

Family Life Project Knox County School Report

Section 1

In May 2001, the National Institute of Mental Health funded The Family Life Project. This is a five-year study of how family life affects children's transition from childhood into adolescence. Data collection began in the fall of 2001 with 6th grade students attending school in Knox County, Tennessee. Students in twelve middle schools (all except Carter and West Valley) participated this year by completing a questionnaire during school. Sixth grade homeroom teachers solicited parental consent and all but four teachers in the twelve schools participated. About 60% of all 6th grade students in the participating schools received permission to complete the school survey. The questionnaire took most students about 50 minutes to complete and then they were treated to a pizza party. Students completed the survey in the cafeteria and several staff members from The Family Life Project were present to answer questions and help those who had difficulty reading questions.

This report contains information provided by 1,717 students. There are 904 girls (52.6%) and 813 boys (47.4%). With regard to race, 1398 (81%) of the students identify themselves as white, 176 (10%) as African American, 27 (2%) as Asian American, 26 (2%) as Hispanic, 9 as Indian (< 1%), and 57 as multiracial (3%). This sample of students is representative of Knox County residents in terms of race.

Although some children had difficulties during the school survey answering the questions about parental education, making us a bit suspect of children's ability to report accurately their parent's level of education, their reports provide data that are very similar to Census data reported for Knox County. Youth report that 72% of their fathers graduated high school, as did 73.4% of their mothers (Knox County estimate in 1990 was 74.6%).

The majority of students live with both parents (60%). Another 14% live only with mother and 1.3% only with father. About 9% live some of the time with each parent. Almost 11% live with their mother and stepfather and 1.9% with their father and stepmother. This sample is representative of the U.S. population in terms of the proportion of households that include married parents (76% in this sample and 77% in the 2000 U.S.).

This report has three sections. In the first section, we provide information on all the participating students in the county. In the second section, we provide information about the students in your school. In the third section, we provide a listing of the specific questions we asked students. The material in this last section can be used as reference material, providing information about the specific meaning of our indicators of youth difficulties and family life.

Youth Adjustment Difficulties

We examine adjustment difficulties in four areas:

- Externalizing problem behaviors that include aggression and delinquency
- Internalizing problem behaviors that include anxiety/depression, somatic complaints, and withdrawal
- Attention problems that include trouble concentrating and poor school work
- Social problems that include not being liked by other youth and/or having trouble getting along with others

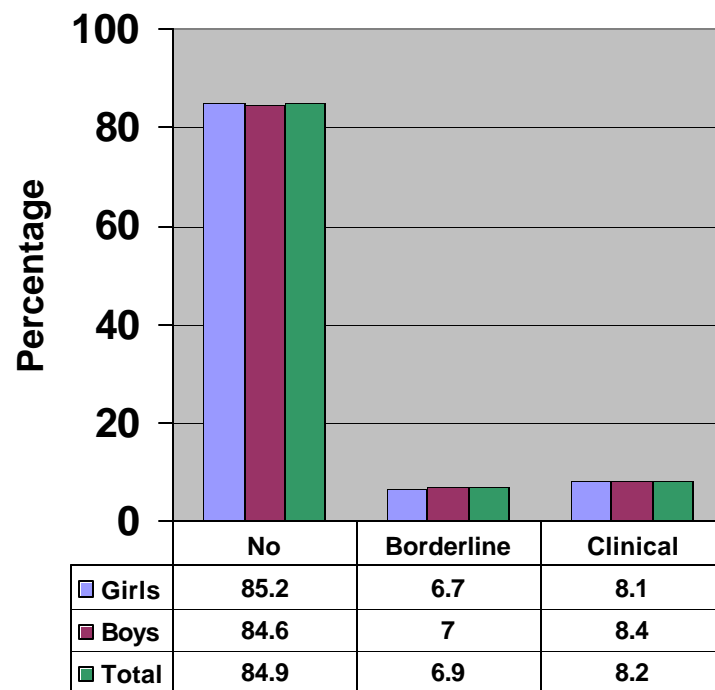
An asterisk by an indicator in any given graph means that boys and girls differ on the indicator; the absence of an asterisk means that boys and girls were similar on that indicator. Additional information on academic performance will be presented in subsequent reports when we have added teacher reports of grades and 6th grade TCAP scores.

