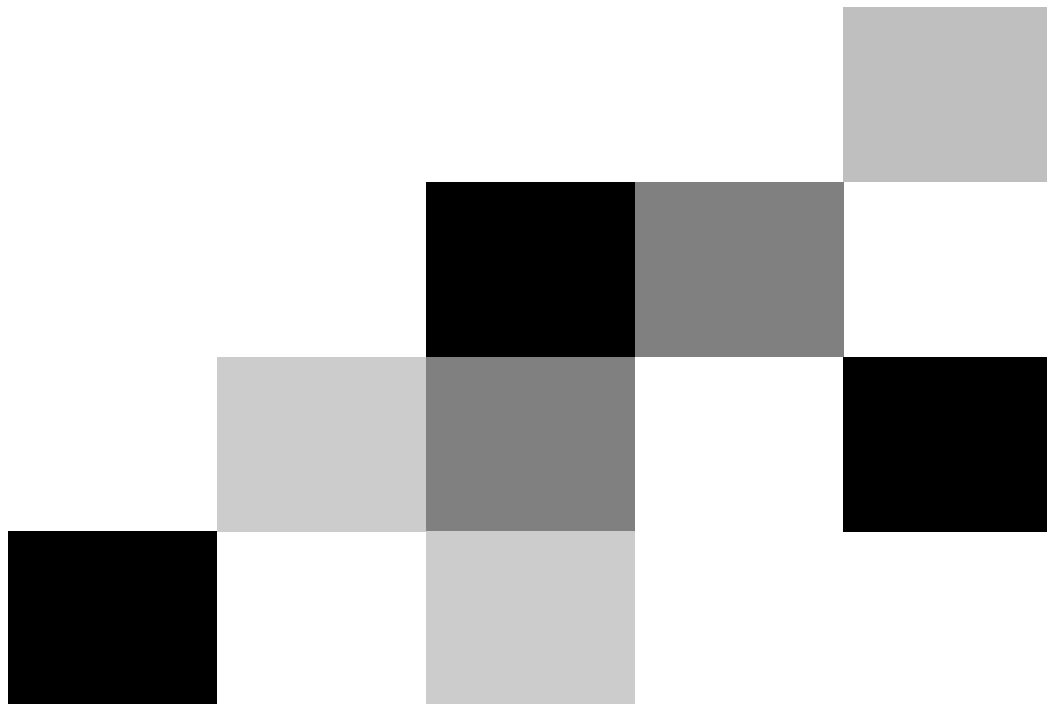




Parent-Child Connectedness: Voices of African-American and Latino Parents and Teens



Steve Bean, MAT
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ETR Associates (Education, Training, Research Associates), established in 1981, is a national, nonprofit organization whose mission is to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities by providing leadership, educational resources, training, and research in health promotion with an emphasis on sexuality and health education. ETR's Program Services Division offers comprehensive services for the development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of critical public health initiatives. The division works directly with community-based programs, state and local education agencies, health care providers, health educators and public health organizations. ETR's Publishing Division produces authoritative health education and health promotion resources that empower young people and adults to lead healthier lives. Thousands of ETR pamphlets, books and other materials are used in hundreds of health care settings, schools and workplaces across the United States and around the world.

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For the past 15 years, Lori has designed, implemented, and evaluated a variety of reproductive and sexual health curricula and programs for young people, parents, and professionals in the U.S. and Latin America. At ETR, Lori co-directs the Parent-Child Connectedness: Bridging Research and Intervention Design Project (PCC BRIDGE) funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation with Steve Bean. In partnership with the Healthy Teen Network, Lori also works on a nationwide CDC-funded project to support adolescent pregnancy prevention coalitions in developing, implementing and evaluating science-based adolescent reproductive health programs.



Lori began working on strengthening parent-child relationships as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras where she worked directly with parents and their children on a variety of issues including child/adolescent development, sexuality, communication skills and nutrition. Later as a Sexuality Educator at Planned Parenthood of Nassau County, Lori developed parent-child communication programs specifically for Latino families. As Program Director at Mothers' Voices, Lori spearheaded a parent peer education program titled Finding Our Voices: Parents Educating Parents About HIV Prevention.

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Steve Bean, MA

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Steve has more than 14 years of experience in the fields of youth development and experiential education. As a Senior Program Manager at ETR Associates, he has led the development of several positive youth development and prevention programs, including Cultures & Communities, a violence prevention program for alternative school youth, the Young Women's Leadership Alliance, an after school leadership program for high school girls, Girls Creating Games, an after school technology program for middle school girls and Physical Education for the Body, Mind and Spirit, a physical education program focused on martial arts and yoga for alternative school youth.



Positive connections between youth and adults have long been identified in the youth development field as important positive developmental assets. Steve's interest in how developmental assets of this kind can contribute to the prevention of negative outcomes for teens led to his collaboration with Lori Rolleri on PCC BRIDGE. Steve serves as co-director of the project.

Steve received a BA in Political Science from Reed College and an MA in Teaching from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he was a James Madison Fellow. Steve would like to dedicate his efforts on this project to his PCC BRIDGE co-director Lori Rolleri, with whom he feels a treasured connection as both colleague and friend.

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Recruiting 135 focus group participants was no easy task. Five local focus group coordinators supported us in finding and screening potential participants for study eligibility, securing a venue for conducting the focus group, collecting parent consent forms from teen participants, and coordinating other logistics. These coordinators completed these tasks for modest honorariums and did an outstanding job. Thank you to Donald Northcross from the OK Program in Rancho Cordova, CA; Barbara Gaynor, Amber Graham and Alina Orozco from Mothers' Voices South Florida in Miami, FL; Marta Flores from Family Health Centers of San Diego, CA; Nanette Ecker and Denise Morone from Planned Parenthood of Nassau County in Hempstead, NY; and Johnny Rice from The Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development in Baltimore, MD.

Focus group facilitation is part science and part art. We were fortunate to find two expert focus group facilitators who understood how to blend both science and art to elicit diverse opinions, experiences and emotions from our focus group participants. In addition, both facilitators assisted the project team in developing the focus group protocols and editing this report. Thank you Pamela Wilson, a private consultant from Oxon Hill, MD, and Trish Moylan Torruella, a private consultant from Hartford, CN.

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Several ETR staff assisted our team in creating a database for the data gathered from demographic surveys, as well helping us analyze these data. Thanks for this task go to Nicole Jayne, Cathy Tyner, Greg Thrush and Kieren Jameson.

We received valuable advice on qualitative research, writing and coordination during the course of this study from several ETR staff. Special thanks to Karin Coyle, Michelle Bliesner, Pam Drake and Linda Fawcett. Pam Drake lent her writing skills to this project by composing the executive summary of this report.

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Finally, we want to acknowledge Debra Delgado, Senior Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who believes in the protective power of parent-child connectedness and who granted us the financial resources to conduct this study. Thank you, Debra.

With gratitude,



Steve Bean
PCC BRIDGE Project Co-director



Lori A. Rolleri
PCC BRIDGE Project Co-director

■ Foreword

Parents Matter. If this is true, why do the majority of youth-serving programs only focus on teens? The Annie E. Casey Foundation examined this question about three years ago by conducting focus groups with providers in communities throughout the United States. The providers' responses provided interesting insights. We learned that many programs would like to make the connections to parents. However, they faced a broad array of challenges. For example:

- Program funds are restricted to youth-serving activities. The funds could not be used for family and/or community events.
- Providers did not know where to get information about best practices and/or promising approaches for helping parents of teen children improve parenting skills.
- Providers were ambivalent about parents' interest in learning more about adult/adolescent interactions.

This document is an important step forward in the fields of youth development and adolescent health. It makes a clear and compelling case that parents really do care about the quality of relationships with their children. It also makes the case that parents want help and look to community partners for assistance. Most importantly, this focus group report captures parents' ideas about what practitioners can do to help them figure out why teens do what they do. As you listen to these parents' voices, you'll learn more about their dreams, aspirations and hopes for their children. You'll also learn about teens' aspirations for themselves. We encourage you to listen to both the parents' and teens' voices and begin to explore opportunities for making their hopes and dreams become a reality.

I am grateful to project staff, principally Lori Rolleri and Steven Bean, for their thoughtful approach to raising awareness about the power of parent-child connectedness. Both Lori and Steve have been relentless in their efforts to translate abstract concepts like "parent-child connectedness" into clear and concrete practices for youth-serving organizations.

We encourage you to join their campaign.

Debra Delgado
Senior Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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■ Executive Summary

Background

In January 2003, ETR Associates was awarded funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to study the construct of "parent-child connectedness." During the first year of PCC BRIDGE project, ETR reviewed more than 600 documents on parent-child connectedness and related constructs. We wrote a review of this literature and published it under the title *Parent-Child Connectedness: Implications for Research, Interventions and Positive Impacts on Adolescent Health in early 2004*.¹ In addition to our literature review, we conducted a national online survey² with adolescent reproductive health practitioners and collected and studied the programs we could identify that most directly addressed parent-child connectedness.

An important outcome of our Year One project activities was the realization that the literature base for parent-child relationships consists largely of white middle class families. Given that ETR and the Annie E. Casey Foundation place a strong priority on serving economically disadvantaged African-American and Latino families, ETR set out to learn more about how these African-American and Latino families understand parent-child connectedness and make heard the voices of these families that are currently missing from the academic study of parent-child connectedness. We sought to accomplish this task through a focus group study that was the major emphasis of our second year of work (2004) and the subject of this report.

Focus Group Methodology

We conducted a total of 16 focus groups in five cities including: the Sacramento, CA, area; San Diego, CA; Miami, FL; Baltimore, MD and western Long Island, NY. Representatives from five local community-based organizations assisted the PCC project team by handling the logistics for the focus groups. In an effort to help focus group participants feel most at ease, we matched an African-American focus group facilitator to African-American focus group participants and a bilingual Latina facilitator to focus groups comprised of Latino participants.

The specific questions in our teen and parent focus group protocols center around the following three overarching research questions:

1. What does parent-child connectedness mean to parents and to teens?
2. What contributions can parents and teens each make toward achieving a sense of connectedness with each other?
3. What kinds of interventions do parent and teens think would be effective at helping families develop parent-child connectedness?

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. At the conclusion of the focus group discussion, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire. A systematic process based on the "long table" method of focus group data analysis described in *Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results* by Richard A. Krueger was used to collect, analyze and inter-

¹ Lezin, N., Roller, L., Bean, S. & Taylor, J. (2004) *Parent-Child Connectedness: Implications for Research, Interventions and Positive Impacts on Adolescent Health*. Scotts Valley, CA: ETR Associates. To download a free copy of ETR's literature review on parent-child connectedness visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/research/litreview.pdf>

² To review the findings from ETR's online PCC survey, visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/research/AuthorPaperPCCSurvey0104.htm>

pret the data obtained in this study. Data analysis involved multiple project staff including: project co-directors who served as focus group note takers, data coders, data interpreters and writers; focus group facilitators who offered valuable post focus group reactions; and research assistants who analyzed questionnaire data and transcribed audio tapes. Much of this staff was bilingual (English-Spanish).

Participation

Eighty-one (81) parents and 54 teens were recruited to participate in our focus group study. Demographics are reported below.

Teens

- Ages ranged from 11 to 18 years with a mean age of 13.7 years and a mode of 13 years.
- Our study included more male teens (32) than female teens (22).
- Fourteen (14) teens identified as "Latino/Hispanic/Chicano," 34 teens identified as "Black" or "African-American," 3 identified as "White," and 21 identified as "Other."
- The majority of the teen focus group participants were born in the United States (44), while 10 were born outside the United States.
- Teen focus group participants reported having a range of siblings from zero to six. The majority of participants had one sibling (20), followed by two siblings (12), and no siblings (11).
- The majority of the teen focus group participants live full time with one family (88.9%), while just a few reported living with more than one family or living with foster parents.
- Twenty-two (22) teens reported that adults other than parents help care for them in their homes. Responses to this question included, but were not limited to: grand mothers (15), aunts (9), cousins (4) and uncles (3).

Parents

- A total of 78 of the 81 parents (mothers, fathers and grandmothers) from eight focus

groups completed questionnaires.

- Their ages ranged from 24 to 71 years, with the mean age being 39.0 years.
- The majority of parent focus group participants were female (55) and the remaining male (23).
- Twenty-one (21) parents identified as "Latino/Hispanic/Chicano," 53 of them identified as "Black" or "African-American," 10 identified as "White" and 13 identified as "Other."
- The majority of the parent focus group participants were born in the United States (55), while 19 were born outside the continental US.
- Parent focus group participants reported an average of 2.8 children and the average age of all participants' children was 12.3 years.
- Each parent participant had at least one child between the ages of 11-15 years of age.
- The largest sub-group of our participant sample identified as being a single parent living with children (41.3%), followed by two parents living with children (32.0%), a single parent living with an adult partner and children (12.0%), and a single parent not living with children (9.3%).
- A little over a third (37%) reported having some high school or less, while 20% reported completing high school, 24% some college or junior college, and 18.7% completed college or graduate study.

We were aiming to talk to parents and teens who are experiencing economic challenges in their family lives. Our sense from talking to the parents and teens during focus groups is that our participants came from a fairly wide representation of economic conditions, but that the majority of them were coping with economic challenges. Many of the parents we spoke to were successfully supporting their families, but were working long hours at low pay, sometimes in multiple jobs, to make their finances work.

In terms of measuring the economic status of our focus group participants, we did not collect income data directly. However, our sense of the economic status of our sample is based on the following pieces of information: The average median household income within the home zip codes reported by our focus group participants

(78 parents and 54 teens) was \$36,390. An average of 31.4% of the families living in the neighborhoods represented by the zip codes reported by focus group participants live in poverty. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the 2004 poverty threshold for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states was \$18,850. At an average of 2.8 children, most of our focus group families were at or above the size of four, and we know that the largest subgroup of them were single parents, which was likely to have a significant detrimental impact on their ability to work and earn money.

Results and Interpretations: Important Themes

This section of the report comprises the main analysis and interpretation of our focus group data. It is based on a 33-page data table consisting of our analyses and interpretations, references to specific quotes or commentaries that support the analysis, and cross-references between related themes. The finished data table contains a total of 319 entries spanning 45 different themes or concepts. Through the process of converting this data table into a narrative report, portions were merged or dropped so that the final report contains not 45, but 30 themes. For organizational purposes, we have grouped these 30 themes into four categories: Relationship Building Themes, Teen Themes, Parent Themes and Household/Family Themes.

Relationship Building Themes

Communication. Communication was talked about in every focus group as a requirement for parent-child connectedness. The concept of communication is also found frequently in the literature and in our survey and in-depth interviews with practitioners. Communication is a broad concept, and can be broken down into three phases: 1) sending messages in an effective way, 2) receiving those messages, and 3) understanding those messages. Focus group participants stressed all three of these elements of communication at different times and in different ways. They also talked generally about creating an open and honest atmosphere for communication to occur. Most importantly, both parents and teens appeared to really value

effective communication - a value that program leaders can use to anchor programs designed to strengthen parent-child connectedness. When discussing how communication can contribute to building connectedness between parents and teens focus group participants identified unconditional availability, openness and honesty, initiating conversations, good listening, and bringing up difficult subjects as factors.

Understanding. Understanding is the third phase of the communication process and was discussed extensively by focus groups. It was characterized by our parents and teens as: empathizing with the other's point of view or feelings, interpreting body language as well as the words that come out of a person's mouth, feeling attention coming from the person doing the listening, having a bidirectional teaching process, feeling like your individuality is being acknowledged, showing an interest in the other person and the things she/he likes, and remaining calm.

Availability. Many of the critical factors that contribute to PCC, for example shared activity, affection, communication, etc., require the same basic resources to be present. These resources are time, energy and attention from the parent and child. We have collectively represented these resources and how they are marshaled by individual family members to be "present" in a parent-child relationship as a theme called "availability." Focus group participants talked about barriers to availability, including general lack of time, lack of time because the parent has too many of his/her own activities, parent being tired, geographic separation from child, parent distracted or thinking about other things, parent's anger or bad mood, responsibilities for running the household, fear of the responsibilities of parenting, the need to accept more hours at work or an inconvenient schedule in order to provide financially, and a parent's romantic interests.

Shared Activity. When we talk about shared activity, we mean for the phrase to describe social activities between parents and their children. These activities are often, but not always, recreational. The primary focus of shared activity, whether it is watching TV together, playing games or going to the park, is the mutuality of a shared experience, regardless of what direct verbal communication is exchanged between a parent and a child. Focus group parents and teens talked extensively about the importance

of shared activity to connecting and bonding. The number of comments and quotes that related to the concept of shared activity ranked up with "communication" as the most frequently talked about theme.

Respect. The concept of respect was used to mean several different things by focus group participants. One use of the term by parents gave it qualities similar to those of "pride," where it described children's behavior outside of the house or family, as in "being respectful" or "showing respect." Several parents described how they expect their teenagers to act respectful towards others when they're in public so their behavior reflects positively on their parents and their family. In a second use of the term, both focus group teens and parents expressed the desire to be treated with respect. When this respectful treatment was described by focus group teens, it brought into sharp relief a direct connection they drew between respectful treatment and increased autonomy.

Trust. Trust appeared to be a strong foundational requirement for establishing connectedness according to focus group participants. A child's trust is required for parents to effectively communicate with their children, establish structures, and provide guidance and for parents and teens to share time with each other. In turn, these activities help to build more trust. Focus group teens and parents talked about several positive outcomes of having a trusting relationship including: the ability to talk more frankly/openly, more effective problem solving, increased likelihood that a sensitive subject like sex will be brought up with parents, worrying less about each other because there is full disclosure, and a more satisfying/pleasurable feeling about each other.

Love. Teens and parents offered many examples of how they express love and what it feels like to be loved. Although parents may genuinely feel love for their children, and from their perspective, behave in loving ways toward their children, what appears most important to a positive outcome is that the teen feel loved. Parents' ideas about the best ways to show love to their children may not always be in sync with how their teen children would like to be loved. And sadly, in some cases, parents confront personal barriers to expressing love to their children such as their own history of having emotionally unavailable, neglectful or abusive parents. The ability to love each other is an important one for parents and teens to have and

ultimately an important factor in establishing connectedness.

Advice. Parents from almost every focus group talked about the importance of giving advice to their children. Topics that parents considered important to advise their children about included: money, importance of an education, smoking, abortion, personal safety, being "a man," drugs, weapons and violence, and dressing in public/fashion. Although the link between advice giving and parent-child connectedness was not entirely explicit, it appears that by parents providing the "gift" of advice to their children, they are in a way hoping to protect their children, helping their children avoid mistakes, and supporting their children in achieving happiness. In contrast to what we learned from parents, teens talked very little about the value of their parents' advice and sometimes characterized parental advice giving in negative terms.

Balancing Being a Parent with Being a

Friend. Across six of our 16 focus groups, both parents and teens named and discussed a particular balance that they thought was important to connectedness. Participants across groups identified this balance in exactly the same terms, namely: parents acting as both a parent and a friend to their teen. The way this balance was both named and discussed across focus groups marks it as an important theme with some degree of cross-cultural resonance. However, while the theme emerged with an identical label across a large number of different focus groups, there was not a strong consensus among parents, or across groups, as to where a healthy balance between being a parent and being a friend truly lies.

