggling to keep your relationship strong?

For People who Work with Parents and Families

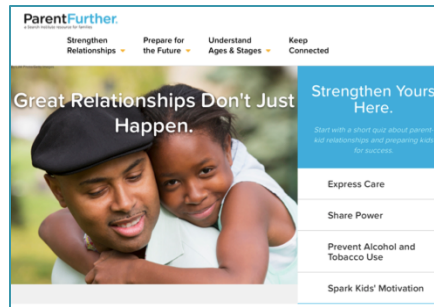
- Where do you see particular strengths in the families with whom you partner when you consider their current situations?
- What particular challenges do families in your community face that might affect their relationships? How might you be a resource to help them work through those challenges?
- What opportunities might you offer to families to explore the dimensions of their relationships together?
- How does the Developmental Relationships Framework invite you to think differently about your relationships with parenting adults and families? What aspects of the framework would you like to be more intentional about in your practice of working with families?

Resources for Strengthening Family Relationships



Keep Connected offers a seven-session workshop series for parents and their middle schoolers. Families explore the five essential elements of parent-youth relationships through a mix of learning and sharing activities.

www.searchinstitute.org/KeepConnected



ParentFurther.com is a free Search Institute resource that encourages families to strengthen relationships through self-quizzes, discussion starters, and self-guided activities based on the developmental relationships.

www.ParentFurther.com



Bring a Search Institute leader to your community to provide interactive professional development for family engagement staff or to introduce parents and others to strategies for building developmental relationships.

www.searchinstitute.org/keynotes-workshops



Relationships First is a free booklet that introduces the Developmental Relationships Framework, research on the power of relationships, and strategies for building relationships with and among young people.

www.searchinstitute.org/relationships-first



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