In Figure 1, we show the percent of students in the non-problem category of externalizing problem behaviors, the borderline problem category, and the clinical-level of difficulty (i.e., aggression and delinquency). 15% of the students are either borderline or clinical on externalizing problem behavior as measured by the Achenbach Youth Self-Report (YSR). The most frequently endorsed items are “I argue a lot,” “I talk too much,” “My moods or feelings change suddenly,” and “I brag.”

In Figure 2, we show the percent of students in the nonproblem category of internalizing problem behaviors, the borderline problem category, and the clinical-level of difficulty (i.e., depression, anxiety, withdrawal, somatic complaints). 20% of the students are either borderline or clinical on internalizing problems as measured by the YSR. The most frequently endorsed items are “I am secretive or keep things to myself,” “I am shy,” headaches without a know medical cause, and “I am self-conscious or easily embarrassed.” Preadolescent boys have higher internalizing problem behaviors than do the girls.

Information on the proportion of students who have attention problems is shown in Figure 3. 9% of the students are either borderline or clinical on attention problems as measured by the YSR. The most frequently endorsed items are “I daydream a lot,” “I act without stopping to think,” and “I have trouble sitting still.”

Figure 1. Externalizing Problems



We provide information on four aspects of youth's social relationships (see Figure 4). About a third of the students lacked social initiative in the classroom – they don't talk with teachers in a friendly manner, don't participate in class discussions, and don't ask clarification questions. About 20% believe they are disliked by their peers and about 11% are friends with youth who engage in deviant behaviors. 12% of the students are either borderline or clinical on social problems as measured by the YSR. The most frequently endorsed YSR items are "I keep from getting involved with others," "I get teased a lot," and "I'm too dependent on adults." The asterisks by the various indicators of social problems indicate that boys have more difficulties than do girls.