Bidirectionality. ETR has defined parent-child connectedness as "a condition characterized by the quality of the emotional bond between parent and child and the degree to which this bond is both mutual and sustained over time." Parents and teens both need to contribute to the relationship dynamic in ways which establish and maintain connectedness, for example, by expressing love and caring to each other. The fact that PCC is bidirectional also means that those things that one person does to contribute to feelings of connectedness must also be the things that the other person recognizes and wants in order to feel connected. The bidirectional dynamic of creating a connected parent-child relationship was described by participants in several ways. Being able to "read" each other

emotionally and empathize with each other was mentioned by several parents and teens. Shared activity was another area where bidirectionality surfaced - teens and parents talked about working together to find shared activities that are mutually satisfying. While parents are primarily held accountable for the quality of their relationships with their children, the bidirectionality of PCC points to many contributions that teens can make to connectedness, and teens can make these contributions without engaging in unhealthy role-reversal. Teens doing things to make their parents proud like getting good grades, helping out with chores and living demonstrably by the parents' or family's values appeared to increase several parents' sense of connectedness to their children.

Teen Themes

Adolescent Developmental Stages. Focus group parents varied in their awareness and understanding of healthy adolescent development. In addition to the physical changes of puberty, the adolescent years are also marked by the development of personal identity, increased autonomy, movement from concrete to abstract thinking, recognition and management of emotions, increased importance of peer relationships and development of personal values. Yet, while many focus group parents seemed to be aware of the physical changes of puberty (e.g., menstruation), many seemed to lack an understanding of normal adolescent development with respect to cognitive, social and emotional changes. For these parents, the behavior of their children as they moved into and through adolescence (such as seeking greater autonomy) created barriers to maintaining emotional connectedness.

Autonomy. Developmentally, as children get older, and especially as they become teens, they are going to seek increasing amounts of autonomy. Our conversations with focus group parents and teens told us they are deep into the challenge of negotiating the increasing expectations of autonomy on the part of teens. One thing that was clear from our focus groups around the issue of autonomy is that differences in parents' and teens' expectations around this issue are common within families and create a ripe field for conflict.

Resistance/Rebellion. Focus group parents, primarily African-American parents, made con-

spicuous use of the terms "resistance" and "rebellion" to describe their children's challenges to structure, rules, discipline and parental decisions. Based on focus group comments, a loose categorization of teen's behavior that might qualify as resistance or rebellion includes: challenging parents' structure, rules, discipline and parental decisions, acting out, misbehaving or doing poorly in school.

Teens Feeling Embarrassed by Parents.

Teens from several focus groups reported feeling embarrassed by things their parents do or say. Teens become conditioned to physically or emotionally withdraw from parents to avoid embarrassment and, as a result, parent-child connectedness suffers. Specific examples of parental behaviors that embarrassed the teens with whom we spoke included: discussing private/family matters in front of other people, yelling or reprimanding the teen in public, telling childhood stories about their teens, adjusting teens' clothing, simply being with teens in public and being seen by someone the teen knows, talking loud in public or yelling so the neighbors can hear them, calling additional attention to something the teen has done that she/he is already embarrassed about (e.g. tripping and falling down), showing physical affection to the other parent or to the teen in public, laughing in a derisive way at the teen, acting "cheap," or "penny-pinching" in public, making a fuss over something that teens think is minor/petty, and trying to act cool, hip or young.

Teen Support. Both parents and teens talked about the importance of parents providing teens with support, encouragement and praise. Parents reported providing their teens with support on a range of issues including: helping them find a peer group to fit into, telling them that it's okay to make mistakes/not be perfect, being present at their children's special events, giving praise, encouraging them to achieve their goals, providing them with positive reinforcement for good behavior, giving them money, and cooking and caring for them.

Parent Themes

Parent's Childhood. Several focus group parents reported experiencing a variety of traumatic events that continue to have a powerful impact on their self-esteem and mental health. In turn these experiences are having a

significant impact on their parents' ability to connect with them. For example, several parents talked about childhood trauma that resulted in an inability to say "I love you" to their children, a difficulty expressing physical affection to their children, a fear of repeating the cycle of abuse with their own children, a mistrust of their own parenting skills/decisions, and problems in their marriages.

Parents' Relationship with Each Other. The dynamics of the relationship between parents can affect the quality of parent-child connectedness in several ways. Parents' relationship problems are experienced by teens and children as unresolved family conflict, which our focus groups confirmed has a detrimental effect on connectedness. When the dynamics of the parent's relationship are good, parent-child connectedness appears to be positively affected. Parents who have a good relationship also support each other emotionally and instrumentally during times of family and personal stress. This support can help parents care for their children in more effective ways.

Drugs and Alcohol. Overall, there was not a lot of mention of alcohol or drug use in our focus groups. However, the few times that this was mentioned, it usually pertained to parents' use of drugs and alcohol and how this created barriers to connectedness for teens. Teens described a few common reactions to parents' drug or alcohol use related to PCC - withdrawing from their parents or refusing to abide by parents' rules and structure. In the latter case, they described how, when parents were under the influence, their rules, expectations and structure lost all credibility with teens.

Parent Support. Parents from several focus groups talked about needing or wanting support from their spouses, children, other family members or outside sources. Parents talked about wanting support around general parenting of their children (disciplining, communication, etc.), completing chores around the house, caring for sick/disabled children and personal issues. Focus group commentaries indicate that parents' possession of an adult support network is a key factor in overcoming barriers to connectedness related to financial problems, taxing work schedules and emotional stress.

Gender. Parents and children are conditioned to followings male and female gender roles and

the attitudes, behaviors and assumptions associated with those gender roles. Overall, our data indicate that focus group parents do not see that a parent's gender in relation to a child's has any deterministic effect on the level of PCC between them. Nonetheless, many focus group participants, parents and teens, perceived gender as shaping their relationships and their level of closeness with their counterparts. Some parents identified a belief that the traditional roles of mother and father, as they have been defined along gender lines, are not equal in their "connectivity."

Modeling. When we use the term "modeling," we are referring to parents demonstrating values and behavior. When parents model consciously, they are selecting values and behaviors they want their children to emulate. On the other hand, parent messages and behaviors serve as modeling for children regardless of whether a parent intends to model or is conscious of the fact that he or she is doing so. Modeling was an important theme that emerged from our focus groups. Focus group participants, for the most part parents, positioned it outside of the construct of connectedness but described it in terms of being a critical element that shapes the nature of the parent-child relationship. It did not come up with the same level of frequency as some other themes, such as shared activity, but the intensity with which focus group participants talked about it demonstrated its importance.

Pride. For both Latino and African-American parents in our focus groups, feeling proud of their children was identified as one of the things that contributed to them feeling more connected to them. Specific things that parents listed as things teens did to make them proud included: being respectful towards other people, helping out around the house, helping others who need help, making eye contact with people, looking out for siblings, getting good grades, having a strong sense of themselves as individuals, and having a "big heart." School performance, as a source of pride, was mentioned by parents from all ethnic backgrounds, but came up with a very high degree of frequency among Latina mothers. Parents "feeling proud," or teens "being felt proud of," did not come up with the same frequency or intensity as some other contributing factors, such as shared activity. However, it appears to be a

distinctive contributor to PCC in that it may reflect some very specific values, as in the school performance example. For African-American parents, pride in their children was often strongly linked to how their children act in public and how their behavior in this regard reflects on their parents.

Household/Family Themes

Monitoring. When we talk about parental monitoring in this report, we mean parents tracking where their children are physically, who they're spending time with, and what they're doing with their free time and measuring their performance on schoolwork and chores.

Monitoring can also extend to knowing the direction in which their children's moral development is headed. Ultimately, too much monitoring, as perceived by teens, can negatively affect their level of connectedness with their parents. We also learned that behaviorally, if teens perceive that responding to parents' monitoring questions will result in restrictions, many of them are more likely to withdraw from open communication, or are more likely to withhold information. We know from our focus group responses about communication that withholding, or the absence of disclosure/open communication, makes both sides feel less connected.

Expectations. We use the term "expectations" to frame participants' comments about what parents expect from their teenage children. One can think of expectations as "performance standards" or "performance measures" within families. Typically parents set the expectations in families, and most of the explicit comments from participants about expectations reflect this fact. The failure of teens and children to meet expectations is what commonly leads to disciplining. Focus group participants identified common parental expectations as being around issues like appropriate dress, behavioral standards (both at home and in public), academic performance, demonstrating a work ethic. Teens have their own expectations of parents, expectations they appear to communicate and attempt to enforce, usually through reactive behavior.

Structure. We have used the term "structure" in this report to describe the framework parents use to establish (and in many cases negotiate), communicate, and maintain their expectations. It might also make sense to include how par-

ents enforce their expectations within the theme of "structure." However, the particular character and prominence of this theme as it emerged from our focus groups suggested it be established as its own theme, one we've called "discipline." Focus group parents placed value and importance on structure and rules. However, they communicated and implemented rules and structure according to different styles. Some parents imposed rules arbitrarily without warning or explanation and expressed belief that this is the "right" of a parent to do.

Discipline. Discipline, what we think of as the methods that parents use to enforce their rules, structure and expectations, was a prominent theme for both parents and teens in our focus groups who made comments about the affects of discipline on the parent-child relationship. Parents tended, far more than teens, to cite discipline as a positive contributing factor to the parent-child relationship. The topic of physical discipline came up frequently in focus groups and with high intensity. There was disagreement among focus group parents about the effect of physical discipline on connectedness with their children. While a few teens recognized a need for, or in some cases endorsed, physical discipline, focus group teens generally felt that it has a strong negative impact on their connectedness with their parents.

Conflict. Previous findings on PCC indicate that family conflict can have a crippling negative impact on PCC for both parents and teens. If family conflict arises and is managed and resolved, it is believed to have no lasting negative impact on PCC and may even have a positive effect, maintaining trust in the relationship and testifying to its resiliency. It is when conflict within families goes unresolved, especially if it is widespread, that it has a crippling effect on PCC.

Siblings. The fact that a teen has siblings does not, in and of itself, mean that she or he is less likely to experience a sense of connectedness with her/his parent. What seems to be important is how parents treat each sibling. For example, several teens talked about losing a feeling of connectedness with a parent because the parent takes the side of the sibling in conflicts between the teen and the sibling. This perceived favoritism was reported as especially irksome when the teen felt that the sibling was largely responsible for instigating the conflict. For the children of "blended families" (families

composed of parents and children from previously distinct families) where a consistent set of rules applying to all children of the different parents is not in effect, this differential treatment can feel very unfair, resulting in resentment and negative effects on PCC.

Separation. We use the term "separation" to refer to a physical separation between a parent and his/her teenage children. It is distinguishable from the term availability, where a parent has access to his or her child but does not, or cannot make himself or herself available to spend time, create shared activity or engage in focused communication with that child.

Notably, the issue of physical separation was only reported in our focus groups with African-American respondents, or in the case of focus groups with teens, those groups with a primarily African-Americans, or a mix of African American and Latino respondents. In these groups, some form of physical separation between teens and one of their parents or relatives serving as their guardian was widespread. Teens reported being separated not only from their parents, but also from grandparents and other members of their extended family. In such cases, teens reported the separation as having a largely negative impact on both their relationships and feelings of connectedness with the relatives from whom they were separated and their sense of themselves as part of a cohesive family unit.

Interference. Respondents from several African-American focus groups talked about how interference in their parenting from other family members can be detrimental to connectedness with teenage children. These comments were made primarily by parents but were echoed in a few instances by teens. Interference was generally characterized as another family member (e.g., other parent, grandmother, parent's new partner) teaching a child a different set of values, setting different rules, bad-mouthing a parent, restricting access to the child, and buying things for the child without the parent's approval. This interference often leaves parents feeling frustrated, and at times powerless, while teens feel confused about whose rules or values they should abide by. The issue of "interference" did not surface in our focus groups with Latino parents.

Money. The issue of limited financial resources and the stress resulting from working long hours surfaced in both teen and parent focus

groups. In some cases, teens talked about wishing their families had more money to help ease some of the stress experienced by family members. They felt that easing this stress might open more time and energy to spend time together and do fun things. Although a few parents talked directly about "money" during our focus group discussions, more parents talked about the stress related to working two jobs, long hours, and/or inconvenient shifts in order to make ends meet for their families.

Program Implications

The last 15 minutes of both parent and teen focus groups was spent on discussion related to designing programs addressing parent-child connectedness. We asked participants about their recommendations for content, approaches, recruitment, setting and program leaders. Several themes related to program content surfaced: creating opportunities to share time together, improving parent-child communication, creating opportunities to simply get to know each other better, and addressing the need for parent support and family counseling. It should be noted that parent-child communication was a program theme that was identified in almost every focus group. Often, two or more program ideas were presented in combination with each other. For example, a program might include a shared activity, such as a family picnic, while also including an activity where parents and teens practice their communication skills.

With regard to recruiting parents to PCC programs, respondents recommended that program leaders: consider parent work schedules and parent responsibilities (e.g. preparing meals); schedule programs on a regular, predictable basis so parents can plan for them; give parents sufficient notice about program schedules; not rely on promotional flyers brought home by children because kids often forget to give the flyer to their parents; rely on personalized recruitment strategies such as phone calls or word of mouth from other parents; plan something "catchy" at each session to attract parents; use a "catchy" title; give parents choices about what presentations to attend; and don't expect parents to attend every session.

Parents and teens also made recommendations on what a PCC program leader should be like.

These characteristics included: committed; skilled at talking about and solving family problems; good mentors and role models for kids (African-American parents felt this was especially important for African-American male teens); skilled at getting to know parents and teens and building trust/rapport; skilled at facilitating discussions about feelings; someone who can make you feel safe and secure; educated in his/her field; and credible in the community.

Next Steps

Over the past two and half years, our project team has built an understanding of parent-child connectedness linked to the prevention of adolescent sexual risk-taking behavior. Our next step will "spring-board" off of the understanding of PCC among economically challenged families of color given to us by our focus group participants and their specific recommendations for needed programs and services. This next step is the design of interventions that can be used widely to increase PCC in families with the ultimate goal of reducing adolescent sexual risk-taking behavior.

The PCC project team will take what it has learned about the behaviors that contribute to parent-child connectedness (e.g., understanding, trust, shared time together, respectful communication, etc.) to develop targeted activities to strengthen these behaviors. We will carefully breakdown the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will support the strengthening of each parent behavior. We will also look at ways to engage parents and teens, as well as future program facilitators, in the implementation of the activities we develop.

The team will also look at factors that pose barriers to parent-child connectedness (e.g., conflict, lack of autonomy granting and poor parental self-esteem/mental health). A similar analysis will be applied to these factors to design intervention activities that may lessen their presence in families and the negative impact they have on PCC. Our team will have to make decisions about what contributing or challenging factors will not be addressed due to limitations such as time and funding.

After a long period of research, we are finally ready to build the "bridge" in PCC BRIDGE. As practitioners, we are excited to take our two and one-half years of work and apply it to the

development of practical activities that other practitioners can use with families in their communities. This is the reason why we embarked in this work in early 2003 - our field was talking about the protective nature of parent-child connectedness but little was available to help practitioners understand how to support it. We expect our first collection of PCC intervention activities to be available in November 2005. To learn more about this upcoming work, visit the ReCAPP website at www.etr.org/recapp for updates, or email Steve Bean at steveb@etr.org or Lori Roller at lorir@etr.org.

■ Introduction

Over the last decade, research studies from the fields of public health, psychology and education have demonstrated that the condition of "parent-child connectedness" serves as an important protective factor for a variety of adolescent health outcomes including the prevention of adolescent pregnancy, STI and HIV. Program development and research staff at ETR Associates took notice of the growing significance of parent-child connectedness in the literature and began to think how they might better address this important protective factor in new programs and curricula. Although the literature was clear that parent-child connectedness is associated with positive health outcomes in youth, little information was found about the factors that determine PCC, and even less information was available about how to design interventions to strengthen it.

Parent-child connectedness has been a difficult construct for experts in a variety of fields to understand. The difficulties on the part of researchers and practitioners to operationalize and make concrete the construct of PCC have been apparent in much of the work on the subject. For example in a recent presentation on research on adolescent connectedness,³ Dr. Brian K. Barber noted that "There is substantial inconsistency or lack of clarity in the conceptualization of connectedness." He went on to identify six aspects of current conceptualizations of connectedness that make it, in his words "muddy territory." Two of the aspects mentioned in Dr. Barber's presentation, namely, "conceiving of connectedness as the state and property of a relationship" and also conceiving of it as the "possession of feeling/attitude states"

were both aspects of PCC that are represented, at various times, in the commentaries of focus group respondents within this report. Thus we see the "muddy conceptual territory" of PCC reflected both in the academic effort to clarify theories and in the widely different ways that families of color conceive of it when thinking about their own familial relationships.

ETR Associates sees the challenge of understanding connectedness as an interesting and important opportunity to shed light on a protective factor that appears to have such a strong and widespread impact on adolescent health outcomes. We undertook this challenge in January 2003 when we were awarded funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to study the construct of "parent-child connectedness." We titled our project Parent-Child Connectedness: Bridging Research and Intervention Design (PCC BRIDGE).

During the first year of our project (2003), the PCC BRIDGE team sought to familiarize itself with the best available research and information about how PCC develops and how it works as a protective factor. We sought this understanding to prepare ourselves for our ultimate project goal: to develop interventions that could successfully strengthen PCC in families, leading to positive adolescent reproductive health outcomes. ETR reviewed over 600 documents on parent-child connectedness and related constructs. We wrote a review of this literature and published it under the title Parent-Child Connectedness: Implications for Research, Interventions and Positive Impacts on Adolescent Health in early 2004.⁴ In addition to

³ Proceedings of The National Academies' Board on Children, Youth and Families - Committee on Adolescent Health and Development's Planning Meeting on "Connectedness and Adolescent Health and Development." October 8, 2004. Washington DC.

⁴ To download a free copy of ETR's literature review on parent-child connectedness visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/research/litreview.pdf>

our literature review, we conducted a national online survey⁵ with adolescent reproductive health practitioners and collected and studied the programs we could identify that most directly addressed parent-child connectedness.

Our literature review process was greatly strengthened by input from 15 national experts (both researchers and practitioners) on parent-child relations. The group of experts met for two days at a meeting we convened in Baltimore, MD in July 2003 to review and give intensive feedback on the first draft of our literature review.⁶ Feedback from this meeting helped significantly in shaping how we addressed several issues in our literature review, especially with regards to how culture and poverty affect PCC as well as the role fathers play in connecting with their children.

