



THE AMERICAN  
**Family Assets**  
STUDY



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For more than 50 years, Search Institute® has been a leader and partner for organizations around the world in discovering what kids need to succeed. Our knowledge and resources help motivate and equip caring adults to create schools, communities, and families where young people thrive.



Based on surveys of more than three million kids, the 150 plus books we've published, and the work we've done with schools and youth-serving organizations in more than 60 countries, Search Institute can help you solve critical challenges in the lives of young people. Our 40 Developmental Assets are the most widely recognized and most frequently cited approach to positive youth development in North America, and serve as the foundation of our work.

# THE AMERICAN Family Assets STUDY

presents a compelling national portrait of America's families which **focuses on their strengths, hopes, and aspirations** and aims to help families become catalysts for change in the health and well-being of all children, families, and communities. This study includes the most comprehensive national survey of family assets ever conducted in the United States. The family-focused developmental assets measured in this study focus on the family relationships, interactions, opportunities, values, skills, and self-perceptions that position family members to thrive; not economic or tangible assets like jobs, houses, cars, bank accounts, or other materials possessions.

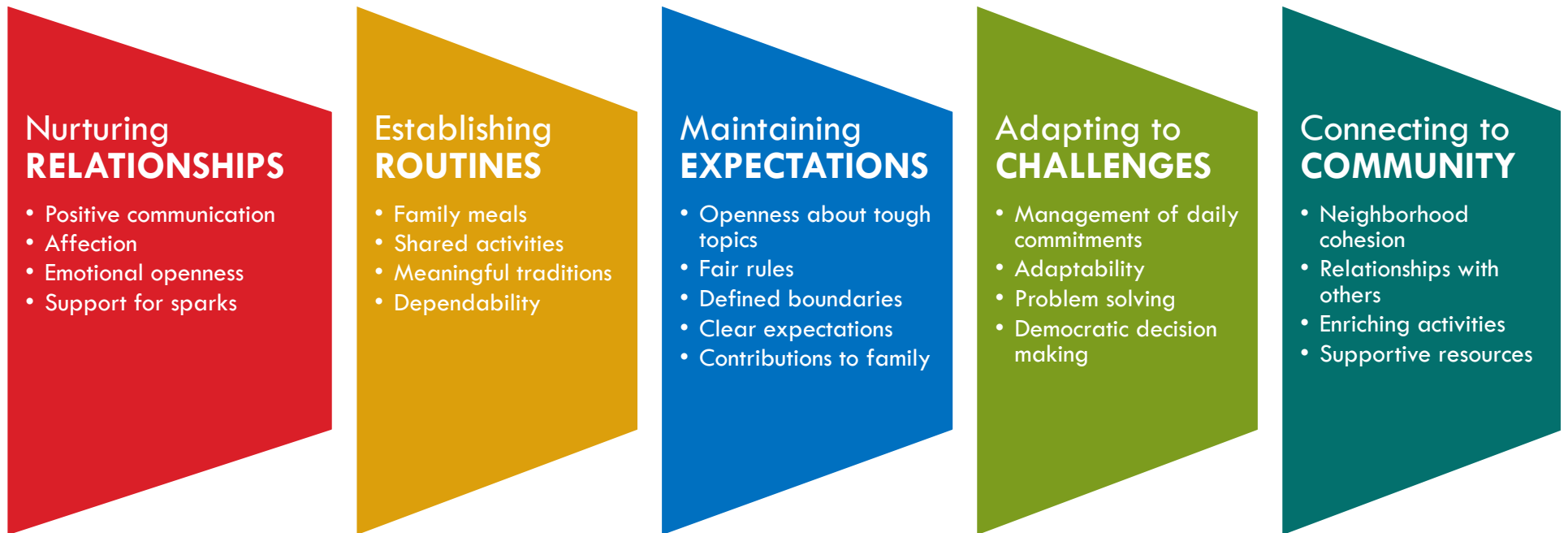
To date, most research has taken a narrow view of both families and well-being. The American Family Assets Study was intentionally designed to **give voice to the diversity of adults, youth, and experiences that make up the modern American family** and to **empirically demonstrate the ways adults and youth pull together** to support and bring out the best in one another.