Figure 2. Internalizing Problems

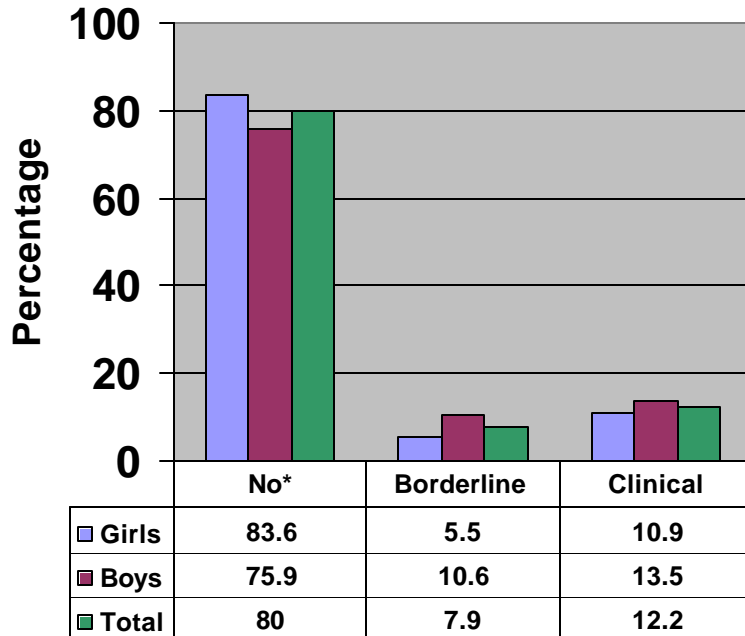


Figure 3. Attention Problems

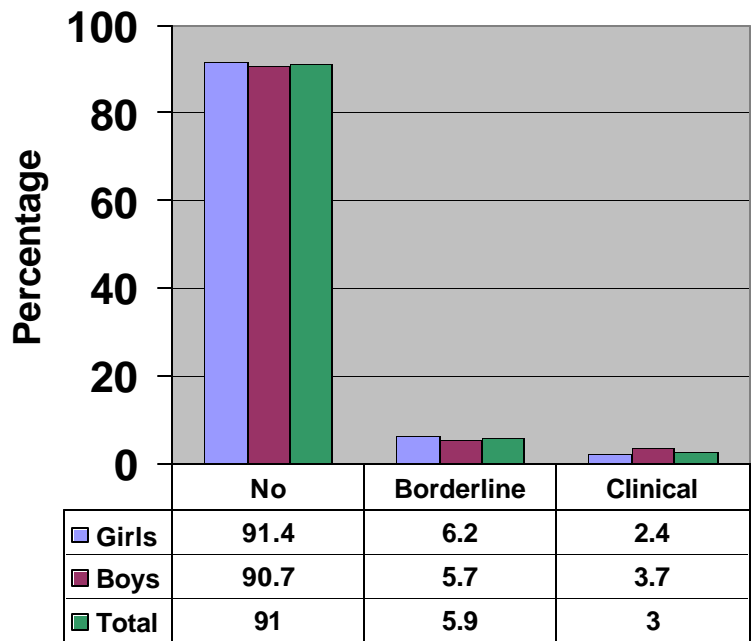
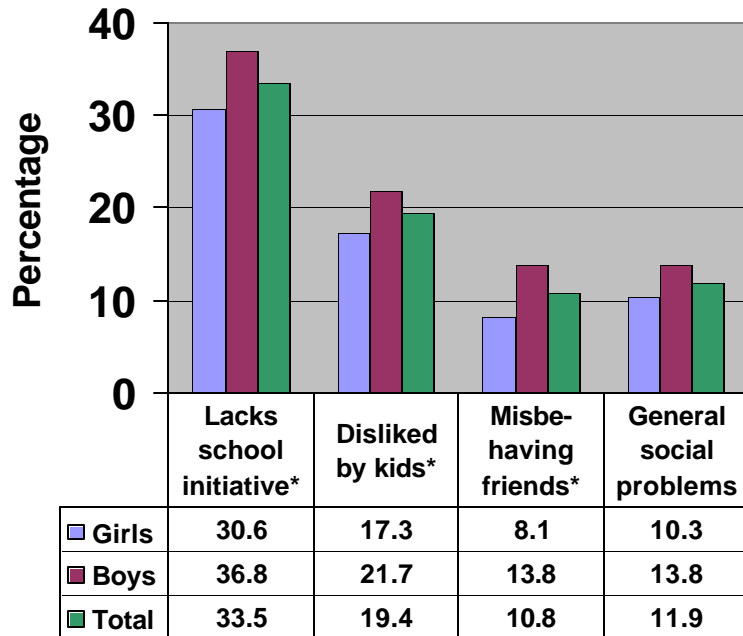


Figure 4. Social Problems



Family Life

We examine stress and potential risk for adjustment difficulties in several areas of family life: family stress, marital or coparenting difficulties (the term coparenting applies to unmarried or formerly married adults who have children together), youth appraisals of interparental conflict, and parenting difficulties. We focus on potential risks because teachers and school officials often are concerned about how a student's family life might jeopardize their potential to succeed and do well in school. (This is in contrast to an equally important resiliency perspective in which the focus is on how youth can overcome the risks they face.)

There are two indicators of family risk: hostile family relationships and economic difficulties. About 31% of the students reported tenseness, expressed anger, and hostility in their families (see Figure 5). About 11% reported economic distress, as measured by believing they were less well off than other kids they know.

There are five indicators of potential risk for students due to marital disruption or hostile marital or coparenting interactions: doesn't live with both birth/adopted parents, frequent disagreements between parents, frequent hostile interactions when parents do disagree, intense fights between parents, and the youth feeling caught in the middle of parent's conflicts (see Figure 6). 40% of the students don't live with both parents. About 19% reported that their parents frequently disagree about issues of family life such as discipline, children's behavior, and money. About 20% of the youth also report that parents are hostile during their disagreements (e.g., yell, insult). About 15% of the youth think their parent's fights are intense and 21% feel caught in the middle when their parents' fight or disagree.

Because youth socially construct their experiences in close relationships, we also examine their thoughts and feelings with regards to their parent's fights. About 39% of the youth are frightened and worried by the fighting and about 23% blame themselves in one way or another for the conflict (see Figure 7).

In Figures 8 and 9, we present information on parenting difficulties and conflicted parent-child relationships. Because some of the youth in this study don't see their fathers much, all of the indicators of parenting except for one focus only on mothers. In Figure 8, we present information on conflict and hostility. 10% of the youth report frequent arguments between themselves and their parents. 9% report that their mother expresses a lot of hostility toward them. Using a lower threshold to indicate difficulty, 25% of the youth indicate their mother has been aggressive toward them within the past year. This was reported for 18% of the fathers. In Figure 9, we provide information about youth's perceptions of mother's psychological intrusion, inconsistency, monitoring, and acceptance/care. 36% of the youth indicate that their mother intrudes on their sense of self (e.g., tries to change thoughts and feelings) and 35% report she is inconsistent in terms of rule enforcement and her moods. About 21% of the mothers do not seem to have enough knowledge about the youth's whereabouts and activities and about 25% of the youth feel some rejection by their mothers (more specifically, low acceptance).