An important outcome of our Year One project activities was the realization that the literature base for parent-child relationships consists largely of white middle class families. Given that ETR and the Annie E. Casey Foundation place a strong priority on serving economically disadvantaged African-American and Latino families, ETR set out to learn more about how these families understand parent-child connectedness and make heard the voices of these families that are currently missing from the academic study of parent-child connectedness. We sought to do this through a focus group study that was the major emphasis of our second year of work (2004) and is the subject of this report. In the report, we seek to give voice to the perspectives of African-American and Latino parents and teens, many of whom who are overcoming economic challenges to raise healthy families. These voices and perspectives have previously been absent from the research literature on parent-child connectedness and by presenting them here, we aim to make a contribution to eliminating this gap in the scientific understanding of parent-child connectedness.

The report is organized into sections that reflect the order of the focus group discussions. The first section describes the methodology of our study. With one exception, the subsequent sections follow the general order of the important questions and prompts presented to focus group participants. Each individual section reports a combination of data, interpretations and findings relevant to the topic of the section. The second section reports on participants' basic views of PCC following from the protocol question, "What does parent-child connectedness mean to you?" The third section reports on the important themes that emerged from participants' responses to the questions, "What makes you feel closer to your parent/teen?" and "What gets in the way of you feeling closer to your parent/teen?" The fourth section presents participants' responses to the focus group wrap-up question, "What do you think are the things that are most important to creating PCC in families?" The fifth and final section reports participants' answers to questions about how programs or interventions should be designed to help families who are struggling with PCC and about what community stakeholders and organizations would be most effective at implementing these interventions. In the chronology of the focus groups, the question about interventions preceded the wrap-up question about the most important elements for creating PCC. However, since the ultimate goal of the PCC BRIDGE project is to design and test evidence-based interventions to strengthen PCC in families, we felt it important to end with related findings. The conclusion of the report follows from these findings about intervention design by describing the future directions of the PCC BRIDGE project that follow from the completion of this study.

⁵ To review the findings from ETR's online PCC survey, visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/research/AuthorPaperPCCSurvey0104.htm>

⁶ To review the format and proceedings of the July 2003 think tank meeting at parent-child connectedness, visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/column/column200401ThinkTank.htm>.

■ Section 1: Focus Group Methodology

We conducted a total of 16 focus groups in five cities including: the Sacramento, CA area (more specifically Rancho Cordova); San Diego, CA; Miami, FL; Baltimore, MD and western Long Island (more specifically Roosevelt, NY). The five cities were chosen based on three criteria including: 1) our team's desire for geographic diversity, 2) likelihood of successfully recruiting low-income African-American and Latino families, and 3) availability of local contacts who would serve as focus group field coordinators.

Focus Group Recruitment

Representatives from five local community-based organizations assisted the PCC project team by recruiting parents and teens for focus groups, obtaining parent permission forms from participating teens, securing a venue for focus groups, and handling other logistics (e.g., refreshments, transportation, etc.)⁷ Our local field coordinators received a modest honorarium for serving in this capacity.

Local field coordinators were individually trained on the specifications for focus group participant recruitment and were provided with various written documents (e.g., PCC BRIDGE Project fact sheet, recruitment flyers, participant screening tool, etc.) to assist them with recruitment. Ultimately, 81 parents and 54 teens were recruited to participate in our focus group study. Appendix A lists the locations and a description of the participants recruited for each focus group.

Developing Focus Group Protocols

The voices of African-American and Latino parents and teens, especially those facing economic challenges, are largely lacking in the collective literature on PCC. Given that we plan to develop PCC interventions for these priority populations in the future, we believed it was important to hear directly from them. Although the experiences shared by the 135 people who participated in this study cannot be generalized to all low-income African-American and Latino families, their experiences will give us an important set of perspectives to consider as we develop program activities. Thus the questions included in both the teen and parent focus group protocols were designed to do two things: 1) complement and/or broaden our findings from the parent-child connectedness literature review completed in early 2004, and 2) better elucidate how parent-child connectedness is experienced in economically challenged African-American and Latino families.

The specific questions found in the teen and parent focus group protocols center on the following three overarching questions:

1. What does parent-child connectedness mean to parents and to teens?
2. What contributions can parents and teens make toward achieving a sense of connectedness with each other?
3. What kinds of interventions do parent and teens think would be effective at helping families develop parent-child connectedness?

⁷ Local focus group coordinators included: Barbara Gaynor, Amber Graham & Alina Orozco from Mothers' Voices South Florida in Miami, FL; Nanette Ecker and Denise Morone from Planned Parenthood of Nassau County in Hempstead, NY; Marta Flores from Family Health Centers of San Diego in San Diego, CA; Donald Northcross from the OK Program in Rancho Cordova, CA; and Johnny Rice from the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development in Baltimore, MD.

Individual protocols with specific questions and prompts were developed for both parent and teen focus groups based on these overarching questions. In addition to specific questions for focus group participants, the protocols include a script for briefly explaining to participants the background on the PCC BRIDGE project, the purpose of the focus group study, what participants can expect during the focus group discussion, and the voluntary nature of participation. Both teen and parent focus group protocols were translated into Spanish. English versions of each protocol can be found in Appendices B & C.

Both focus group protocols were piloted with parents and teens in Sacramento, CA. The pilot was analyzed for timing, quality of responses to questions, pace and flow of questions, logistics and general participant reactions. Piloting the protocols proved valuable, as several improvements to the wording and order of focus group questions were made as a result of reviewing the audiotape and facilitator reflections from the pilot groups.

Focus Group Procedure

Focus groups began with facilitators presenting the background information from the protocol script. After this information was presented, participants were asked to introduce themselves and answer some "ice breaker" questions. At the conclusion of each focus group discussion, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire. (A summary of the findings from this questionnaire can be found on page 17 of this report). Once questionnaires were completed, parents received a \$45 gift certificate and teens

a \$15 gift certificate to popular local merchants as an incentive for participating in the study.

Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and loosely followed the schedule described in Table 1.

Focus Group Facilitation

Focus group facilitators were selected based on their experience in conducting focus groups, their race/ethnicity, and language skills. To help focus group participants feel most at ease, we matched an African-American focus group facilitator to African-American focus group participants and a Latina facilitator (fully bilingual) to focus groups with Latino participants.⁸ Both facilitators received a two-hour telephone training on the PCC focus group study. During this training, facilitators reviewed how the overarching focus group research questions link to specific focus group questions, how to prioritize questions, focus group facilitation techniques and logistical procedures (e.g., scheduling, travel, etc.).

Focus Group Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

A systematic and analytic process was used to collect, analyze and interpret the data obtained in this study. Data analysis involved multiple project staff including: project co-directors who served as focus group note takers, data coders, data interpreters and writers; focus group facilitators who offered valuable post focus group reactions; and research assistants who analyzed questionnaire data and transcribed audio tapes. Much of this staff was bilingual (English-

TABLE 1: Typical PCC Focus Group Agenda

Time	Agenda
30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greetings/Welcome • Sharing of a meal • Signing of assent forms (see Appendix D)
5-10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background on focus group study" • Introductions
75 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group questions and discussion
5-10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group demographic questionnaire • Distribution of gift certificates

⁸ Focus group facilitators chosen for this project included Pamela Wilson, MSW, a private consultant from OxonHill, MD and Trish Moylan Torruella, MPH, a private consultant from Hartford, CN.

Spanish). There were five steps involved in this process, starting from collecting data and ending with summarizing the findings of the focus group data. These steps are described below.

Step One: Collecting the Data

Each focus group was documented using three methods. First, each focus group was recorded using an audiotape recorder. Second, focus group assistants (PCC BRIDGE staff) simultaneously took notes of each focus group so that the facilitator could be free to facilitate discussion. And third, both the facilitator and PCC BRIDGE staff members met immediately following each focus group to record impressions of the discussion. Note taking and the post focus group debriefs turned out to be valuable assets, as the audio taping of one Long Island parent focus group failed despite equipment checks.

Step Two: Transcribing the Data

Each audio tape was transcribed by ETR research assistants using Microsoft Word. Bilingual assistants were used to transcribe Spanish audio tapes. Over 500+ pages of text resulted from the transcription of the 15 audio tapes. Each focus group transcription was then photocopied on a unique color of paper to help distinguish them.

Step Three: Coding the Data

Initially, project co-directors assigned themselves two transcripts to review and hand code for themes. They then met to compare each others' coding and to develop a single list of codes by combining alike themes and assigning uniform names. Code names were then assigned abbreviations to make the coding process a bit easier. Once this code list was established, the co-directors hand-coded all 15 focus group transcripts as well as focus group field notes, discussing the addition of new themes and codes as they arose in the interpretation. Ultimately, 45 individual codes were developed and used in combination with each other to capture the major concepts expressed in both the teen and parent focus groups.

Step Four: Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

The "long table" method of focus group data analysis as described in *Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results* by Richard A. Krueger

(1998)⁹ was used to study the hand-coded qualitative data in a systematic way. Once the data were coded, quotes were cut from transcripts, sorted, and fastened to labeled folders. Each folder of quotes was then studied together by both co-directors in face-to-face meetings to bring a broad perspective on the meaning and interpretation of quotes as well as to maintain a checks-and-balance on interpretations and perceptions of significance.

Interpretations of these quotes and estimates of their significance in terms of frequency and intensity were entered into a matrix. The finished matrix comprised a 33-page document with a total of 319 entries spanning 45 different themes or concepts.

Step Five: Summarizing Findings

With the majority of the data interpretation completed, each of the project co-directors was assigned about half of the 45 major concepts to summarize in narrative form for this report. Their narrative summaries were guided by the questions listed below.

1. Does the data support, contradict or add to literature review findings?
2. Does the data point to something unique about Latino and/or African-American families or does it point to aspects of parenting and connectedness that are cross-cultural or "universal"?
3. Does the data support something specific to mothers, or to fathers?
4. Does the data suggest agreement or disagreement between parents or teens on a particular issue?
5. Are there different interpretations of the data that result in conflicting findings?
6. What is notable about the frequency or intensity of particular themes suggested by the data?
7. What are our general impressions?

The thematic interpretations of the data were summarized and the additional sections of this report were written. Individually written drafts were reviewed by both of the project co-directors to ensure agreement. The draft was then

⁹ Krueger, R.A. (1998). *Analyzing & reporting focus group results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

edited by ETR copy editors and key focus group study members including our focus group facilitators (Trish Moylan Torruella and Pamela Wilson) and ETR's Senior Qualitative Research Scientist, Michelle Bliesner. Final revisions were made, and the report was proof read, formatted and printed.

Study Limitations

There are some limitations to our focus group study that the project team would like to acknowledge and make explicit. First, though we attempted to obtain a sample representative of all geographic regions, this goal proved impossible within the scope of the study. As can be seen from our list of focus group locations, California and the Mid-Atlantic states are well-represented. The southern United States is represented by our focus groups in Miami, FL, which could be argued, is not a good representation of the region known as "the South," or the "Deep South." Our 16 focus group locations fail to represent New England, the Midwest, the Southwest, the Rocky Mountain States or the Pacific Northwest.

A look at the demographics of our study sample reveals that the study sampled African-American populations much more heavily than Latinos. The demographics also show that the study sample favored mothers and female guardians over fathers and male guardians by more than two to one. Furthermore, 100% of the fathers or male guardians we spoke to were African-American. This means, regrettably, that the voice of Latino fathers is entirely absent from the study.

It should also be acknowledged that our identification of the parents and teens in this study as "low income," "economically disadvantaged," or "economically challenged" requires some explanation of our method for determining this status. We did not ask focus group parents or teens to report family income. We determined that this reporting entailed some potential problems that could limit its validity. Some of these perceived problems included: parents reporting individual income and not household income, an inability to translate household income figures into an actual "standard of living" measurement and the likelihood that teens do not know parents' individual or household incomes. Instead, we chose to assess the economic conditions of our study groups by looking at income data from the census tied to the

neighborhoods in which they live. Specifically, we asked participants to identify their zip codes, and then looked at income data from these locations in relation to commonly accepted standards for living in poverty or near poverty. Thus, while we can say with a degree of certainty that most of our participants live in economically challenged neighborhoods, we cannot determine the exact SES of our study population with a high degree of certainty. This SES analysis and relevant statistics can be found on page 18 of this report.

Lastly, we have to acknowledge one limitation to the study resulting from the use of audio tape recording. Despite procedures used to ensure the completeness and quality of focus group audiotapes, technical difficulties resulted in the failure of our project team to capture one entire focus group on audio tape and portions of audio were missing from two other focus groups. Where portions of focus group audio are missing, those commentaries are almost entirely missing from our data analysis and interpretation. The focus group for which audio is entirely missing is represented in this report by other documentation including: 1) handwritten notes taken by the PCC BRIDGE staff member who was assisting that focus group 2) reflections of both the assistant and the facilitator about the focus group that were discussed and documented immediately following it, and 3) an additional written reflection from the facilitator reconstructing her impressions of the group. This additional account was written and sent to PCC BRIDGE project staff approximately two weeks after the focus group was held.

About the Study Sample

Background

In order to provide a more accurate description of our total focus group study sample, our team designed a short anonymous questionnaire for focus group participants to complete at the end of each focus group discussion. The questionnaire included both open-ended and close-ended questions related to gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, family structure and income. Our team chose to administer the questionnaire at the end of the focus group (before gift certificates were distributed) in order to establish some rapport with focus group participants before asking them to answer personal

questions about themselves. We thought administering the questionnaires at the end of the focus group would also allow for less interference and more comfort and honesty during the focus group discussion. Both parent and teen questionnaires were translated into Spanish for our Latino focus group participants. However, one Latino teen group preferred to complete the questionnaire in English. Copies of the teen and parent questionnaires (English versions) are found in Appendices E & F.

Teen Questionnaires

A total of 54 teens from six focus groups completed questionnaires and their ages ranged from 11 to 18 years with a mean age of 13.7 years and a mode of 13 years. A summary of other characteristics describing our teen sample is found below.

Gender. Our study included more male teens (32) than female teens (22). One local focus group coordinator manages an after-school program for young men and recruited focus group participants from this program. This likely explains the gender imbalance.

Ethnicity. Of the 54 teens that completed the survey, 14 identified as Latino/Hispanic/Chicano.

Race. Our question about race told us that 34 teens identified as "Black" or "African-American," 3 identified as "White," and 21 identified as "Other." Because some teens chose two response categories in answering this question, the total number (58) is greater than the actual number of participants (54). We suspect that a large number of the participants who chose "Other" also identify as "Latino/Hispanic/Chicano." The questionnaire may not have been as clear as it could have been in distinguishing ethnicity from race.

Immigration. The majority of the teen focus group participants were born in the United States (44), while 10 were born outside the United States, emigrating to this country between 1990 and 2003 from the following countries: Mexico (6), Germany (1), Ecuador (1), Bahamas (1), and Honduras (1).

Siblings. Teen focus group participants reported having a range of siblings from zero to six. The majority of participants had one sibling

(20), followed by two siblings (12), and no siblings (11).

Family Structure. The majority of the teen focus group participants live full time with one family (88.9%), while just a few report living with more than one family or living with foster parents. Almost 6% of participants reported not living with either biological parent.

Other Adults Who Care for Teens. Of the 54 teens completing this questionnaire, 22 reported that adults other than parents help care for them in their homes. Responses to this question included, but were not limited to: grandmothers (15), aunts (9), cousins (4) and uncles (3).

Parent Questionnaires

A total of 78 of the 81 parents (mothers, fathers and grandmothers) from eight focus groups completed questionnaires and their ages ranged from 24 to 71 years, with the mean age being 39.0 years. A summary of other characteristics describing our parent sample is found below.

Gender. The majority of parent focus group participants were female (55) and the remaining male (23).

Ethnicity. Of the 78 parents that completed the survey, 21 identified as Latino/Hispanic/Chicano.

Race. Our question about parents' race told us that 53 of them identified as "Black" or African-American," 10 identified as "White" and 13 identified as "Other." We suspect that a large number of those participants that chose "Other" also identify as "Latino/Hispanic/Chicano." The questionnaire may not have been as clear as could have been in distinguishing ethnicity from race.

Immigration. The majority of the parent focus group participants were born in the United States (55), while 19 were born outside the continental United States emigrating to this country between 1973 and 2003 from the following countries: Mexico (10), Honduras (5), Puerto Rico (2), Bahamas (1) and Venezuela (1).

Parents' Children. Parent focus group participants reported an average of 2.8 children, and the average age of all participants' children was 12.3 years. Each parent participant had at least

one child between the ages of 11-15 years of age. The majority of participants are parenting their biological children (88.8%), while 11.2% parent non-biological children.

Family Structure. The largest sub-group of our participant sample identified as being a single parent living with children (41.3%), followed by two parents living with children (32.0%), a single parent living with an adult partner and children (12.0%), and a single parent not living with children (9.3%).

Parents' Education. Parents reported a range of educational backgrounds from no formal education to completion of graduate school. A little over a third (37%) reported having some high school or less, while 20% reported completing high school, 24% some college or junior college, and 18.7% completed college or graduate study.

Income of Focus Group Participants

We were aiming to talk to parents and teens who are experiencing economic challenges in their family lives. Our sense from talking to the parents and teens during focus groups is that our participants came from a fairly wide representation of economic conditions, but that the majority of them were coping with economic challenges. Many of the parents we spoke to were successfully supporting their families, but were working long hours at low pay, sometimes in multiple jobs, to make their finances work.

In terms of measuring the economic status of our focus group participants, we did not collect income data directly, making it difficult to describe with certainty the economic conditions in which our focus group study sample live. We did not ask focus group participants to report their income. We thought focus group participants would feel uncomfortable with such a question and we were also fairly certain that there would be reliability problems with income reports, including the fact that most, if not all, teens would not be able to report accurately on family income. So instead we asked participants to provide their zip code and then looked at median "household income" and the "poverty average" for these zip codes using 2000 Census data.

The average median household income of the zip codes reported by our focus group participants (78 parents and 54 teens) was \$36,390. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the 2004 poverty threshold for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states was \$18,850. While this puts the income of our participants at almost double the poverty level, other factors need to be considered in trying to use this census data to determine SES. At an average of 2.8 children, most of our focus group families were at or above the size of four, and we know that the largest sub-group of them were single parents. Furthermore, we also know that more than half (57%) have a high school education or less. We can infer some general limits to their wage-earning ability resulting from the limits to their education. Furthermore, an average of 31.4% of the families living in the neighborhoods represented by the zip codes reported by focus group participants live in poverty. This fact alone gives many of our participants, statistically, an almost one-in-three chance of being in or near poverty.

■ Section 2: Basic Views on PCC

The primary aim of this study was to uncover the views of economically challenged African-American and Latino parents and teens on parent-child connectedness within their families and the families of their peers. More specifically, we wanted to learn about the factors they believe contribute to PCC (especially as children move into adolescence), the barriers they believe impede or decrease PCC, and the programs and/or community stakeholders that could be of assistance in helping families struggling with connectedness to succeed.

This section of our report presents participants' broad perspectives on PCC, including how both parents and teens understand and characterize the concept, what parents identify as good parenting practices, and what parents and teens perceive as the family outcomes resulting from the presence of connectedness. Following this "Basic Views of PCC" section, there is a more in-depth exploration of 31 themes related to how parents and teens talked about parent-child connectedness, how it is established, and how it is maintained.