## **Towards this end, this study:**

- defines and assesses **multiple assets** within a family.
- distinguishes good parenting from family assets by recognizing **young people as active agents in the development of family well-being.**
- acknowledges that young people are **parented not just by biological mothers and fathers** but also by grandparents; adoptive, foster, and step parents; legal guardians; and, other family members.
- includes the **perspectives of both young people and parenting adults** in the assessment of family assets.
- empirically **links family assets to measurable outcomes** for young people, parenting adults, and families.

Data for this study come from an online survey conducted in June 2011 among 1,511 parent adults and their 10- to 15-year old child (one parent-child pair per family). A parenting adult is an adult who, regardless of their biological relationship, assumes responsibility for a child. Participants were recruited to represent a diverse mix of genders, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Data were weighted, based on Census figures, to reflect the U.S. population of 10- to 15-year olds and their parents.

# The Family Assets Index was developed to capture the diversity of ways family members support one another through their day-to-day interactions.



The Index was informed by scientific research in the areas of family systems theory, resiliency, and adolescent development; and, listening sessions hosted with youth, adults, family professionals, and leaders in the family research and policy arenas.

The Index averages reports from one parenting adult and one 10- to 15-year old child from the same family on five categories of family assets. Within these 5 categories, there are 21 assets. The Index ranges from 0 to 100.

# How do American families fare on the Index?

# The average American family with a 10- to 15-year old scores 47 out of 100.

The Family Assets Index assesses how families “measure up” against the aspirational ideal we strive for in healthy, asset-rich families. Scores on the Index approximate a normal bell curve, such that the majority of families score in the middle 50th percent (see Figure 1). Families fit into four groups based on their Index score: Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent. As shown in Figure 2, only 11% of families score ‘Excellent’. The average score of 47 is on the high-end of ‘Fair’, but still equates to less than half of the aspired family assets. Thus, while all families have some assets, there is still room for growth.

Parenting adults’ and youths’ individual scores on the Index are highly correlated ( $r = .75$ ). This suggests that while there is some variability in the perceptions and experiences of family assets between family members, there is also significant congruence.

Figure 1. Family Assets Index distribution.