Figure 5. Family Stress

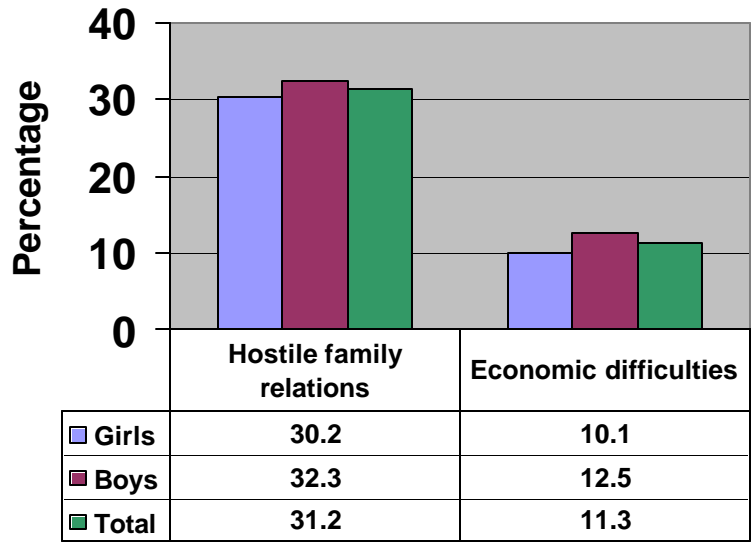


Figure 6. Marital or Coparenting Difficulties

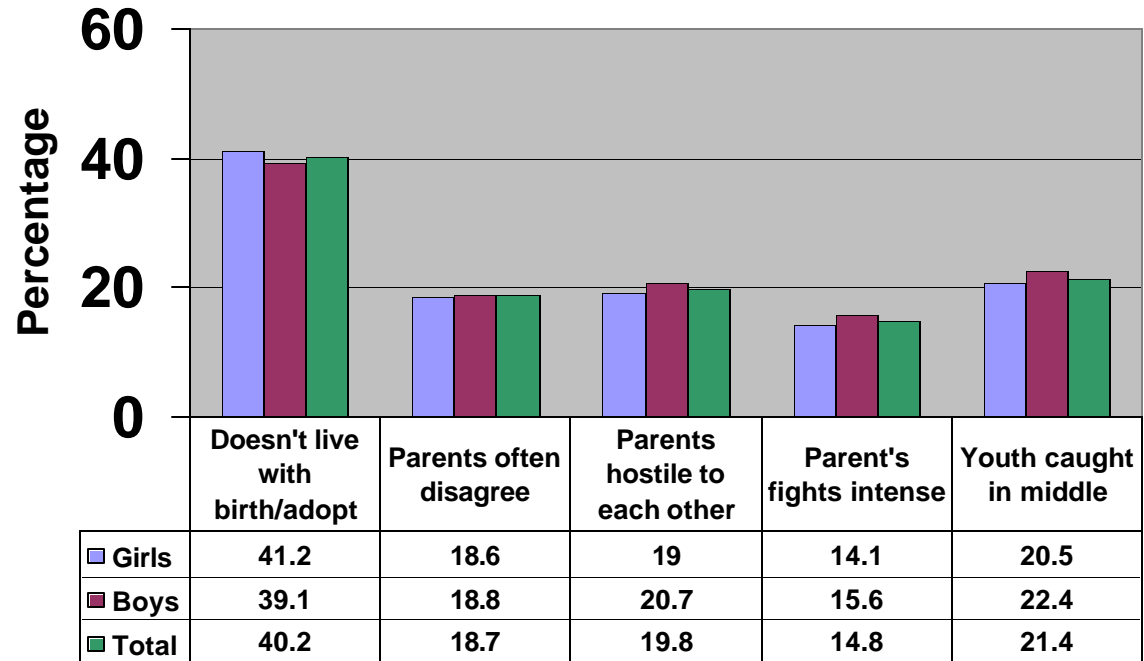


Figure 7. Youth Appraisals of Interparental Conflict