How Parents Characterize PCC

At the beginning of our focus groups, we asked parents the question "What does parent-child connectedness mean to you?" Our analysis of parents' answers to this basic question yielded 14 general views of PCC, some of which characterize PCC and some that are indicators that PCC is present in families:

- 1) Trust
- 2) Verbal communication
- 3) Intuitive, non-verbal communication
- 4) Children recognizing parents' adult roles and responsibilities

- 5) Children recognizing the difference between their parent's role as "a parent" and their parent's role as a "friend"
- 6) Teens want to be with parents all the time
- 7) Parents feel, and can express, love for their children even though they "want to kill them"
- 8) Parents are able to obtain help/support from their children
- 9) Parents feel like PCC allows their child to feel/express their closeness to them despite any societal expectations to the contrary that are specific to their gender
- 10) Teens feeling happy despite typical family conflict
- 11) Teen idolization of parent(s)
- 12) Loyalty - teen will always defend parent
- 13) Teen belief in their parents' advice
- 14) Teens acknowledging the credibility of their parents' knowledge/experience

Most of these 14 characteristics/indicators are represented in some way in the 31 specific themes that we identify in our analysis and interpretation of focus group transcripts. Indicators such as trust, verbal and non-verbal communication, the balance of parenting roles between being a parent and being a friend, parents' unconditional love for their teenage children, and teens listening to and giving credence to parents' sharing of advice and experience are all prominent in the main body of the report.

However, parents also identified some general characteristics and indicators of PCC that did not merit their own sections in this report. Although we chose not to feature these characteristics and indicators, they will resonate with anyone who has ever been a parent. These less prominent characteristics or indicators of PCC

included: when children want to be with parents all the time, when parents are able to obtain help/support from their children and one father's feeling that PCC allows his children to feel and express their closeness to him despite any societal expectations to the contrary that are specific to their gender.

How Teens Characterize PCC

We also started our focus groups with teens by asking the basic question of what PCC means to them. Teen focus group participants offered their own views of the definition, characteristics and indicators of the presence of PCC in their families. Some of these views were the same for teens as for parents. For example, teens put trust near the top of their list of conditions necessary for, and indicative of, PCC. Teens, probably because they are typically on the lower end of parent-child power relations, emphasized the mutuality necessary for them to feel like trust was in place. Another defining characteristic of PCC mentioned frequently by teens as well as parents was open communication, or feeling like they could talk to their parents about anything.

Overall, six of the views of teens on the characteristics and indicators of PCC matched their parents' answers to the basic question about what parent-child connectedness means:

These characteristics are discussed among the 31 specific themes that form the main body of the report.

Teens also offered a few characteristics and indicators of PCC that were not mentioned by parents. Teens' comments on this topic amounted to three additional characteristics or indicators of PCC besides those mentioned by parents:

- 1) Feeling happy despite experiencing typical levels of family conflict
- 2) Idolization of parent(s)
- 3) Loyalty - teen will always defend parent

These characteristics and indicators do not receive specific attention in the main body of the report. While they are significant in that they were mentioned by teens and not by parents, they were not mentioned with sufficient frequency and intensity to deserve individual attention.

Views on Characteristics and Indicators of PCC	
Teen version	Parent version
1) Trust	Trust
2) Open communication	Verbal communication Intuitive, non-verbal communication
3) Teens being able to recognize that their parents love them and want the best for them even when the parents do things teens don't like Teens being invested in parents' happiness even if it involves things the teen doesn't like	Feeling and expressing love for their children even when they want to kill them
4) Parents and teens spending lots of time/going everywhere together	Teens wanting to be with their parents all the time
5) Confidence in a parents' ability to provide help even in the face of difficult issues	Being able to obtain help/support from their children
6) Belief in their parents' advice Acknowledging the credibility of their parents' knowledge/experience	Teen belief in their parents' advice Teens acknowledging the credibility of their parents' knowledge/experience

Definition of Parenting/Identification of Good Parenting Practices

Parents and teens often discussed PCC in terms of good parenting or good parenting practices. Participants' comments often implied or suggested that two outcomes of good parenting are a good relationship and a strong, positive bond between parents and teens. So by looking at participants views of good parenting, we obtain another window from which to view their understanding of connectedness.

During the analysis of our data, we identified 49 different quotes that we saw as definitions of good parenting or the identification of good parenting practices. We were able to sort these 49 quotes into 18 items:

- 1) Communication
- 2) Trust
- 3) Openness
- 4) Autonomy
- 5) Understanding
- 6) Balancing being a parent with being a friend
- 7) Discipline
- 8) Knowledge of the developmental stages of children
- 9) Providing support to your child/teen
- 10) Teaching
- 11) Giving advice
- 12) Monitoring
- 13) Modeling
- 14) Showing love and affection
- 15) Finding support for yourself as a parent
- 16) Managing/being in control of anger
- 17) Providing for the physical safety of your children
- 18) Following through on what you say you're going to do

The first 15 of these themes appear in their own sections in the main body of the report. The last three items in the list (in italics) did not emerge with sufficiently high frequency or intensity in

to receive individual treatment in the "Important Themes" section of this report.

Outcomes that Result from the Presence of PCC in Families

In our previous publication, we called parent-child connectedness the "super-protector." This name was coined on the basis of the body of research that has associated PCC with a multitude of positive outcomes for children and teens, including: fewer early, unintended pregnancies, less sexual risk-taking behavior, reduction in aggressive and violent behavior, prevention or reduction of substance use or alcohol use, less delinquent behavior, better school attendance, improved academic performance and better mental health. Focus group participants gave us their perspectives on what the presence of connectedness between parents and children brings to their families and what its absence takes away.

Wanting to know what family outcomes African-American and Latino parents and teens would attribute to the presence of PCC, we asked them the question, "In what ways do you think family closeness affects the lives of teenagers?" Parents identified the positive effects of the presence of PCC as well as the negative effects of its absence.

They generated 17 positive effects of PCC on the parent-child dynamic or the quality of family life:

- 1) Easy and good communication
- 2) The capacity to negotiate rules, specifically curfews
- 3) Improved relationships between siblings, even if they have different parents
- 4) Increased parental trust and autonomy granting towards teens
- 5) Feelings of relief on the part of teens that come with trusting/being close to parents
- 6) A stronger sense of family/social capital
- 7) Parents feeling generally supported by children in a way that gives them strength
- 8) The dissipation of negative feelings quickly and easily

- 9) Teens spending more time with parents and thereby having less time or opportunity to get into trouble
- 10) Teens wanting to exhibit good behavior
- 11) Teens having good or positive intentions towards parent(s)
- 12) Teens feeling happy
- 13) Teens defending parent(s) against detractors
- 14) Advancement of a child's goals, morals and principles
- 15) Teens emulating parents and absorbing their modeling and messages
- 16) Parents and teens understanding of each others' cues better
- 17) Increased family capacity to work out problems/resolve conflict

A list of 14 items represents participants' views of the effects of not having PCC within the family. Significantly more of these responses came from teen focus group participants than from parents:

- 1) Not feeling cared for or loved
- 2) Not feeling welcome in the home
- 3) Contributes to problems at school
- 4) Children/teens acting out/misbehaving in school
- 5) Children/teens not wanting any contact with a parent
- 6) Children/teens feeling anger and/or resentment towards parent(s)
- 7) Children/teens feeling the desire to control the parent's behavior or silence the parent
- 8) Children/teens leaving the room or the house to get away from the parent(s)
- 9) Children/teens avoiding contact with parent(s)
- 10) Children/teens wanting to move away from parent(s) permanently
- 11) Children/teens getting into fights at school or on the streets
- 12) Children/teens developing poorer social and communication skills

- 13) Reduction in children/teens' ability to have fun
- 14) Parents feeling anger, jealousy or resentment towards other parents who have connectedness with their children

Two issues deserve specific comment regarding this list. First, the fact that a large percentage of these items came from teen participants suggests something important about PCC. It suggests that parents may often believe that there is connectedness with their teenage children when the teen does feel connected. This evidence points to the importance of mutuality, or what we call "bidirectionality," as a characteristic or indicator of the presence of PCC. We postulate that bidirectionality is an important characteristic to assess when looking for PCC in a parent-child relationship. If the perception that PCC exists in a relationship is not mutual, or shared by both sides, then it is questionable whether that connection exists functionally. Specific focus group findings on bidirectionality are presented in a separate section in the main body of the report.

Second, when discussing the negative consequences of not having PCC, it is important to highlight the comments of some teens about parents who physically hit them as well as parents who communicate in "an angry way." The reaction of teens to these parental behaviors was overwhelmingly negative. This contrasts with some parent participants who saw this approach to discipline as acceptable or even necessary parenting practices and, in some cases, described them as a positive way of "teaching values" or "building character" in their children. Teens generally believed that these behaviors have detrimental effects, such as "teaching teens to hit their own kids," and teens "wanting to leave the house to get away." Furthermore, as can be seen in more detail in the section of this report on discipline, our focus group teens see corporal punishment as contributing negatively to their feelings of connectedness with their parents, a situation that presumably results in one or more of the 14 effects listed above.

Finally, these 14 items are not treated individually in the main body of this report. Instead, the reader will notice them appearing as part of quotes by participants who are experiencing difficulty maintaining connectedness as well as in our interpretation of participants' comments.

■ Section 3: Important Themes

Introduction

This section of the report comprises the main analysis and interpretation of our focus group data. It is based on a 33-page data table consisting of our analyses and interpretations, references to specific quotes or commentaries that support the analysis and cross references between related themes. The finished data table contains a total of 319 entries spanning 45 different themes or concepts. Through the process of converting this data table into a narrative report, portions were merged or dropped so that the final report contains not 45, but 31 themes. For organizational purposes, we have grouped these 31 themes into four categories: Relationship Building Themes, Teen Themes, Parent Themes and Household/Family Themes. Many themes are introduced with a definition and then supported with the presentation of quotes from parent and/or teen focus groups. Interpretation of quotes by study leaders and implications for program development are provided within the section dedicated to each theme.

Finally, the presentation of quotes from focus group participants requires explanation. It is our understanding that there are two "schools of thought" on the presentation of quotes. One says that quotes should go in "raw," with all of the pauses, "ums" and other qualities of oral communication. Another "school" says that it is appropriate to edit out many of these elements because conversational speech looks wrong in print and implies a lack of intelligence or articulateness on the part of the person(s) being quoted. In our report we have attempted to strike a compromise between these two schools. We have eliminated many pauses, "ums" and other colloquialisms when they seemed extraneous to what the speaker was attempting to communicate. Concurrently, we have attempted to preserve the idiom of focus group participants as it

often reflects important cultural and linguistic contexts for their comments.

Relationship Building Themes

Communication

Communication was talked about in every focus group as a requirement of parent-child connectedness. This finding did not surprise study leaders as the concept of communication is found frequently in the literature and also in our survey and in-depth interviews with practitioners. Communication is a broad concept, which can be broken down into three elements: 1) sending messages in an effective way, 2) receiving those messages, and 3) understanding those messages. Focus group participants talked about these three elements of communication as well as the importance of creating an open and honest atmosphere for communication to occur. Parents felt strongly that their children should feel comfortable about talking to them about any subject at any time. However, they also admitted to feeling discomfort when talking about some sensitive subjects such as sex or drugs. Communication, by definition, must be bidirectional and several parents talked about wanting their teens to take more initiative in communicating with their parents. Most importantly, both parents and teens appeared to really value effective communication - a value that program leaders can use to anchor programs designed to strengthen parent-child connectedness.

The theme of communication is presented in this report under five subsections including: Unconditional Availability, Open and Honest Communication, Starting the Conversation, Listening and Difficult Subjects.

Unconditional Availability

Many focus group parents stressed the importance of letting their children know that they could come to them to talk about "anything" at "any time." Parents talked with pride about their ability to create an atmosphere where their children can talk to them about any subject - no matter how difficult. Several parents offered their insight on how parents can create an open communication atmosphere. They suggested that parents: not yell, not get visibly angry or lose their temper, avoid blaming or judging their child while still making it clear that there might be consequences for unacceptable behavior, ask for the child's input about what the consequences should be for breaking rules/misbehaving, demonstrate willingness to talk over an issue, listen actively, continuously remind children that you are available and open, express confidence to children that together they can resolve any situation, continuously remind children that you love them, not pressure children, and letting them come to you in "their own time." Several of these suggestions for creating an open communication atmosphere are found in the parent quotes below.

"I have just always let them know that no matter what it is, even if it's something that they think is displeasing for me to hear that there is never something that they can't tell me - never - even if it's something that you may know that I may not like, or even wrong, you always know that you can always come to me and always talk to me. I will never just, you know, just start lighting into you."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*



[His daughter said] "Daddy I got something to tell you. And you might not like it, right?" I [the father] said, "Well it's not whether I'll like it or accept it or not. I'm just glad you want to tell me. What is it?" She said, "Well, I had sex." And my first question was, "Well, when you had sex did you use protection?"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Creating an atmosphere where teens feel that they can talk to their parents about anything

appears to have several positive outcomes including: children admitting to their parents when they've done something wrong, opportunities for parents to better monitor their children, opportunities for parents to coach, advise or counsel their children, parents and children feeling more connected to each other, and parents and children not "holding on to things" that could lead to tension in the relationship down the road. When asked about how her son responds to her when she tells him he can talk to her about anything, a mother from Sacramento said:

"I think almost like a relief. I know that right now, we have the closeness that we do have because he knows that he can come to me and talk about whatever it is that he's dealing with or what's going on around him in his surroundings. And I appreciate that. And it's just like you know, I can talk to my mom. And I appreciate that because I'd rather him come to me than find out from the neighbor or somebody else's mom. I appreciate that."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Although many parents said they valued an atmosphere of unconditional availability and openness with their children, it was clear that some parents did not have the skills to create such an atmosphere. On the other hand, several parents talked about being aware of their tempers and how getting angry can damage the open communication atmosphere. These parents attributed their temper to feeling tired or cranky, being in a bad mood, working long hours, and hormones (i.e., menopause). One parent from Sacramento showed remarkable awareness about the effects of her "temper," explaining that it often puts a damper on communication, and her children start to "clam up."

"... I've noticed lately that I've been working so much that I'm starting to get a temper. I don't quite yet have a temper, a little one, and now I'm a little short because I'm so tired. I'm not a screamer, but I'm starting to get a little snappy, and they're starting to be like [what's wrong with mom] which is kind of putting a damper on communication because they're getting a little scared... When I get that way, they start

clamming up. And so that's why I'm saying to keep it open I have to watch my temper."

Mother, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Several teens expressed hesitation about communicating with their parents because of nervousness, anxiety or fear their parents might become upset. When a teen from Sacramento was asked why he was nervous about talking to his Dad, he said, "He might get mad or something." One teen from Miami felt that she had to censor herself when talking to her parents:

"People know their parents, they know their reactions, you know what you're allowed to say and what you're not, so it's of course our convenience what we say or not, so if it's something that we know that it's not going to be accepted, we don't say it because we ... it's not the smart thing to do."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

Other teens talked about avoiding communication with their parents out of a concern for burdening or bothering them. Some teens demonstrated a great deal of empathy in their ability to recognize that their parents are tired and stressed from working and taking care of the family.

Participant: My mom, she's tired and then she's stressing over things like, I don't know but she be stressing a lot because she got to go a lot of places, do a lot of stuff.

Facilitator: So when she's stressing, what do you usually do?

Participant: I leave. I talk to her sometimes and sometimes I just go outside, or ...

Facilitator: Get away?

Participant: Yes, usually I stay in and talk to her, but usually she's tired so I don't want to be like in her face.

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

One parent from Sacramento commented that it is difficult or impossible to do the work necessary to maintain an environment of "unconditional communication" when parents are not

getting the "down time" they need to recharge their energy. Sometimes parents need a respite from the energy it takes to be attentive to their kids. This seemed especially true for African-American parents who are single and/or work long hours and are simply fatigued after a day's work. These parents may not always have the energy required to listen or problem solve with their children. Two parents (one from Miami and one from Sacramento) talked about acknowledging their fatigue instead of trying to ignore it. They communicate openly with their children about a need to take a break but also assure their children that they will respond to their needs in the near future.

"I'm not feeling good, I need to rest for an hour because I have so much stress. After an hour and you let me rest... we can do what you want and she says, 'OK Mommy.' So then I rest for an hour, and I recoup and feel strong again."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

Open and Honest Communication

Communicating openly and honestly was another characteristic of effective communication expressed across focus groups. This concept is similar to unconditional availability to communicate about any subject, but refers more to how communication is delivered rather than to the atmosphere created. In order to achieve true connectedness, many focus group parents acknowledged the need for parents to expect and practice open and honest communication with their teens. For example, parents talked about the importance of: acknowledging when they think their children are right about something, being "straight up," or not shying away from saying your child is wrong about something. For example, one father from Baltimore said:

"If she come to me with a valid point about something and I'm without a leg to stand on, then I'll say well you know you right and I'll talk to her about that. You know, but if she's wrong, I'll tell her she's wrong."

Father, African-American focus group, Baltimore

A teen from a Sacramento focus group said:

"Every time I have a football game he be like, man even if I'm doing bad on the field he'll bust me out on the field. Just screaming, "Get him out the game." He'll bust me in front of everybody. And if I did have a good game he'll congratulate me, tell me I had a good game."

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Other tips for developing open and honest communication include: reinforcing to the child that it is safe for them to talk to you about anything, praising the child for sharing, demonstrating a willingness to act constructively on information that children/teens disclose, displaying comfort around issues that might be particularly difficult for children/teens (e.g. sex, "street life"), and not showing the shock parents may feel at hearing something disturbing. A mother from Long Island talked about the importance of not letting shock get in the way of parent-teen communication:

"I don't want to say the wrong thing either and I don't want to make them feel inhibited from telling me, so I have to really maintain an attitude such as I come out shocking but then again I don't try to show it and I just listen. I mean you're going to be shocked...I but I want to continue to hear them out because that shock might stop the whole conversation and then I don't have anything to go on."

Mother, African-American focus group, Long Island

Teens and parents reported several behaviors that act as barriers to open and honest communication. One teen from Miami was especially articulate about barriers that her mother imposes that discourage her from sharing openly and honestly. The teen reported that her mother puts constant pressure her to share. This pressure does not feel good to the teen and actually discourages her from talking to her mom.

"...she's like you don't tell me anything, I'm supposed to be your friend. I'm your mother! ...there's going to be some things that maybe you feel more comfortable telling to a friend or maybe someone else who's not your mom and

she's like no, you're not my daughter if you don't tell me things."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

One teen from Long Island expressed how troubled she was when, in 5th grade, she openly and honestly communicated to her grandmother [her guardian] that boys were touching her, and her grandmother didn't do anything about it.

"...when I was younger I went to my grandmother and told her that some boy tried to touch me or whatever ... so I went and told her and she was like oh, it will be alright, he probably liked you or whatever, and I'm like well aren't you going to do something about it? And if he does like me, that doesn't mean he has a right to put his hands on me or to touch me. She'll say something like that. I'm like can't you do something. It was no help."

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

Our interpretation of this teen's story is that parents need to demonstrate that they are going to do something with the information that their teens give them. Responding to what a teen tells you aids in that teen feeling supported, safe and willing to share again in the future.