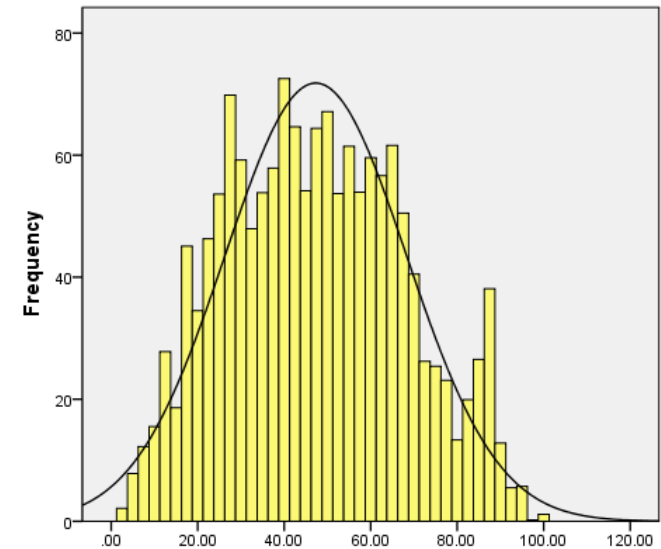
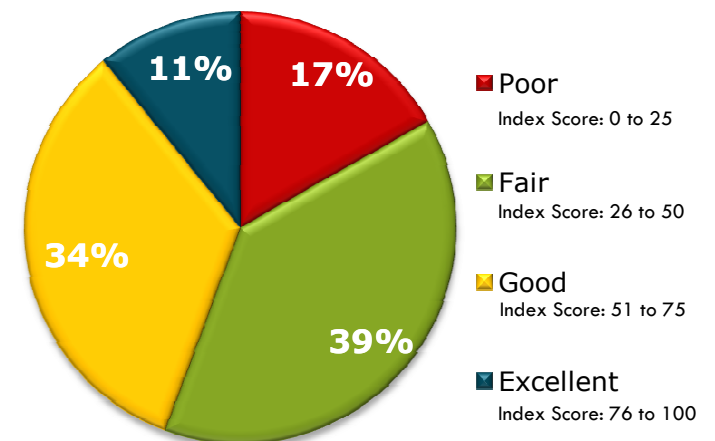
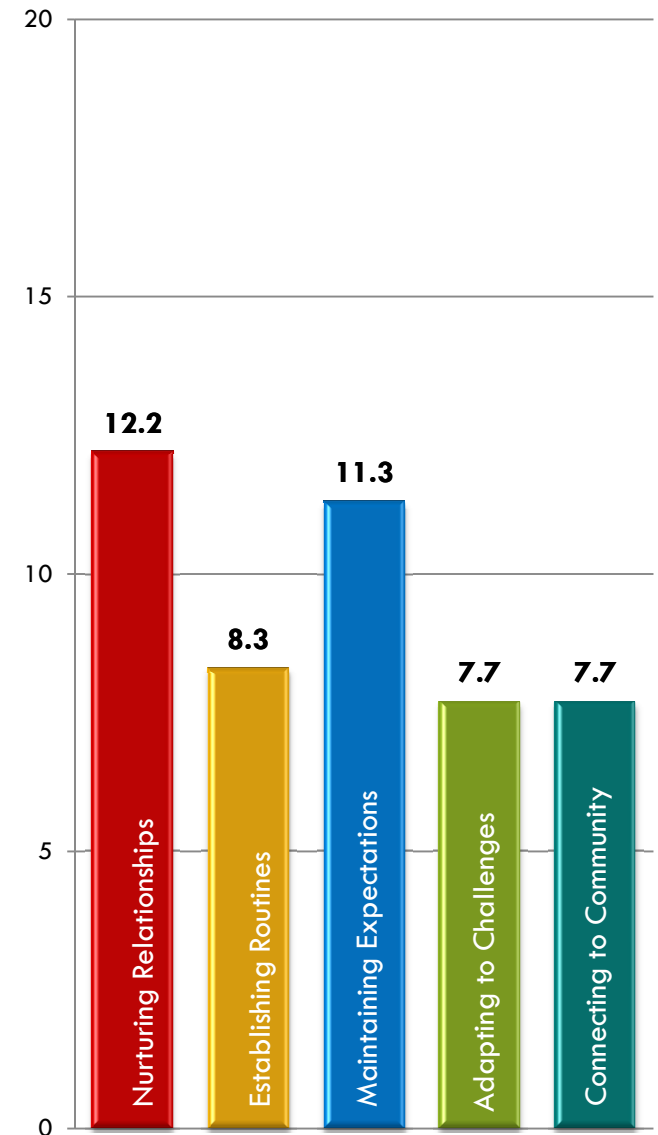


Figure 2. Family Assets Index, by percentile.



American families **have strong relationships, *but*** struggle to overcome challenges and connect with the community.