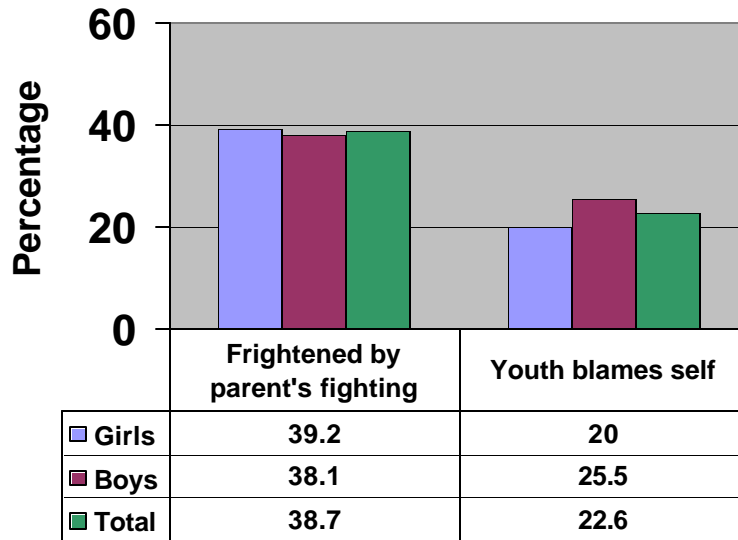


Figure 8. Parenting Difficulties

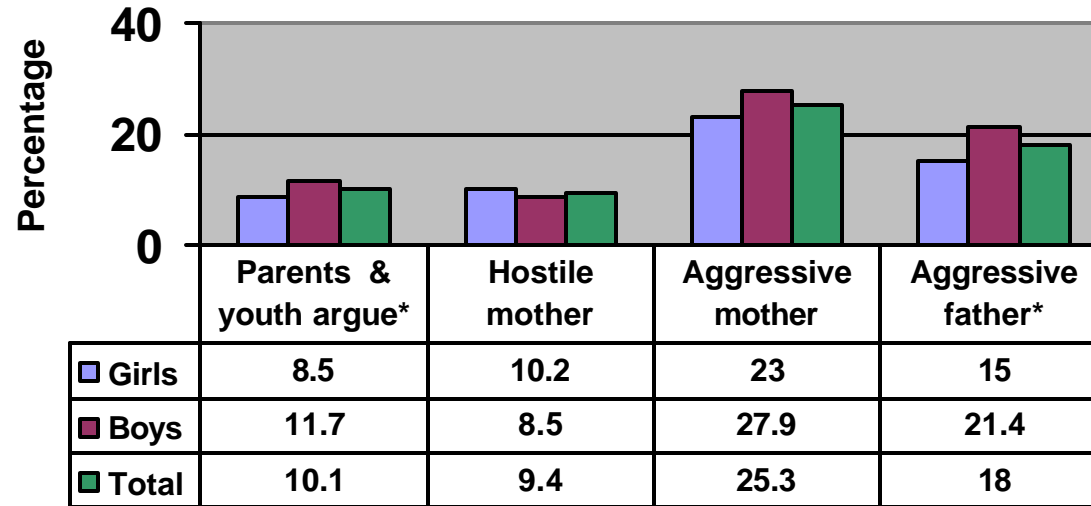
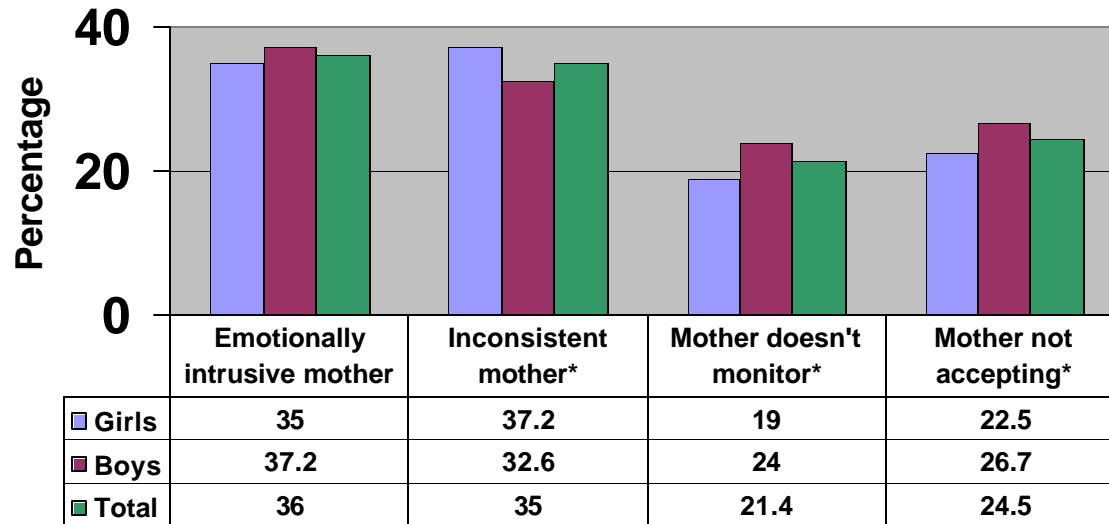