Other barriers to open and honest communication included: parents not disclosing information, talking about something that makes the child afraid of the parent, a child not feeling accepted by a parent, parent prejudices and biases (e.g., homophobia), parents yelling, parents using insults or profanity, parents talking about sensitive subjects in front of other people, and a child feeling censored. One teen from Miami talked about how she wished she had known the truth about her father's mental illness so she could have shown more understanding towards him. This reflected her desire for her other parent to have been open and honest about his condition.

"Parents sometimes they keep thing from you because they say they don't want to hurt you, but at this age, I know we're not grown and maybe we can't fix things, but we want to know."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

One mother from Long Island admitted that she feels some ambivalence towards establishing open and honest communication with her child.

“You see I’m so busy that I have that protective part of me like oh my gosh, they’re all grown up, but now I’m like alright, I can hear you know what I mean and step-by-step letting the door open to hear. So I think it’s a matter of us being even more receptive because sometimes we want to communicate with them but sometimes we’re afraid of the things we might hear too.”

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Starting the Conversation

Starting a conversation with a teen may be a more strategic process than we originally thought. Teens may not be so willing to start conversations with their parents, so it may be the parent who needs to initiate communication. Both parents and teens talked about how parents could use very general questions, especially about school, as a way of opening up communication. This approach seems to work well because it gives the teens an opening while leaving some of the choice about what to talk about up to them. One mother from LI described how she can sense that something is on her child’s mind, so she uses a technique of asking her child different questions in different ways in order to encourage/give the child permission to talk.

“I’ll just ask him if everything is okay, how’s school, you know, like I let them know every once in awhile if there’s anything you want to discuss or talk about, you know you can talk to us. You can talk to me and I will listen.”

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Asking teens questions about their day or school needs to be done in a way that does not feel like pressure to the teen. Several teens reported reacting negatively to their parents asking questions, especially “too many questions” about their lives, or reported that their parents sometimes “want to force communication.” Forcing questions may threaten teens’ sense of autonomy and privacy by taking away

their ability to choose what they want to tell their parents and what they would rather keep private. One teen from Miami made a good comparison about the style of question/asking between her mom and dad:

“My mom’s normally like, she asks me questions and when I tell her things, she sits there asking questions and she asks more questions...Like this happened at school - “How did it happen? Oh my God was everything okay?” With my dad, I just tell him and he’s like, “Do you want to talk more about it?” “No, it’s okay, I’m okay.” With my mom, she wants to know everything that goes on.”

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

On the flip side, one teen from Miami, when asked what parents should do to elicit communication from their teens, said that they should keep trying to ask questions.

Participant: Well, like when you in the car driving, they like yeah, uh huh, well... What happened today at school? Nothing. And they just stop right there.

Facilitator: So what, what would, what would you like her to say - What happened today at school? And then the teenager says Nothin’, then what should the parent say?

Participant; What you mean Nothin’?

Facilitator: So just ask, just keep, sort of probing?

Participant: Just keep asking, like keep talking.

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

Several parents reported that having to ask their children to share makes it more difficult for them to communicate. It appears that their efforts to talk with their children when there is no response feels like rejection, and repeated attempts to get their teen to open up feels frustrating. An indication that parent-child connectedness is bidirectional surfaces again here. In order to develop PCC, teens need to understand the fulfillment that parents experience from hearing their children tell them about their day or activities:

"I ask her what's wrong. Do you have problems you want to talk about and she remains tight lipped. She says nothing, nothing, nothing."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Many Latino families value interdependence and sharing within a family.¹⁰ The idea that teens are becoming adults and may want to hold some of their thoughts and activities to themselves may threaten this cultural norm. It is our belief that teens who feel pressured to be more autonomous by what they see modeled with friends, school and the media may find coping with parent's more traditional expectations of sharing and communicating about personal information a challenge.

In addition to asking questions, both parents and teens reported a variety of techniques to open up communication. These techniques included: use of jokes and humor, telephoning parents at work to talk or connect, reading children's non-verbal cues indicating they want to talk, children knowing how to open up a constructive conversation without yelling or carrying on (i.e., talking in a way that your parent can hear), talking about topics the teen wants to discuss, parents learning each child's individual communication style, parents expressing concern and a willingness to talk after disciplining a child, parents being patient and giving children the time they need to answer a question or offer a comment, creating a physical environment conducive to communication by turning off the phone or closing doors, and keeping a teen's confidentiality.

Several teens from Sacramento talked about physical separation as being a barrier to communication with a parent, for example, family members staying in their own rooms, or a parent being at work, at a friend's house, or in jail.

"I mean there is no communication in my family 'cause I'm either in my room, my sisters in her room and my mom is either at work or at a friends' house so there really is no communication."

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Listening

Across focus groups, both parents and teens recognized the power of listening in building connection in their relationships. Several focus group parents talked about the value of "active listening" - that is listening without distractions and without interruption or judgment - in strengthening their relationships with their teen children. Listening can strengthen the connection parents have with their teens in several ways including: validating and acknowledging their children, letting their children know that they are important to the parent, understanding their children, and supporting and/or relieving the emotional burdens their children may be carrying. Listening also is a way in which parents can continually assess what is going with their children. This "assessment data" can be used later to help or support a child. Parents also commented that even if parents can only dedicate a short period of time of their day (e.g., five minutes) to "just listen" to their children, they are working toward connectedness. This type of attention tells the child that he/she is important to you. For example, one mother from Sacramento said:

"That you find time in the day, whether it's five minutes, to let them know that I'm stopping the world from spinning for five minutes to listen to you."

Mother, African-American focus group, Sacramento

One father from Baltimore suggested the therapeutic effects of active listening when he talked about the emotional burden some children feel when they have to hold things inside. Parents who can provide active listening can help to relieve this burden.

"Well mostly listening you know when he talk you know try to pay more close attention to what they have to say because, believe it or not, it's something they be trying to hold in. It makes them feel like they're outcasts, you know?"

Father, African-American focus group, Baltimore

¹⁰ Schuster, C. (2003). *Issues at a Glance: Latina Adolescent Health*. Washington DC: Advocates for Youth.

Teens from several focus groups talked about the absence of listening by their parents as a barrier to good communication and a detriment to connectedness. Teens talked about several behaviors that are detrimental to good listening including: parents talking over them, cutting them off, not reflecting or paraphrasing accurately - "twisting their words," not listening to them when they want to be listened to, giving "stupid" advice, and being tired/non-attentive. Below find quotes from teens in Miami and Sacramento who talk about their frustration associated with parents who do not listen well.

"Yeah, my dad when you talk to him about something, he just like starts talking and you can't even talk. Like they just start talking over you and over you."

*Teen African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

"Some parents just don't listen. And they don't want to listen to all you have to say like when you are talking too much, you really trying to stress what you got to say, and they cut you off or something."

Teen African-American focus group, Miami

Many parents may simply never have had training in active listening. Parents who cut off their children or give advice may have good intentions, i.e., wanting to help their child solve a problem, and may not be aware of the fact that sometimes a teen may just want to be validated or acknowledged. Parents who have never experienced the value of being listened to may find this kind of need difficult to understand. Parents who practice a more authoritarian style of parenting may also find active listening to be a challenge. Active listening requires that the listener honor the time taken by the person talking to express his/her ideas, thoughts and feelings - a practice that sometimes is in conflict with authoritarian parenting.

One Latina parent from San Diego demonstrated awareness about how her own lack of communication skills in general made it difficult for her to teach her son how to communicate.

"My son did not know how to communicate, and he told me 'Ma, how is it that you want me to communicate when you never taught me how...' I went to parenting classes and they taught me a little bit about how to

communicate with my kids, but it is still difficult for me."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Difficult Subjects

Several focus group parents talked about their challenges in communicating with or educating their children about difficult subjects. Examples of difficult subjects included: unintended pregnancy, teens wanting to know when the right time is to initiate sex, abstaining from sex, sex before marriage, children experiencing peer pressure, condoms, girlfriends and dating, puberty and menstruation, sexually transmitted diseases, drugs, and sexual orientation. Parents reported feeling uncomfortable (both physically and emotionally) in talking about some of these subjects, and at times not having the information they needed to answer questions or talk about a particular subject. Cultural norms and traditions may also add to the challenge of talking about these subjects, especially if the subject is considered "taboo" in the culture as one Latina mother from Miami described with regards to talking about sex.

Focus group parents offered several tips to other parents for talking about difficult subjects. One mother from Sacramento described how she tries to present factual information to her teenage son when talking about difficult topics. This approach helps to prevent him from thinking that for her it's a "moral thing," and not pay attention. Other parents talked about taking deep breaths, taking a break to collect their thoughts or recover from shock, and asking for support from a spouse or other trusted adult. One Latina mother from San Diego explained how she thinks that initiating the discussion of difficult subjects is important. To her, beginning to talk about any one difficult subject makes it easier, or "opens the door" to talking about other difficult subjects in the future. When these discussions become easier for both parents and children, this increased ease, in turn, removes a potential barrier to connectedness with children.

Parents developing the ability to talk about difficult subjects may require practice, which seems to be an area of communication skill development for which community-based organizations (CBOs) may be able to help parents. CBOs are well qualified to provide parents

with the factual information they need to know on potentially difficult topics as well as help them practice communicating this information to kids. Our focus group parents suggested that this type of training would be appreciated by parents.

Our past work has shown that communication is a complex and important factor associated with parent-child connectedness.¹¹ Although some practitioners may see parent-child communication and parent-child connectedness as synonymous, it is important to recognize that they are distinct constructs. Communication clearly plays a role in connectedness, but it is not the only factor associated with connectedness. Intervention activities that aim to enhance parent-child communication should address all three elements of communication and also recognize that communication is also not synonymous with education. In other words, giving parents the information they need to know about HIV prevention, for example, does not necessarily mean they can effectively communicate that information to their children. Learning how to relay messages and making sure these messages are heard and understood are critical. Being able to empathize with feelings that surface in these discussions is also a critical skill for parents to master.

Understanding

Understanding can be considered the third phase of the communication process and was characterized by focus group parents and teens as: empathizing with the other's point of view or feelings, interpreting body language as well as the words that come out of a person's mouth, feeling the attention of the person doing the listening, participating in a bidirectional teaching process, feeling like your individuality is being acknowledged, showing an interest in the other person and the things she/he likes, and remaining calm.

Several teens talked about how important it was to them that their parents make the effort to understand them from "their level" or their perspective. The absence of this understanding has a significant negative impact on teens' feelings of connectedness.

"I think the best relationship is for parents to actually understand even though we're kids, because again like parents sometimes don't understand because the way we act is so immature, and they're so much more mature that they're not at the same level, and they look at us and think, 'You're so stupid for thinking that.'"

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

An emotional need for recognition of the fact that living as a teen these days is difficult/challenging appears to be embedded in the desire to be understood. Some parents admitted that differences between their childhood experiences and those of their teens made it difficult for them to truly understand their children.

"It's nothing like when we were coming up. It's entirely different. I'm having problems really now trying to cope with this new generation."

Parent, African-American focus group, Miami

One teen talked about how a parent's age, generation, or the way he/she was raised can make it difficult for the parent to understand things from the teen's perspective.

"I just don't like the fact that she expects everything to be like how it was when she was growing up. And she's like, 'I did the same thing' ... and I'm like, 'No, you didn't because you're not living in our day and age' ... They didn't have to deal with guns coming into the school; they didn't deal with people bringing knives to the school, and all that. They didn't have to worry about people fighting."

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

One parent from Sacramento insisted that she did know what it was like to grow up today and that she went through similar things that her kids are going through. She felt that it was important that her child understand this fact.

¹¹Lezin, N., Rolleri, L., Bean, S. & Taylor, J. (2004) Parent-Child Connectedness: Implications for Research, Interventions and Positive Impacts on Adolescent Health. Scotts Valley, CA: ETR Associates. Page 59.

"I try to make him know I've been there, I've done this stuff, I've done what you've done. Just because you think that nowadays is different, it's not different; we did the same things you guys did. It's just a little different, you know what I mean?"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents' attempts to empathize with their teens by claiming to have had similar experiences seem to garner negative reactions from their teens. When a parent says, "I know what you're going through," even though it might be true, a teen may feel that the focus is taken off his or her experience and placed on the parent's experience. This lack of focus on the teen's experience and feelings occurs at exactly the time when the teen needs to feel heard and feel that the attention is on him or her.

"I can't stand when old people say, 'Oh I know what you're going through.' You don't. You don't know the dangers and everything that can happen out of nowhere."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

This type of parental reaction conflicts with a teen's intense need to see herself or himself as a unique individual, a classic aspect of adolescent development. When a parent says "I know what you're going through," it is like saying, "I'm just like you," or "you're just like me." A teen will hear this as a challenge to, or refutation of, the uniqueness of his or her experience.

Being able to empathize is a key component of understanding another person. Empathy requires that a person listen actively to the other's verbal and nonverbal cues and try to make a best guess about what the experience he/she is describing is really like for them. This process is a skill and like any skill, will get better with practice. Some parents and teens might very well benefit from workshop activities that guide them in developing this skill. Understanding another person's feelings and ideas is a form of intimacy that can lead to a greater sense of connectedness.

Availability

Many of the critical factors that contribute to PCC, for example shared activity, affection, communication, etc., require a set of resources - time, energy and attention from both parent and teen. We refer to this collective set of resources and the way they are marshaled by individual family members to create parent-child interactions as "availability." Although there are certainly some exceptions, younger children are usually "available" for the parent-child relationship. However, this availability can change over time as children enter adolescence, as evidenced by the following quote:

Facilitator: Is there anything that the teenagers may be doing that might keep the parents from feeling close to them?

Participant: Well, sometimes the kid just don't be home enough. Like certain days my mom will be like, 'Oh, how was the other day? I wanted to ask you something, but you was at your auntie's house.'

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

The teen quoted above went on to emphasize the point that the parent was not to blame for this situation. As a child becomes a teenager and seeks greater autonomy, his/her own availability to the parent decreases.

Barriers to Availability

Focus group parents, most of whom are dealing with economic challenges, are clearly short on time:

Facilitator: What do you think keeps parents from feeling close to their teenagers?

Participant: Sometimes parents just don't have enough time with their kids.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Even when parents have time, they often lack the energy to be fully present. Another Miami teen illustrates this condition in the following quote:

Facilitator: What do you think keeps

parents from feeling close to their teenagers?

Participant: When they get too tired. When they come from work, they probably had a long day so they go to sleep. Then, by the time they wake up, it's time [for the teen] to go to bed.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

This quote from a Latino teenager describes a parent who has neither time, nor energy:

"If you start to talk to them - 'I don't have time. In a little while.' - and then later they're tired."

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

Comments such as these lead us to wonder whether teens' perceptions of their parents' availability might be as important as their parents' actual availability. A parent can be physically present, and possibly even wanting to interact with his or her child, and at the same time, sending non-verbal cues that tell children, "I am not available to you." Non-verbal cues such as frowns or exasperated tones, often the result of fatigue or irritation, can discourage children and teens from approaching parents, whether parents are intending to send those signals or not. Several focus group parents described the importance of communicating their availability to their children to promote interaction and connection.

"And I think just being there without me [being] like, 'Okay, what's going on?' It leads them to be more like, 'Oh,' and then I find out more things like, 'I'm interested in doing this,' or 'I'm thinking about hanging out with this person,' as opposed to me [being] like, 'What's going on?' I'm not throwing nothing at them; I'm just there to see what they might want to say."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

This comment ties availability to other themes that emerged in our focus groups, namely open communication and understanding. This parent, like many others in the focus groups, communicates her availability successfully by using an open and receptive communication style.

Overall, respondents reported a laundry list of barriers to actual availability or to encouraging children to perceive parents as available and approachable. These included: general lack of time, lack of time because the parent has too many of his/her own activities, parent is tired, parent is geographically separated from teen, parent is distracted or thinking about other things, parent is angry or in a bad mood, there are competing household responsibilities, parent fears the responsibilities of parenting, parent has a heavy or inconvenient work schedule, and parents has romantic interests.

In a subtle variation on barriers to availability, at least one parent described being available to her family/children as a group but being unable to provide availability for one-on-one contact or communication:

"Honestly, I find it very difficult to have a lot of 'one-on-one' because by the time I get home and put dinner on the table, and then by the time dinner is finished it's like, 'Okay, let's get ready for bed.' So it's sort of like, a lot of times, I'm getting it piecemeal. Somebody will come in at me from this direction and then somebody else from that direction, and another, and..."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Palpable in this comment is the parent's sense of being overwhelmed.

A Baltimore father discussed his experience trying to fulfill the role of financial provider for his family:

"My daughter said something to her cousins a couple of weeks ago that got back to me, which was something about how their daddy don't care because I work all the time, you know? And it made me think she knows that I work to pay bills so that she can have clothes. I mean, she's been to places that most kids haven't been. She's been to the Bahamas; she's been to Florida. The thing of it is, she knows I work so that she can do these things, but nothing takes the place of that actual time. So now I've made the decision to cut back on work."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

An interesting aspect of this quote is how the participant starts out trying to rationalize his focus on his role as provider but winds up rejecting it. He comes to the conclusion that while it is important to provide financially for your family, it is a mistake to let that responsibility prevent you from being available as a parent. He asserts that a child's need for parents to be available was just as important, if not more important, than their financial needs.

Geographic separation was another barrier to availability discussed by focus group respondents. There is a logical connection between separation and a lack of availability - if parents are physically absent it is harder to communicate their availability or to simply be available for communication, affection or shared activity. In having to cover any distance between each other, separated parents and teens give over some of their availability to the time required to travel. Our teens often reported feeling closer to parents with whom they live than with parents from whom they are separated. We believe that a lack of availability accounts for the difference because it reduces interactions that contribute positively to PCC such as shared activity, communication and affection.

Factors that Increase Availability

Focus group parents, as in the case of the Baltimore father who worked too much, were often aware of the challenges to their availability and had adopted strategies to overcome these challenges. Many reported using telephones and cell phones as a way of increasing their availability despite physical separation due to being at work or not living with their child:

"I'm like, 'Call me any time. I just want to tell you I love you.' And I do the same thing with them."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

A few parents reported that their own parents had been unavailable to them:

"My stepfather, who I'm named after, he taught me a lot of things. That's why I believe in doing what I'm doing with the kids that I'm with today. I've been through a lot of pain... So what I'm basically trying to say is it's real benefi-

cial for kids to have a father figure in their life, especially doing the right things."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

This focus group father was motivated to parent positively and be present and available for the children in his life by the negative experience of separation from his father - as well as the surrogate parenting provided to him by his stepfather.

Several Sacramento teens said their parents demonstrated a lack of availability by ignoring them:

Facilitator: The question is - what does your mom do or say that you don't like and why don't you like it?

Participant: It's when I talk to my mom and she ignores me.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

■

"Sometimes my mom is on the computer or watching TV and I go up to her, like ask her a question or I'll tell her what someone said, and she'll ignore me. As soon as I'm walking away, she'll turn around and say, 'What?'"

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

By not acknowledging the teen's effort to make contact, or by taking overly long in responding, parents are demonstrating a lack of availability while simultaneously making teens feel disregarded and disrespected.