**Figure 3.** Family Assets Index, by category.

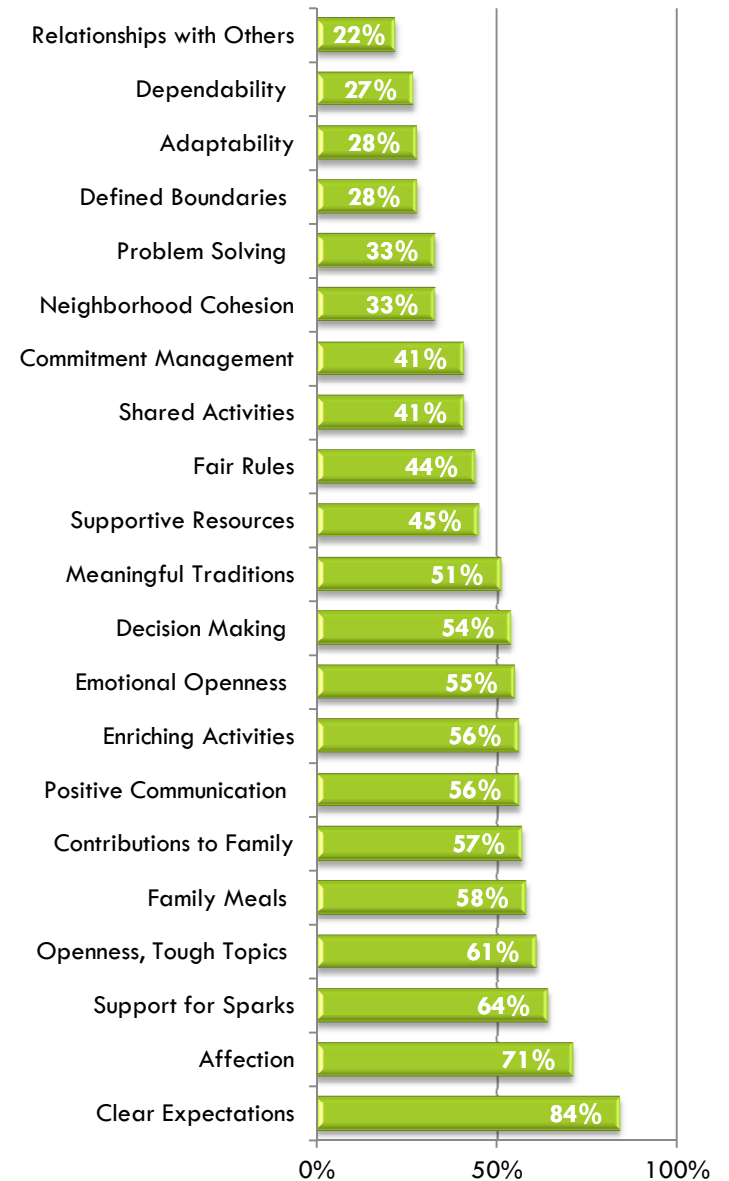


Note. The scoring range for each category is 0 to 20. When summed, these category create the Family Assets Index.

**The least common asset:** close relationships with others in the community.

**The most common asset:** clarity of parents' expectations for youth around issues like school performance and keeping adults informed about who they are with and what they are doing.

**Figure 4.** Percent of families meeting the aspirational criterion for each family asset.



Note. Three family assets were assessed only by youth: Shared Activities, Fair Rules, and Family Meals.



# A closer look at parenting adult and youth **data on specific family assets reveals:**

**76%**

Of parenting adults feel comfortable discussing topics like sex, bullying, religion, substance use, and money with their children, compared to 45% of 10- to 15-year olds.

**MANAGING  
COMMITMENTS**

Parenting adults and youth struggle (only about 40% met the criterion) to navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work.

**1 in 4**

Parenting adults say they know how their youth will act from one day to the next. About the same ratio [28%] holds for youths' reports of their parents.

**1/2**

Of parenting adults say the 10- to 15-year old in their life supports their talents and interests by asking questions, attending performances, and helping out at home.

**19%**

Gap between parenting adults' and youths' perceptions that all family members have a say in important decisions.

**YOUTH**

23% of whom report feeling *close* or *very close* to their peers and the other adults in their school and neighborhood.