Figure 9. Parenting Difficulties



How Family Life Affects Youth Adjustment Difficulties

Youth Externalizing Problem Behavior

These acting-out adjustment difficulties are associated with youth reports of being the reason that parents fight (i.e., self-blame); marital or coparenting hostility (including feeling caught in the middle of parent's fights); parenting difficulties including parent-child conflict, mother hostility, inconsistency, and limited monitoring; and general family hostility. Marital and parenting factors equally influence students' externalizing problem behaviors. Factors we examined but that are not associated uniquely with externalizing problem behaviors are: family economic difficulties, parent's marital status, youth feeling frightened when parents fight, mother's intrusiveness, and mother's non-acceptance.

Youth Internalizing Problem Behaviors

The internalizing difficulties are associated with youth reports of being the reason that parents fight; parenting difficulties including parent-child conflict, mother hostility, intrusiveness, inconsistency, and nonacceptance; youth feeling frightened when parents fight; marital or coparenting hostility (particularly feeling caught in the middle); general family hostility; and family economic adequacy. Factors we examined but that are not associated uniquely with internalizing problem behaviors are: parent's marital status, interparental overt hostility, and mother's monitoring.

Youth Attention Problems

Attention problems are associated with parenting difficulties including parent-child conflict, maternal hostility, and inconsistency; youth reports of being the reason that parents fight; marital or coparenting hostility; general family hostility, and economic adequacy. Compared with marital hostility, parenting difficulties have a greater influence on attention problems. Factors we examined but that are not uniquely associated with youth attention problems are: parent's marital status, youth feeling frightened when parents fight, mother's intrusiveness, monitoring, and non-acceptance.

Youth Social Problems

Social problems are associated with parenting difficulties including hostility, intrusiveness, inconsistency, and non-acceptance; youth reports of being the reason that parents fight; and marital or coparenting hostility. Factors we examined but are not uniquely associated with youth social problems are: parent's marital status, economic well-being, youth feeling frightened by parent's fights, general family hostility, parent-child conflict, and mother's monitoring.

Youth academic difficulties will be examined in a subsequent report after we receive the year-end grades and standardized test scores.. If you have any questions or comments about the information in this report, please contact Dr. Cheryl Buehler at 974-2423 or 974-8308 (cbuehler@utk.edu). Also, please let us know if you would like for us to provide you with any additional information or analyses.

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Section 2

Description of measures Used in Section 1

Externalizing Problem Behavior

I argue a lot.
I brag.
I am mean to others.
I try to get a lot of attention.
I destroy my own things.
I destroy things belonging to others.
I disobey at school.
I don't feel guilty after doing something I shouldn't.
I am jealous of others.
I get in many fights.
I hang around with kids who get in trouble.
I lie or cheat.
I physically attack people.
I would rather be with older kids than with kids my own age.
I run away from home.
I scream a lot.
I set fires.
I show off or clown.
I steal at home.
I steal from places other than home.
I am stubborn.
My moods or feelings change suddenly.
I swear or use dirty language.
I talk too much.
I tease others a lot.
I have a hot temper.
I threaten to hurt people.
I cut classes or skip school.
I am louder than other kids.
I use alcohol or drugs for nonmedical purposes.

(0=Not True; 1=Somewhat or Sometimes True; 2=Very True or Often True)

Internalizing Problem Behavior

- I feel lonely.
- I cry a lot.
- I deliberately try to hurt or kill myself.
- I am afraid I might think or do something bad.
- I feel that I have to be perfect.
- I feel that no one loves me.
- I feel that others are out to get me.
- I feel worthless or inferior.
- I would rather be alone than with others.
- I am nervous or tense.
- I am too fearful or anxious.
- I feel dizzy.
- I feel too guilty.
- Physical problems without known medical cause:
 - a. Aches or pains (not headaches)
 - b. Headaches
 - c. Nausea, feel sick
 - d. Problems with eyes
 - e. Rashes or other skin problems
 - f. Stomachaches or cramps
 - g. Vomiting, throwing up
- I refuse to talk.
- I am secretive or keep things to myself.
- I am self-conscious or easily embarrassed.
- I am shy.
- I am suspicious.
- I think about killing myself.
- I don't have much energy.
- I am unhappy, sad, or depressed.
- I keep from getting involved with others.
- I worry a lot.