In contrast, some focus group parents put paramount importance on being available for their children. Consider this Latina mother:

"If you're in the middle of doing something you want to finish, or if you're making dinner or washing, whatever - that's the time your child will want to talk to you. [You talk to him] And you don't think about it in the moment. Later you'll say, 'Oh, look at what he was doing; he wanted to talk to you!'"

Parent, Latina focus group, Miami

And this African-American mother:

"I do everything with my kids. I'm involved with everything in their lives. When we're doing things, like at the park - I coach at the park - my daughter cheers. I have two different daughters at two different schools, and they're majorettes - I'm there. During band activities or fundraisers, I'm there."

Parent, African-American focus group, Miami

The mothers in the quotes above place so much importance on being available to their children that they either drop whatever they are doing to interact with their children or they make attendance at their children's activities the highest priority. While it is admirable that these parents can achieve this level of availability, it might not be possible for many parents. Other focus group parents we talked to, many of whom were single parents and most of whom are working long hours to provide financially for their families, felt too pressed for time to provide this degree of availability.

Availability as a Gateway to Other Factors

The perspectives of focus group participants on availability led us to some insights about the role it plays with PCC in families. It appears that parents who simply communicate their availability to their children contribute positively to feelings of trust and safety within the relationship. We theorize that perceived availability alone, and the trust and safety that stems from it, could increase PCC in and of itself regardless of whether there is an actual increase in parent-child interaction. We find evidence for this hypothesis in the following teen respondent's comment:

"There's nothing like being able to know that you can go to your mom and dad. There's people that go to counselors in school and go to friends because there's nowhere else to go because they need help. But it's complete satisfaction to be able to know that 'Oh, I can turn around and talk to her about sex.' No one is going to give me better advice because I know that she loves me."

Teen, Latino focus group, Miami

This teen's knowledge that her parent is there

for her, and the connectedness she feels as a result, seems to lend credence to the parent's advice. Parental advice, as we see elsewhere in this report, is not typically welcomed by teens. We have no way of knowing here whether the teen feels like the content of the parental advice she receives is any good, but she is definitely going to seek it out as a result of the trust she feels from being loved and having a parent who is available, who is "there for her."

When availability increases, we would expect that the number of parent-child interactions also increases. If these interactions are contributing factors to PCC, then we would expect to see the PCC between a parent and child increase as a result of their utilization of availability. But again, parent-child interactions can only happen if parent and child are both available to interact. In this way, the concept of availability can be seen as a gateway to other factors that affect PCC in families.

On the other hand, there are many negative impacts that can result from a lack of parent availability. Focus group parents and teens mentioned the following: less shared activity, the absence of physical affection, reduced opportunities for communication, children feeling neglected, children feeling ignored, children feeling "disowned," and children being less likely to obey.

Shared Activity

Common Shared Activity and its Characteristics

By shared activity, we mean social activities between parents and their children. These activities are often, but not always, recreational. By defining shared activity in this way, we intend to distinguish it from verbal communication and affection/attachment, concepts that have been much more the foci of previous research than what we are calling "shared activity." While verbal communication and affection are also types of shared activity, they are distinctive enough from other shared activity to merit separation.

At times, these distinctions will feel artificial. In fact, in the list below of common shared activities in families, several are communication based. However, we believe they are distinctions worth making, especially for the purposes

of designing PCC interventions. We suggest that the major distinction between verbal communication, on the one hand, and "shared activity," on the other, is that the primary focus of verbal communication is the identification of values, ideas and information in what may or may not be an exchange. In comparison, the primary focus of shared activity, whether it is watching TV together, playing games or going to the park, is the mutuality of a shared experience, regardless of what direct verbal communication is exchanged between a parent and a child. The expression of affection, especially the mutual exchange of physical affection, seems to hybridize the communication of values, ideas and information with the goal of shared experience. Since affection has its own unique contributions to PCC, we feel it is better to separate it out from other concepts of shared activity.

Focus group parents and teens talked extensively about the importance of shared activity to connecting and bonding. The number of comments and quotes that related to the concept of shared activity ranked up with "communication" and was the most frequently talked about theme. Focus group respondents offered examples of the most common forms of shared activity involving parents and their children. These included: eating together, completing household chores together, short dedicated play time, board games, watching movies together, watching TV together, playing sports together, discussing movies or TV that parents and children watch together, going to the park, going to the beach, playing video games together, interacting while going to or coming from another activity, riding bicycles together, going for a drive together, reading together, getting ice cream, going out to eat, having "family night," doing arts and crafts together, a parent doing a child's hair and going to church together. Even when parents and teens didn't name specific activities that made a significant contribution to PCC, they still stressed how time spent together contributes to feeling connected. One father described how shared activity with his stepson created a relationship between them:

"He came between me and my fiancée until I explained to her, 'He might not have to like me but he's going to have to respect me. It doesn't make no difference how our relationship worked out, but he has to respect me.' And now it's like he loves me because I spend time

with him. I talk to him."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Many other comments reflected the importance to PCC that focus group parents and teens saw shared activity as having. When focus group participants were asked what parents should do, in general, to connect with their kids, comments like "spend time with them," and "I just spend time with them" were exceedingly common.

Focus group participants also explained to us what some of the characteristics of effective shared activity are in their family's day-to-day lives. Several parents across different focus groups described as important not only basic activity sharing, but also showing a particular interest and/or involvement in the interests or activities which are important to their children. Some examples of this recognition are featured in the following quotes:

"He's on the basketball team, but that's all he wants me to do. I don't care how many business meetings I have, [he says]: 'Look mom, be at the basketball game.' So find out what's important to them, find out what's important to them because, see, we want it for us, but it's not, you know?"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

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Participant: But we always spend time together. He like books; he don't like sports, He just into books. He good at it.

Facilitator: Mmm-hm. So what about your relationship, the way you two connect?

Participant: Oh that's wonderful, yeah. We always try to go with, you know, what he want to do, you know.

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Focus group parents felt that by focusing on their child's self-selected interests, their children appreciate them more and feel more connected with them. In order to create this dynamic, one

parent stressed that it's important to both know and follow what's important to your children.

A large number of both parents and teens in our focus groups talked about enjoying spending "down time" with each other. When participants talked about "down time" as a shared activity, they were referring to time spent together in relaxing, easy-to-do activities, as opposed to activities that took a lot of energy, effort, coordination, focus or resources. Examples of "down time" as a shared activity included: hanging out in parent's/teen's room or on their bed, driving a child to school or the store, going out to eat, listening to music, watching TV, and eating dinner and talking.

One parent pointed out how she uses a particular type of "down time" shared activity that she learned from a parenting program as a way to get one-on-one time with individual children, time which is typically in short supply in a large family:

Participant 1: I was in a program called 15 Minute Playtime. And in those 15 minutes it gave the child the freedom to just be a child. You didn't preach. The parent didn't preach or teach, didn't do anything, they let the child take the role... You give your child 15 minutes to do whatever they want to do.

Participant 2: That sounds real good if you have one or two children. You can't do it with all five. From experience as a mother with five kids, it's almost impossible to set aside 15 minutes for this kid and 15 minutes for that kid.

Participant 1: But wait, wait, it don't have to be 15 minutes... What you can do is break it down to five minutes. What you do is give personal time to that child.

*Parents, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

In this parent's opinion, just a short amount of time spent one-on-one together, even as little as five minutes, makes a positive contribution to connectedness. The implication is that five minutes for each child would be easy to find, even with a large family because it could take place during "down time."

Focus group parents and teens reported that all kinds of "down time" shared activities are excel-

lent facilitators of parent-child communication. Consider the following quote:

"What I do with my son, especially with my middle son, [is] I sometimes say, 'Come on and get in the bed with me and watch a movie.' And we're not talking about things and then I'll notice he'll start opening up, 'Hey mom, guess what happened. I have a girlfriend.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

It appears from focus group participants' observations that these "down time" activities create safe and open opportunities for teens to bring up things with their parents that are on their minds. It may also be that a low-key activity helps to create the safe space the teens need to begin communicating. Teens may feel that the activity, in keeping parents partly occupied, mitigates the intensity of the exchange or of any reaction the parent may have to the topic. It may also be that the activity helps create this safety because the teen feels that if the conversation goes in a direction he or she dislikes, then he or she can end the conversation by reorienting towards the activity itself. Or it may be simply that a "down time" shared activity provides both the opportunity to talk and a sense of closeness that encourages it. Whatever the explanation, "down time" activities are clearly good facilitators of conversation between focus group parents and their teenage children. One parent described how when he takes his child to the movies, they don't even wind up paying attention to the film because they are so busy talking to each other! This may also demonstrate how these relaxing "down time" activities contribute to a sense of equality, camaraderie and closeness that encourages more intimate conversation. Through comfortable postures - lounging in chairs or lying on beds - these activities literally put kids and parents eye to eye.

Another characteristic of effective shared activity is the use of humor and play to keep activities light hearted and warm. Our parent and teen participants talked about enjoying time spent together that was focused on playing, being silly and sharing laughter and humor. This sentiment is reflected in the following quote:

"I was washing dishes with my middle son. He's so much like me, he has my

personality. I was washing dishes and I said, 'Pass me...' whatever it was, and I said, 'If you don't pass me that I'm going to throw water on you!' So he's lying on the floor like 'I'm not listening mom.' So I took a whole thing of water and threw it on him. He was like 'Oh, you want to play!'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Other specific examples of integrating humor and play into shared activity were mentioned in our focus groups. They included: playing practical jokes, physical play, being loud and laughing out loud. One parent talked about how playfulness and silliness function as facilitators of communication much the same as the "down time" shared activity described above:

"I play with my daughter and everything. We chase each other down the street sometimes and they think we're crazy, but to me, it breaks the ice sometimes when you want to talk about something serious."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

In this quote, we can see how the parent perceives humor, fun and play as serving to "warm up" the child for engagement in discussions of more serious topics or issues.

For many children, having shared activity that is physical may have specific benefits that non-physical activity does not. One parent appreciated the "physicality" of all the shared activities that her own father does with her children (his grandchildren).

"My kids' fathers, one is incarcerated and the other is just not around, so my dad has a major part in their life and my dad is teaching them stuff like working outside, working at the church, cutting and measuring with the tools and how to build strong work ethics and how to use the tools."

*Mother, African-American Focus Group,
Sacramento*

All the activities she described - working outside, at the church and with tools - are very physical. The physical quality of these activities is reflective of other research on gender and parenting that says that "fathering" tends to be

more physically oriented than "mothering." Physical activities are thought to have unique benefits for children's development.

This quote also highlights how parents viewed teaching as a positive and beneficial form of shared activity. It was fathers in our Baltimore focus group discussions who most frequently cited teaching as a good shared activity. The comments of one father from Baltimore epitomized responses promoting the importance of teaching children as a way to bond:

Participant: I would like to say two words: learn and teach. I know for a fact that children, no matter what their ages are, when it comes to their father teaching them something, it opens them up a little bit more... I did that with my four-year-old daughter. She had a tendency to sponge things.

Facilitator: What does that mean?

Participant: No matter what it is about, you think she not paying no attention and she got it. She do not forget nothing! Video games - I just taught her how to play the Play Station 1 and it took her about a minute, right?

But she only four years old thinking she's 36.

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

In the quote above, one can also see how this father views shared activity and teaching as reciprocal. The shared activity offers a natural opportunity for the parent to teach, and for the child to learn, in the context of time spent together.

Interestingly, some of what parents described as teaching might not be viewed as positive shared activity by teens. In the section of this report about advice giving, we see how many teens have a negative reaction to advice, finding it to be patronizing and annoying. At the same time, many of our focus group parents did not recognize this difference of perspective and emphasized advice giving as an important part of parenting. In some cases they viewed advice giving as connective. It is possible that the same misconception is sometimes operating here, namely that the teaching that parents see as important and connective shared activity is actually

viewed negatively by the teens involved. However, we think it's more likely that most parental teaching is both a positive and connective form of shared activity when it is done in a way that is different from advice giving. The quote above from the mother in Sacramento highlights some of the important differences between effective parental teaching and giving advice. Effective parental teaching is interactive instead of pedantic, hands-on and exciting. It also puts children as learners in positions of importance and/or responsibility.

According to focus group comments, the same situation applies to chores. When completing chores with parents, some teens described them as a positive form of shared activity. In other words, as was the case with teaching versus advice giving, how the chores are conducted can determine whether they are dreaded or experienced as a positive form of parent-teen shared activity. As described in the section of this report on structure and expectations, chores are positive for teens when they are done together with the parent. The quote from that section is illustrative of this point and is repeated below:

Facilitator: What makes you feel closer to her?... What kinds of things do you do with your grandmother?

Participant: I like to talk to her about things and wash clothes or watch TV with her.

Facilitator: And when you do those things with her, what is it like for you?

Participant: I feel good that I helped her.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Some of the chores that teens reported enjoying doing with their parents included: cooking together, going grocery shopping, washing the car, and "working with dad."

Configurations of Shared Activity

In the context of shared activity, we are using the term "configuration" to refer to the structure of the shared activity, specifically how many and which family members are participating as well as the potential duration of the shared activity. The suggestion quoted earlier in this

report of a "15-Minute playtime" is one example of a configuration of shared activity: one-on-one time between a parent and a child. Both parents and teens in our focus groups talked about appreciating one-on-one time with each other. They also expressed that this configuration is especially conducive to connecting. The following quote is reflective of the significance participants placed on one-on-one shared activity:

"We're talking quite a bit. We have to do it where we have to get in the car and go somewhere, like go some place to eat or something, because as for ever having time to be by ourselves, that's never going to happen anymore [at home]... We go to eat, or I'll go to the store and he'll say, 'I'll go,' and so we'll ride to the store and we'll talk. Listen to music and stuff. And I think just that little bit lets him know 'I still know you're here. Just because the other three [kids] came [after you], I do recognize you more.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Facilitator: In terms of going away somewhere, away to Florida with your grandmother and your dad, how would that make you feel closer to them do you think?

Participant: Because it would just be us.

Facilitator: So time, just time alone with him, without other people.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

While these quotes underscore the connective advantage of one-on-one time, reports from our focus groups indicate that a lack of parental time and energy, among other barriers, negatively impacts the ability to create this configuration of shared activity, especially in families with more than one child.

Luckily, other configurations, ones that involve multiple participants in the shared activity, also seemed conducive to creating feelings of connectedness. For example, several teens, primarily from Miami but also from Sacramento, commented on the importance of shared activities that connect them to their parents by making them feel like a "part of a family." Several teens

talked positively about spending time with and getting to know extended family members. They listed holidays and time after church as opportunities for making connections. One teen remarked on how being with both his parents at the same time (his parents are separated or live separately) makes him feel like he is part of a family.

Special Shared Activity

Focus group teens brought up the issue of "special" shared activities. Special shared activities are exactly what the name suggests: activities that are out of the ordinary, infrequent and especially desirable.

The simplest way of making shared activity special for teens appears to be just getting out of the house to do it, even if it is the same activity they would do together at home. At least six comments across three different focus groups reflected this notion.

Facilitator: Anything that's happened with your parents or your grandparents any time in the recent past that made you feel like, "Yeah, we're cool, we're on the same wavelength here."

Participant: Going out to eat.

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

Teens reported going out to eat and going to the movies as the common shared activities most frequently made special by moving them outside the home. Occasionally, a focus group parent also stressed the importance of opportunities for getting out of the house when doing shared activity.

Focus group teens frequently mentioned activities that are beyond "special" as increasing their sense of connectedness with their parents. These "extra special" activities are ones that happen rarely and are often costly. Examples of these "extra special" shared activities cited by focus group teens included: going fishing, going to the zoo, going to an amusement park and going on vacation. Among all of these, going on vacation was the most frequently cited example of an extra special activity that teens appreciated:

Facilitator: How about thinking about the last couple of months now. Can you

think of anything you did with any of your parents that made you feel connected to them?

Participant: We also went on vacation to Las Vegas, and we got to do a lot of stuff together.

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Family celebrations were also identified by focus group teens as an important form of "special" shared activity. Some examples of family celebrations mentioned by teens were: going out to dinner for mom's birthday, telling jokes together at Christmas, and sharing any activity with an element of tradition:

"My parents and I listen to the classics together like the Temptations and everything because I've been listening to them since I was old enough to remember... it's nice to feel connected that way, in music."

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

Still other examples of family celebrations that qualified as special shared activity were going to ride go-karts on the child's birthday and participating in big family gatherings. Large family gatherings were discussed with a heightened intensity that underscored their "specialness" and contribution to connection:

"Okay, my family is different. Every time we get together, we always have a good time. The men will go in that room and watch the big screen TV, with sports, and the women, they'll be in the kitchen and what not, and cooking. And then the cousins, the kids, they're running all over the house (laughs)."

Teen, African-American focus group, Miami

Though the vocal inflection that signifies some of the "specialness" of this gathering for the teen is lost in the text-version, the quote still demonstrates it. Finally, with regard to family celebrations, it is noteworthy that a couple of teens from Miami reported an extra positive effect when the celebration was a surprise or had a spontaneous quality to it.

It was clear from our focus groups that many of our parents had difficulties providing many, if

any, "special" shared activity because of scarcities of time, energy or money. The absence of "special" shared activities clearly does not preclude good PCC in families. However, extrapolating from the comments and reactions of both parents and teens, it seems likely that parents without the resources to provide such activities, or simply participate in them, are at a disadvantage in terms of opportunities to promote PCC with their individual children, especially as these children become teenagers and these kinds of activities appear to grow in significance to them.

Barriers to Shared Activity

For many of our focus group families, there were numerous constraints on their ability to engage in shared activities: parents working long hours and weekends, parents being stressed, parents needing "alone time" or "down time," parents being tired, parents working inconvenient shifts at work, teens being overscheduled in school or other activities, separation of a parent from the child or family, parents taking classes, financial constraints and single parents juggling work, managing the household and caring for the family. The parents and teens we spoke to were recruited from economically challenged neighborhoods precisely so we could learn about the economic and other contextual barriers facing them in their efforts at establishing and maintaining PCC:

"It's not that they don't love us or nothing. It's just everybody is on a schedule and everybody is busy just going from here to there and you just can't stop what you're doing and do this at one time. And in most cases, the mother is the leader of the household so she gotta get everything done. When she stops working for a second she might, the light bill might not get paid or something. My mom come home and she's tired. She don't wanna do nothing, so it's just like, 'Alright, that's it.' She'll go in her room."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Teens showed special sensitivity to the resource barriers experienced by their parents. Consider the following quotes:

Participant: Well, because my grandma

and my sister, they're both a few years older than me, and I do my own thing most of the time. My mom, because she be gone and so when she's home she'll be watching TV or playing on the computer or something.

Facilitator: So you say she's not really doing anything with you?

Participant: Sometimes she'll say, 'Come on, we're going outside,' and we'll leave and we'll buy some new clothes or something and go out and have a good time, but then this happens like once a month.

Facilitator: So you wish this would happen more often? What do you think gets in the way?