**Are there demographic  
differences in family assets?**

The number of assets a family has does **NOT** differ significantly by:

- Parent education
- Household income
- 1 vs. 2 parenting adults in the home
- Immigration status
- Parenting adults' sexual orientation
- Relationship to child
- Gender

# Black and Hispanic families have more assets than Whites, Asians, and families of other races/ethnicities.

Ethnically and racially diverse families draw from different assets. For example, Black families score higher on 'Connecting to Community' while Hispanic families score higher on 'Establishing Routines'. These findings are consistent with previous research which shows Black and African American families value community and are well connected with neighborhood social institutions. Likewise, studies of Hispanic family values suggest deep cultural roots that prioritize tradition, familial obligation, and extended family.

Possible	1	0	0
Average	4	7	
Blacks	5	0	
Hispanics	5	0	
Whites/Others	4	6	
Asians	4	4	

# Families living in **urban communities** have more assets than those in suburban and rural communities.

Analysis of the Index at the category-level reveals that families living in medium- and large-sized cities score higher than those living in smaller communities on **all five** areas of assets: nurturing relationships, establishing routines, maintaining expectations, adapting to challenges, and connecting to community.

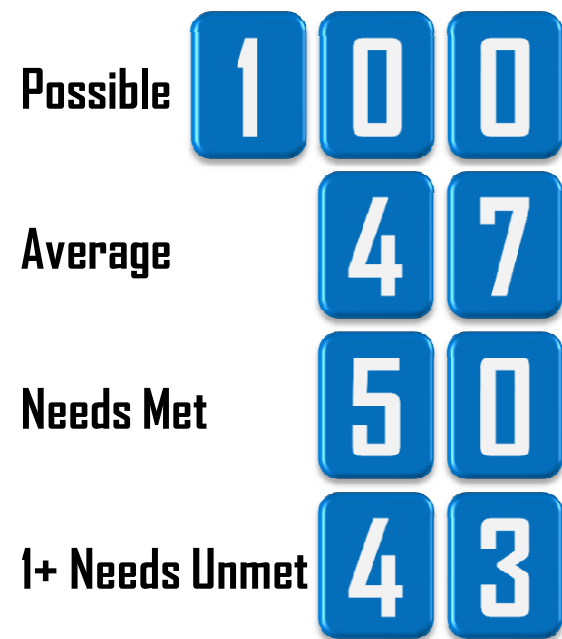


Note. Differences based on urbanicity hold even when the effect of race/ethnicity is controlled.

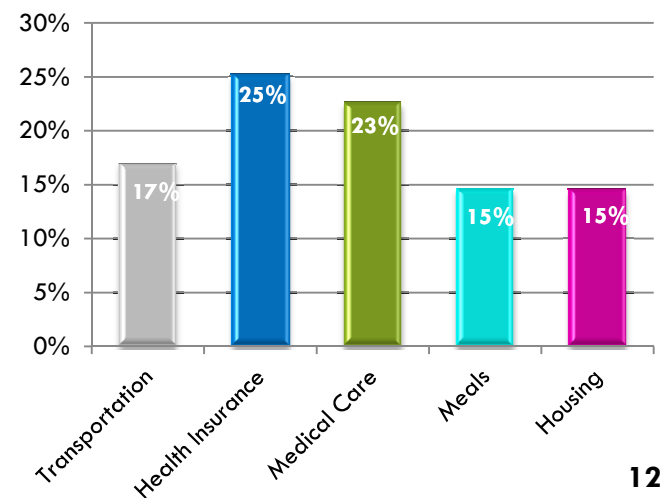
When families have **basic needs that are unmet**, they report **fewer** assets.

We asked parents whether they had affordable access to: (a) dependable transportation, (b) adequate health insurance, (c) adequate medical care, (d) healthy, nutritious meals, and (e) decent housing in a safe neighborhood. About 40% of families reported that they did NOT have affordable access to one or more of these resources. The greatest needs were in the areas of health insurance and medical care (see Figure 5).

Families with unmet needs score significantly lower than those whose needs are met on 'Establishing Routines' and 'Connecting to Community'.