(0=Not True; 1=Somewhat or Sometimes True; 2=Very True or Often True)

Attention Problem Behavior

- I act too young for my age
- I have trouble concentrating or paying attention
- I have trouble sitting still
- I feel confused or in a fog
- I daydream a lot
- I act without stopping to think
- I am nervous or tense
- My school work is poor
- I am poorly coordinated or clumsy

(0=Not True; 1=Somewhat or Sometimes True; 2=Very True or Often True)

Social Problems (4 measures)

Social Initiative

I get into conversations with adults at school (like teachers and staff).
I talk to teachers and staff about things other than class.
I help other students who might need assistance (like are sick or hurt, lost in building).
I ask questions in class when I don't understand the material.
I join in class discussions.
I am comfortable joking with teachers and staff.

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

Disliked by Kids

I am not liked by other kids

(0=Not True; 1=Somewhat or Sometimes True; 2=Very True or Often True)

Friends Who Misbehave

How many of your friends have done the following:

Carried a gun
Purposely damaged or destroyed property
Used alcoholic beverages, beer, wine, hard liquor
Stolen or tried to steal something worth more than \$50
Hit or threatened someone without real reason
Run away from home
Stolen or tried to steal things worth \$5 or less
Been involved in gang fights
Used marijuana
Carried a knife
Used hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and LSD
Used tobacco
Voluntarily had sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex
Cheated on a test
Been suspended from school
Been expelled from school
Gotten in fights at school
Used alcohol and driven a car
Driven over the speed limit

(1=None; 2=Some; 3>About half; 4=Most, 5=All)

General Social Problems

I act too young for my age
I'm too dependent on adults
I don't get along with other kids
I get teased a lot
I am not liked by other kids
I'm poorly coordinated or clumsy
I would rather be with younger kids than with kids my own age
I keep from getting involved with others

(0=Not True; 1=Somewhat or Sometimes True; 2=Very True or Often True)

Family Stress (2 measures)

Hostile Family Relations

We fight a lot in our family (reverse)
Family members sometimes get so angry they throw things (reverse)
Family members hardly ever lose their tempers
Family members sometimes hit each other (reverse)
Family members rarely criticize each other

(1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly agree)

Economic Difficulties

Compared to other kids your age, how well-off do you think your family is?

We are a lot poorer than most
We are a little poorer than most
We have about the same amount of money as most
We are a little richer than most
We are a lot richer than most

Marital or Coparenting Difficulties (5 measures)

Doesn't Live with both Birth or Adopted parents

Who do you live with now? (Fill in the one that fits best.)
Both my mother and father in the same house
Only my mother
My mother and stepfather
Only my father
My father and stepmother
Some of the time in my mother's home and some in my father's
Other relatives (like, aunt, uncle, grandparent)
Guardian or foster parent who is not a relative
No parents or guardians (I live alone or with friends)

Parents Often Disagree

Moms and dads often disagree about many things in family life. How often do your parents disagree about each of these things?

Your (or one of your siblings) dress or grooming
Your (or one of your siblings) physical care
Disciplining you (or one of your siblings)
Your (or one of your siblings) behavior
Money
Your mom or dad's job
Your mom or dad's duties in the family
Other: _____
How often do your parents disagree about things

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

Parent Hostile to Each Other

When your mom and dad disagree, how often do they...

Call each other names
Threaten each other
Yell at each other
Insult (show disrespect for) each other
Tell each other to shut up
Hit, slap, or push each other

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

Intense Fights between Parents

When my parents disagree....
One of them (or both) gets madder and madder.
It gets stressful and tense.
They get hostile and angry.

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

When your parents disagree, how intense does it get?

Not very intense
Somewhat intense
Very intense

Youth Caught in the Middle

When your mom and dad disagree, how often do you...

Feel caught in the middle when your parents fight.
Feel torn between your parents.
Feel like you have to take sides when your parents fight.

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

When your mom and dad disagree, how often do they...