Participant: Her job.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

One teen seemed frustrated by the paradoxical nature of his family's predicament with regard to resources and shared activity:

"A few months ago my mom had a job, but she got laid off because her job got automated - they didn't need the people no more; they had computers to do it. So it's kind of messed up both ways because she used to work, she used to come home tired and stuff, right? The things I want to do with my mom, like I want to go out with her and go out to things to do, kind of like amusement parks and stuff. And sometimes you don't have the money and everything... It's like, when she's working, she's stressed and she wouldn't want to do anything, but she has the money to do it. But when she doesn't want to work, she doesn't have all the stress and stuff and then she doesn't have the money, so it's the opposite."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

This quote is especially descriptive of the resource shortages faced by economically challenged families. From quotes like these, we get a strong sense that many of our teens did not want to add to their parents' burdens by making demands on their time and energy, even as they were craving more shared activity:

Facilitator: What do you think keeps you from doing those things more?

Participant: She's got a lot of work, a lot of things to do. She's stressed out.

Facilitator: And how do you know she's stressed out?

Participant: I can tell because she comes home and she's tired and everything... My mom, she's tired and then she's stressing over things... she be stressing a lot because she got to go a lot of places, do a lot of stuff.

Facilitator: So when she's stressing, what do you usually do?

Participant: I leave. I talk to her sometimes and sometimes I just go outside or...

Facilitator: Get away?

Participant: Yes. Usually I stay and talk to her, but usually she's so tired, so I don't want to be in her face.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Not all barriers to shared activity reported in our focus groups were the result of resource scarcity. A couple of teens talked about how having different interests from their parents created a barrier to shared activity:

"If I want to go fishing, I would have to go with my friends, or go with my friend's dad. I can't go fishing with my dad no more and my mom, she's not a fisherman. And sports, or anything like that - it would have to be playing tennis. I'm not good at tennis."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

The teens who made these kinds of comments also expressed the wish that they shared more common interests with their parents so that they would have more opportunities for shared activity that both would enjoy.

Several focus group parents identified a different kind of barrier to shared activity and ascribed it exclusively to fathers. They described what happens when fathers buy into the stereotype that says a father's primary parenting role is that of financial provider. One

mother voiced the following complaint about the father of her child:

"He won't spend no time. He only come around if my son want money. And I tried to tell him. I say, 'You've been locked up for ten years of your life. You need to bond with your child. All he wants to do is get to know you. You make it a money issue for reasons to come by.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Giving the male perspective, one of the fathers revealed angst and shame about not being able to fulfill the provider role:

"I always let money get in the way because I really want my kids to come over but I don't have no money. All the parents, ice cream truck comes, they all giving their kids money, but I can't. I can't give them no money... Basically, I was being in my own way, too, 'cause I just wanted them to come around when I was... when I could do something to afford the money thing."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Ironically, another father describes how, as a child, he valued time with his dad so much more than money or presents:

"I agree with him - quality time. 'Cause my father, I didn't know my father until I was 12. And it wasn't nothing about the money. When he come around, he come around with a present. I didn't want none of that... I just wanted him to be there, you know?"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Research on fathering shows that many low-income fathers buy into the message that a father who cannot provide is a "deadbeat." Some men actually withdraw from their children's lives when they cannot provide. Focus group mothers and fathers both strongly articulated the idea that men need to recognize that it is equally important for them to be there for their children and participate in shared activity.

Teens from two different focus groups identified a barrier unique to their own experiences

and expectations around shared activity. They talked about peer pressure as a barrier to teens participating in shared activity with their parents:

Facilitator: What else do you think keeps... makes it hard for kids to feel close to their parents?

Participant: Popularity in school... Some kids if they hang around they mommy or daddy too much, people at school be like, 'Well you a daddy's girl.'

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

■

"A person's friends and stuff telling them, 'Don't hang with your parents,' or, 'It's not cool,' or 'Don't do that or you're gonna look such and such,' or whatever. Your associates might tell you it's not good to hang with your parents, and you might just get it through your thick head that it's not cool and then you just stop."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

And this quote:

"They don't show it because they think that their friends are gonna be like, 'Ooh, and you like your parents,' and stuff like that."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

These quotes illustrate the explicit pressure teens experience from their peers and friends to not spend time with, be seen with or outwardly show that they like or feel close to their parents.

In conclusion, the nature of the discussions in our focus groups about shared activity underscore its prominent role in maintaining PCC. The importance of shared activity to PCC makes it essential to try to design interventions that help parents and children spend time together, either one-on-one or in family groups. While there are existing programs that provide opportunities for shared activities, such as free picnics and movie passes, these do not adequately address the barriers that exist for "working poor" or poverty stricken families.

Respect

As a theme, respect emerged from our focus groups with both frequency and intensity and like the theme of "pride," it appeared to carry specific connotations about race/ethnicity and/or class. Respect was perceived differently by focus group participants. In one use of the term, respect became synonymous with children's behavior outside of the house or family. Several parents described how they expect their teenagers to behave respectfully towards others when they're in public so their behavior reflects positively on their parents and their family:

"One of the things I really expect from my children is when they go out, they have to show respect. You don't disrespect any adult and if someone needs help, you help them. You do the right thing because when you leave the house, you're representing me."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents also used the term "respect" to describe a positive kind of behavior that they expect their teenagers to exhibit towards them as parents. The concept of respect emerged in discussions of discipline and autonomy, especially with regard to how a teen's increasing expectations of autonomy were being negotiated in the parent-child relationship. Parents' ideas about what respect looks like were closely related to whether a particular parent felt that teens have a right to question or challenge their parents' decisions, and if so, what are appropriate, i.e. "respectful," ways for teens to express these questions or challenges? Parents who believed that their teens have no right to challenge them or question them identified any such behavior as "disrespectful." Those parents who felt it was okay for teens to challenge and question defined different criteria for judging when this behavior was respectful and when it crossed the line into disrespect.

Not surprisingly, focus group teens, as well as parents, expressed the desire to be treated with respect. When this respectful treatment was described by focus group teen, they often made a direct connection between respectful treatment and increased autonomy. Teens listed the ways that they felt their parents could demonstrate respect. These included: speaking to them politely, not raising their voices, paying atten-

tion to them, not "name-calling," not using negative adjectives to characterize their teens, not using "stupid nicknames," not being constantly critical, and "talking to you like a best friend and not an enemy." The several close variations in this list demonstrate the importance to teens of parents not demeaning or belittling them.

In focus group discussions, parents identified the important role that showing respect plays in maintaining a good relationship with teens. One Long Island mother described in detail the parenting behaviors she finds effective at conveying respect to a child:

"Well, maybe watching my questions, how I want to ask the questions to them. Maybe I can't go through their things anymore. Maybe if they get a phone call, I might not, sort of, say, 'Who's that on the phone?' right away. Give them that little independence, that feeling like [I know they're] growing up now... might get a phone call every once in a while."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Over the ten-month period during which focus groups were conducted, the variety, frequency and intensity of the uses of the term respect revealed the power of its meaning within families of color. The term respect was often spoken about in such a way as to suggest that the word mutual was being implied as a silent prefix, especially by African-American parents and teens. Mutual respect, as used by focus group parents and teens, evidenced two of the same critical characteristics that are ascribed to PCC - preeminent importance within the family, as well as the characterization of the process that establishes it and maintains it as mutual, or what in the case of PCC, has been called "bidirectional."

One of the parents who described respect as a mutual condition between parents and children, also described in detail the process by which she thinks mutual respect is established between parents and children. According to this mother, the process starts with:

"Yes, I love you," or "You know I love you," or I'll show them a hug or something like that and make them feel accepted and once they feel like they're

accepted then they can receive from you too."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Receive what? We're not sure, but we took it to mean shared activity or rules, structure and direction. She goes on to say:

"It opens the door to receive from you so then they get your involvement and as a result of your involvement then they're going to have that trust level. Then the respect will come in too... I'm starting to respect my son more and to [let him] go out, and say, 'As long as you know you're supposed to come in at a certain time, I'm giving you that respect as long as you're willing to respect what I want too.' You know what I mean?"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

An aspect of this description struck us as highly significant. If we substituted PCC for "mutual respect," the process she describes matches very closely with our own model for how PCC is established and maintained in families, especially in terms of using trust as the foundation for building the bond. Consider our model for how PCC develops taken from our work in 2004:

Model of How PCC Develops

Having a basic definition for PCC is useful. However, this definition has raised important questions about: 1) What would one look for to observe PCC in families? and 2) What is the process by which PCC develops between parent and child? ETR proposes the model below to answer these two questions:

- 1) Trust must be created for bonding to occur. Trust comes from physical and emotional support, protection, openness and encouragement.
- 2) These four elements are communicated to the child by the parent(s).
- 3) The communication of trust creates a climate of trust, a condition that both the parent and child can come to expect.

- 4) Children communicate positive reactions to a climate of trust back to their parent(s). This supports more communication of the elements of trust from the parent(s).
- 5) As a climate of trust is established, parents also contribute new elements to the relationship: structure and time together (shared activity, which is also initiated by the child). These elements shape the character of the connection and also introduce possible points of conflict. With a climate of trust, conflict is negotiated and resolved. Conflicts that are resolved successfully contribute to the connection between parents and children.
- 6) Together, these processes promote parent-child connectedness.

*Parent-Child Connectedness:
Implications for Research,
Interventions and Positive Impacts
on Adolescent Health
ETR Associates 2004*

Trust

The concept of trust surfaced in many of our parent and teen focus groups. Consistent with the ETR's model for how parent-child connectedness is established, trust appeared to be a strong foundational requirement for establishing connectedness according to focus group participants. A child's trust is required for parents to effectively communicate with their children, establish structures, provide guidance and share time with each other. In turn, these activities help to build more trust. In this way, trust is essential for developing parent-child connectedness. For example, one Miami teen described a feeling of connection with her mother which she believes resulted from an "amazing" level of trust she has with her mom. Trust was developed because her mom was able to listen to, handle, and be supportive around sensitive topics like sexuality.

Focus group teens and parents talked about several positive outcomes of having a trusting relationship including: being able to talk more

frankly/openly, developing more effective problem solving, having the increased likelihood that sensitive subject like sex will be brought to parents, worrying less about each other because there is full disclosure, and having a more satisfying/pleasurable feeling about each other.

"...I am trying to be with her more so that she will confide in me. Now she laughs with me, she tells me things, and we go places like friends."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami



"I know that right now, we have the closeness that we do have because he knows that he can come to me and talk about whatever it is that he's dealing with or what's going on around him in his surroundings... and I appreciate that because I'd rather he come to me than find out from the neighbor or somebody else's mom."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Focus group respondents identified many parent behaviors that contribute to the building of trust between parents and children. These include: listening, conveying the belief that their children will succeed, communicating that they are looking out for their child's best interests, showing their children that they are on their side / "in their corner," laughing together, spending time with their children, playing together, making themselves available to their children, showing interest in their children, maintaining confidentiality, and apologizing when they are wrong about something.

However, as happens with parents, teens sometimes may not be in the mood to talk, especially about personal or "heavy" issues, simply because they are tired or distracted by something else. One teen from Miami described how her parent always assumes that she/he is not talking because she's done something wrong and wished that the parent would trust her more and not make this assumption.

But at that moment, they're like mad because they think you're hiding things, or that you're doing something wrong or maybe it's just because you don't feel like talking about it."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

Focus group participants also talked about behaviors that can break trust, such as parents who make arbitrary rules without explanation, lying, separation, lack of parent availability, taking the word of others over that of the teens, lack of attention/focus on each other, put downs, and not being given a "second chance" after doing something wrong.

Several focus group fathers who had been physically separated from their children discussed the challenges of having to rebuild trust. One man who had been away in prison talked about his attempts to build trust with his children who were fearful that he might have to go back to jail. Another father in a similar situation described how he used communication, just being together and talking with his son, to rebuild the relationship. Another father suggested that establishing trust with your child early on increases the possibility of reestablishing it after a serious conflict or separation.

Several teens talked about wanting to be trusted by their parents and feeling deeply offended or hurt when they believed their parents did not trust them. However, parents who shared experiences of losing trust in their children seemed to feel justified in taking back their trust. One parent from Sacramento felt that trusting her son became more difficult the more he lied to her. That same parent's comment appeared to stress the importance of "holding the line" on her expectation around trust. She described her willingness to impose a severe consequence - sending her son to live elsewhere - to maintain her expectation, even though this would have an obvious negative impact, in the short term at least, on their PCC:

"Like, he would say be in one place and he'd be in another. Or I would say, 'Did you do this?' and he say, 'Yeah,' and I get home and he didn't do it. So then one day, I got home, and we just sat down and I said, 'You know what I don't like? Liars. And liars can't live in my house. So if you continue to lie. then you're going to have to go somewhere else.' So he looked at me like, 'Mom, you'd kick me out?' And I said, 'You don't have no more times to lie to me because if I can't trust you and it's just me and you then you can't stay here.'"

At the same time, this parent did not hold her-

self to the same standard of honesty. Later when her son asked her to share something about her boyfriend with him, she said:

"I don't share those types of things and so he bring it back to me. He's like, 'Well Mom, I thought you said liars can't live in the house?' I'm not lying. I just didn't tell you. That's different. And it's my house. And that's what I try to explain to him."

Mother, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Parents play an important role in modeling positive social behaviors for their children. In some cases holding back information from one's child might be justified (e.g., it's developmentally inappropriate, it's someone else's personal information, it's the parent's personal information such as a sexual relationship). However, it would probably be helpful if the parent gave the teen a reasonable explanation for why information cannot be shared. We suggest that in order for trust to be mutual among parents and children, both parents and children must be honest with each other and be willing to share some intimate feelings/thoughts with each other. When parents share some of their intimate feelings, they may in some way also be giving permission to their children to share their own intimate feelings, thereby building of a sense of trust and connection in the relationship. This type of sharing may be difficult for parents who are accustomed to a more authoritarian style of parenting, parents who are not used to trusting in general, and parents who are unsure how to negotiate appropriate and reasonable boundaries around topics of an intimate nature.

Love

Both teen and parent focus group participants shared experiences that helped shed light on the age-old question "What is love?" Teens and parents offered many examples of how they express love and what it feels like to be loved. Although parents may genuinely feel love for their children, and from their perspective, behave in loving ways toward their children, the outcome that is most important is that their teen children feel loved. Parents' ideas about the best ways to show love to their children may not always be in sync with how their teen chil-

dren would like to be loved. And sadly, in some cases, parents confront barriers to expressing love to their children. Overcoming these barriers is important because the ability to love each other is an important one for parents and teens to have and ultimately an important factor in establishing connectedness.

Teens cited several things that their parents do or say that support them in feeling loved including: parents saying "I love you," parents being physically affectionate, parents reassuring children that they will meet their needs, doing things together with their parents like playing, talking or hanging out, and parents doing special things for their children like singing to them, calling them by a pet name, sending birthday cards and taking a special interest in what their child is doing. One African-American teen from Long Island talked about several of these parent behaviors when she said:

"I love getting hugs, I love getting the cards on my birthday and her calling, or me calling her, is nice."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

In our focus groups, teens also reported times when they do not feel loved by parents. Parent behaviors that contribute to a teen not feeling loved include: favoring one sibling over another, not feeling accepted, feeling ignored, parents not smiling, parents not saying "I love you," and parents not being physically affectionate.

Teens and parents offered reasons why a parent may not be able to communicate love. These reasons included: not having the expression of love modeled to them when they were children, parents being abused as children, marital problems, financial problems, work pressures and feeling tired. One Latina mother from San Diego pointed to her upbringing to explain the struggle she experiences in expressing love to her children today.

When I was a girl, there was never a word of love. I used to ask my mother if she loved me, and she wouldn't even smile, like I didn't exist.

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Parents also want to feel loved by their children and talked about how much they like hearing "I love you" from their children and receiving physical affection. One African-American moth-

er from Long Island said "I still crave it" with respect to receiving physical affection from her children. One Latina mother from Miami talked about how important it was for her to feel loved by her children because it gave her a feeling of connection that helped her get through her own problems. A parent from Sacramento said:

"I'm very thankful that my children do tell me that they love me, and they'll kiss me and they'll give me hugs and it doesn't matter at all the time or where they're at."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Both parents and teens spoke about the importance of love being given in an unconditional and committed way. Parents in particular felt strongly that children should understand that a parent's love will always be there, no matter what the circumstances. Latina mothers especially placed a strong emphasis on frequently saying "I love you" to their children. One African-American father from Baltimore talked about how love serves as a kind of relationship capital when he has to enforce rules or discipline. Saying "I love you" while also disciplining a child can make the disciplining process easier and more effective. A teen from Long Island expressed a similar sentiment when she talked about still feeling loved by her mom, even when her mom expresses anger.

"Like my mother, she could tell us not to do stuff and then we do it anyway and she gets mad at us, but she still loves us no matter what."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

In summary, parents and teens want to feel loved by each other and feeling loved appears to be an important contribution to parent-child connectedness. How we express love to those we care about is critical to a feeling of love outcome. Both parents and teens may benefit from time spent on communicating with each other about what behaviors make them feel most loved. From a place of love, a parent and teen would work to respond to these requests. Parents who have experienced childhood trauma or are currently experiencing stressful events may benefit from counseling that can help them heal from past pain or better cope with current day stress. The issue of parents'

experiences of their own childhood trauma is the focus of a later section of this report.

Advice

Parents from almost every focus group talked about the importance of giving advice to their children. Topics that parents considered important to advise their children about included: money, the importance of an education, smoking, abortion, personal safety, being "a man," drugs, weapons and violence, and clothing styles/fashion. Although the link between advice giving and parent-child connectedness was not entirely explicit, it appears that by parents providing the "gift" of advice to their children, they are in a way hoping to protect their children, helping their children avoid mistakes, and supporting their children in achieving happiness.

In contrast to what we learned from parents, teens talked very little about the value of their parents' advice. In fact, several teens characterized their parents' advice giving as "nagging" or controlling, especially when given in an authoritarian or patronizing manner. Advice about a teen's style as reflected in the clothing he/she wears or the way he/she behaves may be seen as a threat to a teen's autonomy and personal tastes. The teen may view this behavior as disrespectful and, as a result, the degree of connectedness they feel with their parents decreases. Teens from Miami and Sacramento provided examples of the type of parental advice that does not feel good to them.

"... but when she sees me, she's on me, she's like, 'What are you wearing? No, that shows too much skin. Those shorts are too short.' And I think I have to deal with my mom, and her mom, and my dad, and everybody's getting on my nerves about what I am wearing."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami



"... he'll tell me to do something like mow the lawn. He has to have the yard perfect, so if I'm mowing it and it ain't right and something is wrong, I missed a patch or something, he'll have all these phrases like, 'A lazy person works

ten times harder.' All these stupid things that he likes to say - I hate that."

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Although several parents acknowledged that their advice giving may not always be effective, they did not offer explanations as to why that is the case. One father from Baltimore described how he gives his son advice by teaching him about the consequences of street life, but admitted that his son never takes his advice. Instead, the son finds out consequences for himself and then comes back and admits that his father's advice was right.