**Figure 5.** Percent of families who do **NOT** have affordable access to each of the following resources.



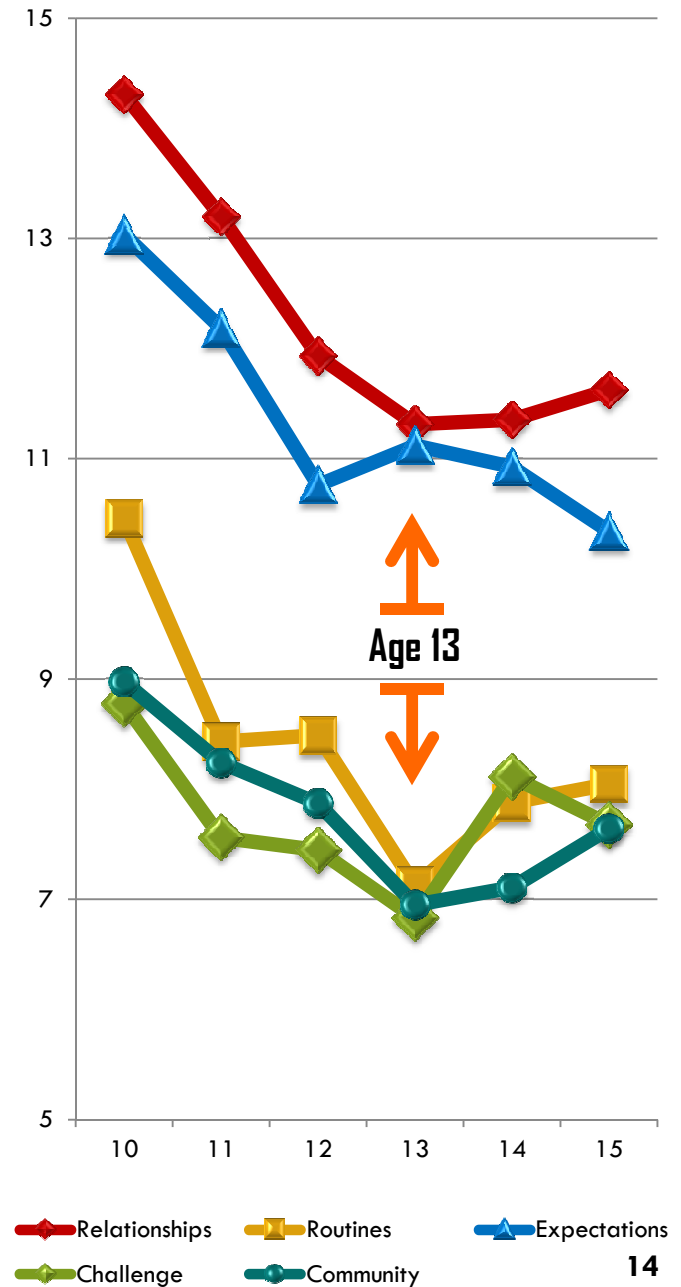
**Do family assets vary with  
the age of the child?**

# Scores on the overall Family Assets Index **decrease in early adolescence** (ages 10 to 13) and then **rebound in middle adolescence** (ages 13 to 15).

This curvilinear pattern holds for all five of the Family Asset categories *except* 'Maintaining Expectations' where the decrease and corresponding rebound occurs a year earlier. The same pattern holds true for parenting adults and 10- to 15-year olds.

The most marked drops occur in 'Establishing Routines' and 'Nurturing Relationships'. These findings align with normal developmental changes during this period as adolescents begin to spend more time away from parents, prioritize time and emotional openness with friends, and experience more emotional volatility than they did as children.

Figure 6. Age pattern.