Send a message to the other one through you because they don't want to talk to the other parent.
Insult (show disrespect for) the other one when they are not there.
Ask you what the other one is thinking, feeling, or doing because they don't want to ask the other parent.
Try to get you to side with one of them.

(1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always)

Stressful Youth Appraisals of Interparental Conflict (2 measures)

Frightened by Parent's Fighting

When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me.
When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt.
When my parents argue I am afraid that they will yell at me.
When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced.
When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen.
I get scared when my parents argue.

(1=False; 2=Sort of true; 3=True)

Youth Blames Self

My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.
I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments.
It's usually my fault when my parents argue.
My parents blame me when they have arguments.
My parents' arguments are usually about something I did.
Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents have arguments.
My parents usually argue or disagree because of things I do.
My parents would be happier if I hadn't been born.
Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments.
I get scared when my parents argue.
My parents argue more when I'm with them than when I'm gone.
My parents get into arguments when I do something wrong.

(1=False; 2=Sort of true; 3=True)

Parenting Difficulties (8 measures)

Parents and Youth Frequently Argue

In the last six months, how often have you had open disagreements with your parents about each of the following?

How I dress
Helping around the house
School
Getting along with family members

(1=Never; 2=Less than monthly; 3=Several times a month; 4=Once a week; 5=Several times a week; 6=Almost every day)

Hostile Mother

During the past month when you and your mom have spent time talking or doing things together, how often did your mom...

Get angry at you
Criticize you or your ideas
Shout at you because she was upset with you
Get into an argument with you
Argue with you whenever you disagreed about something
Insult or swear at you
Call you bad names

(1=Never; 2=Almost never; 3=Not too often; 4=About half; 5=Fairly often; 6=Almost always; 7=Always)

Aggressive Mother

Think about the past year and answer the following questions about your mother. Choose the best response for each question:

- 0 This never happened
- 1 Once in the past year
- 2 Twice in the past year
- 3 3-4 times in the past year
- 4 6-10 times in the past year
- 5 11-20 times in the past year
- 6 More than 20 times in the past year

Threatened to spank or hit me but did not actually do it.
Shouted, yelled or screamed at me.
Swore or cursed at me.
Said she would send me away or kick me out of the house.

Threw something at me.
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved me.
Slapped or spanked me.

Aggressive Father

Think about the past year and answer the following questions about your father.
Choose the best response for each question:

- 0 This never happened
- 1 Once in the past year
- 2 Twice in the past year
- 3 3-4 times in the past year
- 4 6-10 times in the past year
- 5 11-20 times in the past year
- 6 More than 20 times in the past year

Threatened to spank or hit me but did not actually do it.
Shouted, yelled or screamed at me.
Swore or cursed at me.
Said she would send me away or kick me out of the house.
Threw something at me.
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved me.
Slapped or spanked me.

Emotionally intrusive mother

My mother is a person who...

Is always trying to change how I think or feel.
Blames me for other family members problems.
Changes the subject whenever I have something to say.
Often interrupts me.
Brings up my past mistakes when she criticizes me.
Is less friendly with me if I don't see things her way.
Will avoid looking at me when I have disappointed her.
If I have hurt her feelings, stops talking to me until I please her again.
Feels hurt when I don't follow her advice.

(1=Not like her; 2=Somewhat like her; 3=A lot like her)

Inconsistent mother

My mother is a person who...

Only keeps rules when it suits her.
Frequently changes the rules I am supposed to follow.
Lets me do something one day and the next day I get into trouble for doing the same thing.
It depends on her mood whether a rule is enforced or not.
Punishes me for things she previously told me were o.k.
Soon forgets a rule she has made.
Let's me get out of being punished when I've done something wrong.
Gives up trying to get me to behave or follow rules.

(1=Not like her; 2=Somewhat like her; 3=A lot like her)

Mother doesn't monitor

How much does your mother REALLY know about...

Who your friends are?
Where you go at night?
How you spend your money?
What you do with your free time?
Where you are most afternoons?

(1=Doesn't know; 2=Knows a little; 3=Knows a lot)

Mother is not too accepting

My mother is a person who...

Makes me feel better after talking over my worries with her.
Gives me a lot of care and attention.
Believes in showing her love for me.
Is able to make me feel better when I am upset.
Cheers me up when I am sad.
Enjoys doing things with me.
Smiles at me often.
Makes me feel like the most important person in her life.
Often praises me.
Is easy to talk to.

(1=Not like her; 2=Somewhat like her; 3=A lot like her)