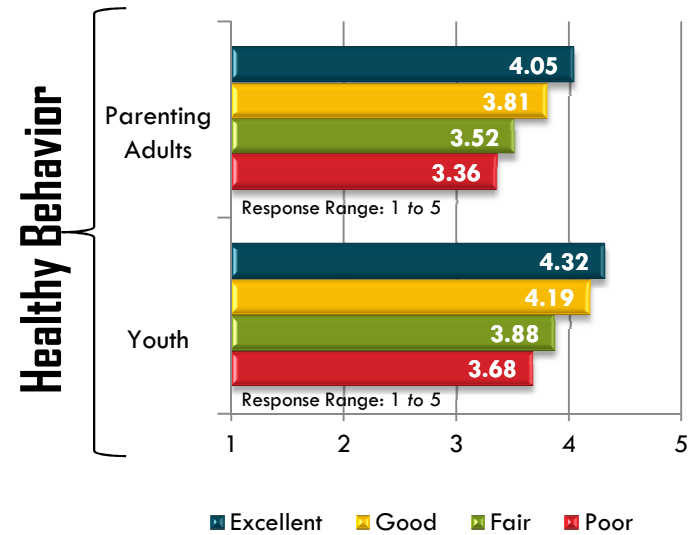




# How do family assets relate to outcomes for parenting adults and youth?

The more assets a family has the more likely they are to **engage in healthy behaviors** like maintaining a balanced diet and getting adequate amounts of sleep, exercise, and "down time."

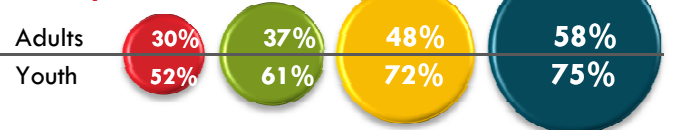
Figure 7. Healthy behaviors, by level of family assets.



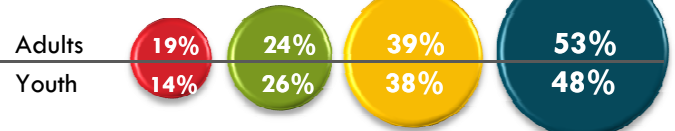
For example:

Percent, by group, of youth and parenting adults who engage in each behavior at least 6 days in the typical week.

Sleep 6+ hours



Eat a balanced diet



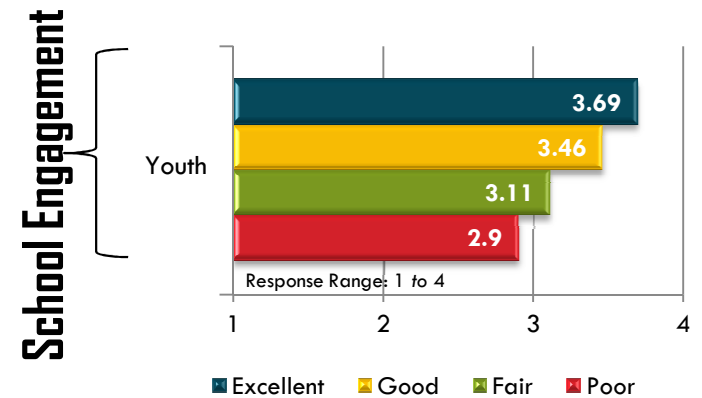
Exercise 30+ minutes



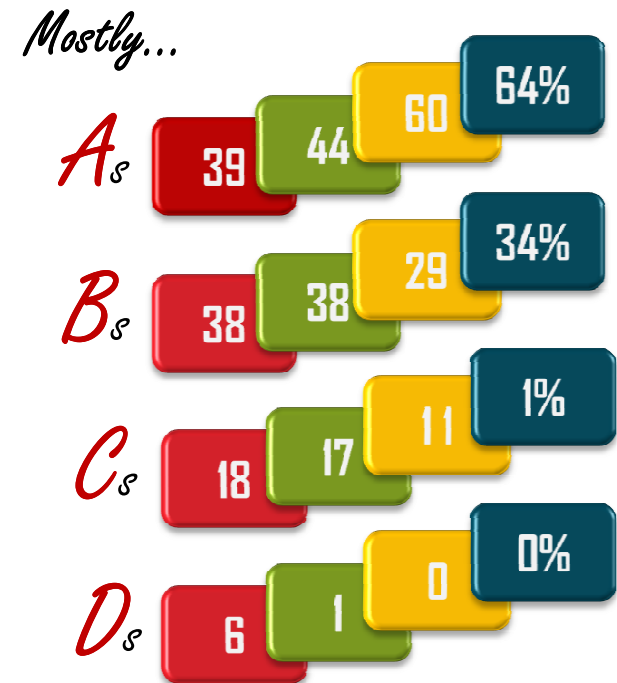
# Family assets are related to youths' academic achievement.

Families with more assets are more likely to have children who are actively engaged in school and who earn higher grades.

Figure 8. School engagement, by level of family assets.



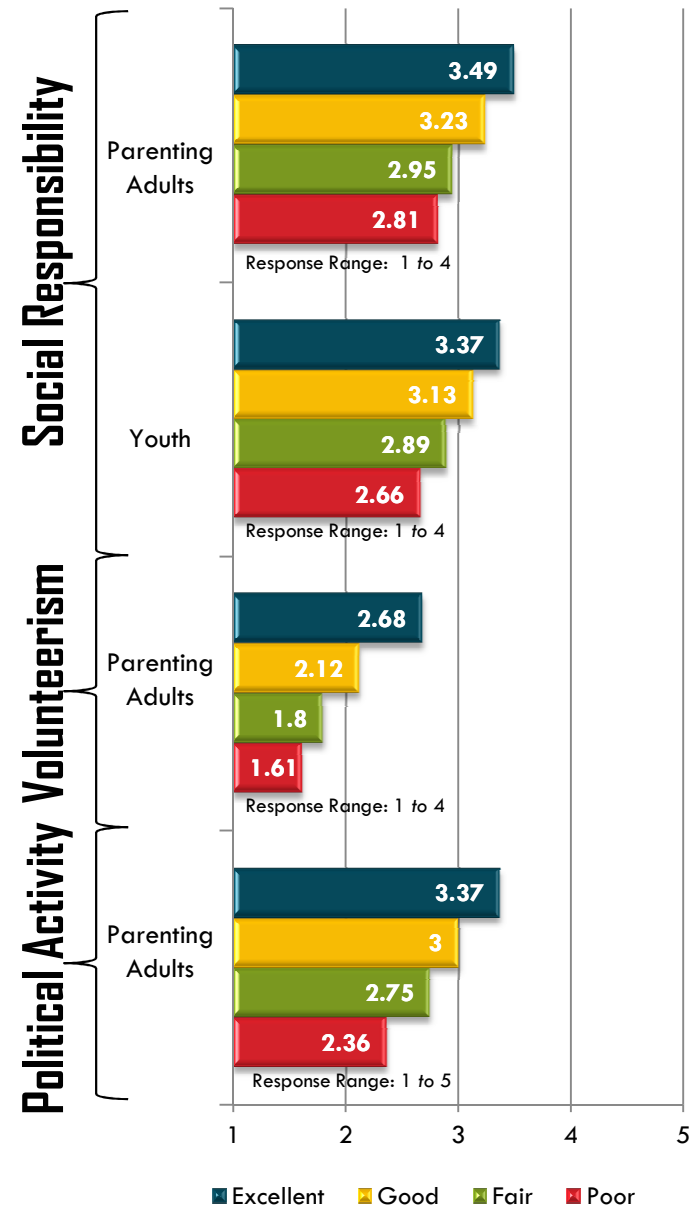
Academic grades, by level of family assets.



Families with more assets are more likely to:

- Act in **socially responsible ways** like taking action when they see others being treated unfairly.
- spend time together **serving their communities.**
- participate in **political activities.**

Figure 9. Civic outcomes, by level of family assets.





# THE AMERICAN Family Assets STUDY

For more information about the study, visit:

[www.search-institute.org/familyassets](http://www.search-institute.org/familyassets)

For practical strategies for strengthening families and positive parenting, visit:

[www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets](http://www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets)