"What I got to offer you will save you. ... My son, he is like me when I was young and he will not tell me nothing. He's already got his mind set and what he want to do and he's going to do it irregardless [sic] of how much of my life I gave [referring to prison sentence]. I told my son the whole consequences - basically what can happen if you do certain things and he still don't pay no mind and when he's done, then he come back to you [to tell you you're] right."

Father, African-American focus group, Baltimore

How parents provide advice to their children seems to be a key factor in how it is received by teens. One Long Island parent talked about how important it was to assess what was really going on with her children before giving them advice. Another mother from Miami described how she offers advice to her teen without forcing her opinions on him. This Miami mom stressed the importance of "offering" as an approach to letting her teen know that she trusts his decisions.

"I don't tell him you shouldn't say this or shouldn't go there - no because I would be doing the same thing that was done to me [by my parents]. I have trust in him to say, 'Honey look be careful about who you hang out with. If you think a situation is going to become dangerous, then keep walking. Tell them you'll talk to them later.' I don't worry about whether or not he uses big pants or big shirts."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

While some parents talked about giving advice in a gentler, "offering" way, other parents gave advice in a more "value laden" and forceful way, using phrases such as "you know what I expect," and "do the right thing." The latter style appears to be a function of a more authoritarian parenting style.

Several parents talked about sharing stories/experiences from their childhoods as a way of giving advice. Some of these parents perceived the potential limitations to this type of advice stemming from generational differences or gender differences. Other parents appeared to rely on this type of advice, without qualification, as a way of trying to instill values in their children. A few fathers from Baltimore characterized this advice giving as a method for teaching teens that their decisions have outcomes or consequences.

"...but he knows what I've been through, so anything he does, I can tell him everything that's going to happen. I can tell him what's going to happen and he listens. You know what I'm saying?"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Giving advice appears to be a method that parents want to use to connect with their teens. However, the manner in which they give their advice may actually be a detriment to developing connectedness. Parents often have the best intentions in giving advice to their children. In a PCC program, these intentions should be acknowledged, while at the same time tips about effective advice giving should be offered. Assessing where your child is coming from, offering advice in a respectful and kind way, and providing alternatives may be some advice giving skills that would strengthen the likelihood that teens heed their parents' advice as well as strengthen teens' connection to their parents.

Balancing Being a Parent with Being a Friend

It appears clear to us from the research literature, empirical observation, and personal experience that developing parent-child connectedness involves a variety of elements implemented in a balanced way. Our own model for how

PCC is established and maintained in families represents an interaction of trust building, affection, communication, shared activity and structure/rule setting. But does this hypothetical construct of PCC as a balance of elements have any reflection in the real world of families? If so, what does it look like to economically-challenged families of color?

Our focus groups provided one answer to this question. Across six of our 16 focus groups, both parents and teens named and discussed a particular balance that they thought was important to connectedness - parents acting as both a parent and a friend to their teens. The way this balance was both named and discussed across focus groups marks it as an important theme with some degree of cross-cultural resonance. However, while the theme emerged with an identical label across a large number of different focus groups, there was not a strong consensus among parents, or across groups, as to where a healthy balance between being a parent and being a friend truly lies.

Our focus groups provided some description of what balancing being a parent and a friend looks like in their families. For example:

"I'm just kind of with them. And sometimes I might seem like a big sister at times. I don't know what I might seem, but I kind of let my hair down a little... I might wear a pair of jeans out with them... I wear my little jeans. I'm not really trying to really come from my world, believe me. I'm just trying to look a little - be a little comfortable with them. Otherwise, if I tend to be dressed up at times, there's a much more formal approach and I don't want that. I want to sort of get down with them and yet sort of stay a mom."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

In this quote, we see how one aspect of parents trying to be their children's friends has to do with joining children in "their world" and being more approachable. The quote also suggests that this effort to be more of a friend shouldn't go so far as to make the parent appear fake or cause the parent to lose the essence of his/her role as a parent.

Another aspect of striking a balance between being a parent and a friend focused on how this

balance serves as a counterpoint to discipline, with its negative effect on PCC. One focus group father felt that too much discipline would push his child towards rebellion and street life. To prevent this result, he attempts to befriend his child, offering a peer relationship that he sees as more conducive to trust, presumably to help him monitor and influence his teen's level of involvement in street life:

"I treat him like he is cool. I don't try to come down too hard on him because I don't want to lead him to the streets and lead him to negative things. I try to be like, 'I'm there for you. I'll be your friend just like you got your homeboy you ride your skateboard with. I'm trying to be your friend in the same way.'"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Other parents talked about easing off of structure and discipline and being more of a friend in order to promote the development of the trust that leads to open communication:

"I'm a parent, but at times you have to sort of be a friend. I have to because otherwise, they're not going to come at me with what I want to learn - what they're going through - so I have to ease down a little bit."

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Another parent talked about easing off on her strictness by engaging in some play with her teen. The "lightening up" that this parent refers to includes a playfulness that she describes in reference to a water fight that she and her son had while washing dishes:

"I'm always straight to business, but it's teaching me to lighten up because if you want to save your children you've got to... I don't know if it's 'be their friend' or 'be in their space.' And you'd better know [what's going on with them]."

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Other parents described different ways of being both a parent and a friend. One mother from Miami felt that "showing her daughter that she (mom) would defend her" was a way of achieving this balance.

One teen felt that a way for parents to adjust the balance in the direction of being friends was to share activities with their children:

Facilitator: Where do you stand on this whole thing? Like around whether a parent should be just a parent or if they should try to be a friend too.

Participant: I guess they should be a friend too.

Facilitator: So how do you think a parent should be a friend too? What kinds of things should they do?

Participant: Do things together.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Many of the parents we spoke to were emphatic about the importance of maintaining the balance between these roles. One Latina described this balance in terms of wearing two different hats:

"This is a nice thing I have with my son. When there are situations where he knows I am going to get mad, when I don't like what he has been doing, he says, 'OK now I want you to put your friend or counselor hat on, not your mother's hat.' So, I say, 'OK, give me a second to take off my mother's hat,' and I sit down and listen... I give him two ways of thinking about the situation."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

Some parents felt strongly that an imbalance in the relationship tipped toward the friend role eroded boundaries necessary for establishing structure, making rules and disciplining. A father from Baltimore described the balancing act in terms of being a parent first:

"I also want to say this too, from my point of view that comes from being a parent and having older children: I am their parent first and then I try to be their friend because some of them will get it twisted... I believe that the best way to handle an 11- or 12-year-old is be a parent first and discipline because when you try to be their friend, they think they can do just about anything."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Yet another father from Baltimore looked at it from the opposite perspective and identified what he saw as a negative outcome resulting from not being successful at striking this balance in favor of the "friend" role. He believed that if he was too much of a "parent," and not enough of a "friend," he would drive his son away by being too much of an authority and not cultivating trust, openness and communication.

Still other parents seemed unable to keep clear for themselves the line between parent and friend, as evidenced by this quote:

"I believe in the parent being the parent, but you can still have that relationship that you [the child] can come to me. But I'm not going to be your friend. I'm not going to be your friend; I'm going to be mama and that's the way it's got to be. And you know she knows my role, it is 'mother,' but she knows I'm her friend. That's why she don't seek... she don't have to be in circles; she don't have to be in a clique. She's a leader and she's strong because I'm her friend."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

The Miami mother above stresses her parental role and asserts that her role is not as a friend. Then, perhaps because she more closely considers the dynamics of their relationship, this mother ends up identifying herself as her daughter's friend. In the next quote, another mother from Miami wants to make a distinction that appears to help her see where the line is drawn or the balance is struck:

"I think 'friend' takes on a variety of textures around what you want to say a 'friend' is and even in being 'friendly.' They're different, being friendly and being a friend. I don't teach my kids that I'm their friend per se, but I don't teach them that I'm not. I teach them that I am friendly. They know I'm their mother. They know what upsets me; they know what doesn't. But at the same time, they can talk to me."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

The distinction that this mother makes between "being friendly" to her children and "being a

friend" embodies the balance between the aspect of parental role involving authority and aspect of the role involving support, understanding and open communication. For this mother, the distinction she makes clearly helps her find the balance between the two roles.

One teen from San Diego felt strongly that she preferred that her parents behave as parents and not try to act like her friends. These attempts came across to her as silly and made her feel stupid and made her feel that they didn't take her seriously:

"For example, they say they want to be your best friends, and sometimes they want to talk to you as if they were teenagers and it's like, 'What's wrong with them?' [Laughter] I don't like it. I like it when they talk to me seriously, when they see themselves as your parents, but they don't raise their voices or anything like that. Because when they try to joke around, and that stuff doesn't make you laugh, like they want to treat you like you are a little kid...I feel sometimes stupid or something..."

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

No matter where parents and teens landed on the issue of what the proper balance of parent and friend should look like, the general consensus was that some kind of balance constituted good parenting and yielded positive outcomes. Both parents and teens suggested that being a friend as well as a parent results in more understanding, better communication and more fun spending time together, all of which are signatures of PCC.

Bidirectionality

In our published review of previous research, we offered a basic definition for PCC that had been synthesized from various sources. We defined parent-child connectedness as "a condition characterized by the quality of the emotional bond between parent and child and the degree to which this bond is both mutual and sustained over time." With regards to that definition, the characteristic of "mutualism" is relevant to this section of our report. What does it mean for PCC to be "mutual?" Does this part of the definition hold as true for economically challenged African-American and Latino fami-

lies as for the middle class Euro-American families with whom much of the early research pertinent to PCC had been done?

The most obvious interpretation of the term "mutual" as it's used in our basic definition is that it means "felt by both sides." This definition would suggest that PCC is only present in the relationship if it is felt by both the parent and the child. However, we have also looked at the term mutual as representative of a bidirectional dynamic to the parent-child relationship. By this we mean that, through their actions, both parent and child can contribute to establishing and maintaining their connectedness. The idea that PCC is to some degree bidirectional is a dimension that is absent from other views of parent-child relationships, such as Attachment Theory, which are much more heavily focused on the parent's role, decisions and actions, and how these parental characteristics determine the nature of the relationship.

Furthermore, we have theorized that bidirectionality as a factor in the parent-child connection increases in importance as the child becomes a teen. The increasing need for autonomy as a child moves into and through adolescence plays a larger role in the new relationship dynamic with a parent than it did at a younger age. As teens seek more independence from their parents, it helps the relationship if they can contribute more to creating a sense of connectedness. In other words, when children are young, and parents feel more needed, it may be less important that those children make their own explicit contributions to the feeling of connectedness. When they get older and seek more connection, it may become more important that they "feed" the relationship, taking advantage of the bidirectional nature of PCC to do things from their end to maintain connectedness. One important implication of this hypothesis is that it may help parents grant more autonomy if they feel confident that their teen is going to work to maintain a connection with them.

All of which brings us to the question of whether these speculations about the bidirectional nature of the PCC relationship process are supported by commentary and themes that emerged from our focus groups. Simply put, the answer to this question is "yes."

Because we still tend to think of the parent-child relationship in terms of what parents do for children, most of the things that stand out as

bidirectional are the things that children or teens can do that help build their relationship with their parents. One example of this is parents wanting teens to understand the pressures they're under and be able to read them emotionally, much the same way that teens want parents to understand what they're going through in their adolescent lives. A few different parents' comments reflected how much they appreciated it when their teens could read them emotionally, empathize with the challenges in their adult lives and adjust their behavior accordingly:

Facilitator: How would you describe what makes the relationship good with your teens? Not with your five-year-old, but with your teen?

Participant: For me it's - he knows what to do to not make me snap.

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Some teens in our focus groups demonstrated through their comments that they could act to make parents feel better understood and supported. Other teens were more likely to miss cues about their parents' needs.

Another way that a teen can behave that makes a positive contribution to PCC is to offer encouragement, emotional support, or at least sympathy, to a parent. One father from Baltimore described how touched he is by the fact that his child often offers him emotional support:

"Me and my older son got a connection because we talk and when I'm going through something, like when I get laid off from work, and I call him and be like, 'Look, we can't go to the park this weekend. Daddy not working no more.' He be like, 'Ok Daddy, it's okay. Everything will be alright. You'll find another job.' And I might be feeling bad one day and I'll call him up and I'll be like, 'I need you to help me stick,' and he'll be like, 'Okay Dad, I got you, I got your back.'"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

In this example, the child sees that the father is having difficulty and offers him reassurance. Here, the bidirectional dynamic is similar in the

child-parent direction to what we might see in the parent-child direction.

The above quote also begs the question: What parameters and limits should be placed on the contributions of children and teens to PCC? It is our belief that teens can contribute in a positive way to PCC. However, their contribution should not be a heavy responsibility. It should not be something that is taxing or anxiety-producing for the teen or that results in role-switching or enmeshment with the parent. In order to set this limit, parents need to ensure that they are not dependent on their child for emotional support.

Parents also need to be sure that they are not seeking support from their children in a way that leads them to cross any inappropriate boundaries in terms of what they disclose to teens. This situation involves a delicate balance between openness and honesty on the one hand and providing safety and security for children on the other. A similar balance is discussed in the section of this report on trust. Parents who disclose too much and/or rely too heavily on their children for emotional support are apt to undermine their children's sense of safety, security and stability.

Another part of the parent-teen dynamic where we see evidence of bidirectionality - where the teen can make a positive contribution to promoting PCC - is in the area of shared activity. Notably, one teen said that he would be willing to do a shared activity that was based on one of his mother's interests:

Facilitator: What would you like to see in a program? What kind of activity would you be interested in?

Participant: Mom's? I don't even know. Probably looking at... going antique shopping with her or something, 'cause she loves antiques all over the house, and so she would like to do that. That would be cool. It's boring to me though.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Being willing to go antique shopping, even though it is boring to the teen, because he knows that his mother would enjoy it seems like a very positive example of the bidirectionality that can characterize a parent-teen relationship. Here, mutual contributions are made to the relationship, with each side giving some-

thing. The parent makes herself available while the teen provides an added incentive by participating without complaint in an activity that the parent prefers and will help her to relax and recharge.

Another avenue for bidirectionality is teens doing things to make their parents feel proud of them. The section of this report on pride identifies the tremendous value that focus group parents placed on their children doing things to make them proud. Our parents offered examples of things that teens do that make them feel proud, ranging from the instrumentally obvious, like getting good grades or helping out with chores and childcare without making a fuss or having to be asked, to the more powerfully subtle, such as living demonstrably by the parents' or family's values. One mother found pride in her son in an unlikely place:

"I was picking him up outside and he's sitting out there. He had on his O'Neil's t-shirt, some shorts, some long johns with one leg pulled up and then the socks came all the way up, and then he had something wrapped around his head. He got in the car and I said, 'Boy, are you ashamed of anything? Why are you out there looking like that?' And I was like, 'You ought to be ashamed.' And he's like, 'Mom, I'm not ashamed. I'm proud of who I am. I don't care what people think about me.' And then I looked at him and I was like, 'You're right. I guess you're right, because if you don't care, if you're secure, then everybody else around you got to be secure too.' But I was just proud to hear him say, 'I don't care what other people think about me.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

The quote above is suggestive of another way that bidirectionality can manifest in a parent-child relationship, namely that children and teens have things they can teach their parents. This manifestation of bidirectionality is not about what a teen actively does to contribute to the dynamic so much as it is about parents' willingness and ability to be open to learning from children. One parent from Miami described the open state of mind necessary to learn from her children:

Facilitator: What are some other things

similar to this theme of the relationship, the bridge in the relationship between parents and children?

Participant: One thing is to know what they like, share what they like with them, spend time with them doing these things. They teach us. We adults think we know everything. We don't know everything. Our kids can teach us something new each day. If one is open to receiving, has an 'open door,' then each generation can aspire to a little more.

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

For her, understanding her children, their wants and needs, is part and parcel of being open to learning from them. It goes beyond seeing their point of view to recognizing that she doesn't know everything and that her children have things to teach her. Thus, children are always doing things that their parents can learn from, feeding the relationship in this direction, if parents are able to see this contribution and take advantage of it.

One parent suggested that teens could do more to contribute to PCC if they would make an effort to communicate better. This parent was having difficulty feeling close because she felt her teen did not communicate his experience to her:

Facilitator: What do you think makes it hard for parents to create that feeling of closeness with their kids?

Participant: My situation, like I say, he don't say anything.

Facilitator: So when the child doesn't give something back, that makes it hard.

Participant: Yes, because I don't know what he's thinking, what's going on in his mind - 'What do you want to talk about?'

Mother, African-American focus group, Miami

Having to ask her child to share appears to

make communication more challenging for this parent. The quote implies strongly that she wants more to come from his direction, more mutual effort. The discussion goes on:

Facilitator: You said it's really hard because you don't get feedback from your son, but what kinds of things have you tried to overcome that?

Participant: I think it's just him because we do everything together as a family.

Facilitator: So you're saying that you've tried things that haven't worked and you think it's just his personality?

Participant: I think it's just his personality.

Mother, African-American focus group, Miami

By the end of the discussion, the parent demonstrates grudging acceptance that her son's lack of openness is a characteristic he's not likely to put much energy into changing.

The foregoing commentaries from our focus groups provide examples, with supporting evidence, of the way in which PCC can be maintained or increased through a mutual, or bidirectional process where both parents and teens contribute. The greater implication of this is that, to the extent that the evidence of bidirectionality is compelling or convincing, our focus group respondents provide support for our proposed model of PCC that defines it as a condition characterized by mutuality.

Teen Themes

Adolescent Developmental Stages

Focus group parents varied in their awareness and understanding of healthy adolescent development. While many parents seemed to be aware of the physical changes of puberty (e.g., menstruation), few seemed to understand normal adolescent development with respect to cognitive, social and emotional changes. In addition to the physical changes of puberty, the adolescent years are also marked by the devel-

opment of personal identity, increased autonomy, movement from concrete to abstract thinking, recognition and management of emotions, increased importance of peer relationships and development of personal values.¹³

One parent from Long Island acknowledged that as her child ages, she needs to constantly rethink her approach to parenting and what she needs to best parent her child at different ages. She showed a willingness to experiment with different disciplinary and communication styles to find the one that may work best for her and her child. She also acknowledged the importance of encouraging and praising her child during this time of change when teens can feel unsure about themselves.¹⁴

“...they are getting older, and I'm thinking what may work one moment may not work right now at this time, so I'm just now refocusing on some things myself and saying more praise, you know what I mean? ... because sometimes we as parents think - 'No, this is the rule and you have to follow this.' But I think what she was saying was, 'Let's give them the chance to express their ideas too and see if it work out fine.’”

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

The type of flexibility illustrated in the quote above may be more challenging for parents who practice a more authoritarian style of parenting. Authoritarian parents may be less willing to discuss options, try different parenting techniques or be generous in providing praise and encouragement.

Many parents reported struggling with giving their teens more freedom or independence. Some parents struggle in supporting their teens becoming more autonomous because they are not aware of how the process of developing autonomy (e.g., a teen arguing for something she/he thinks is right, teen wanting time alone) may manifest in their teens. Therefore, parents may interpret teens asserting themselves as disrespectful or acting out, may not feel skilled at negotiating compromises, may be reluctant to let go of their role as parents of young children,

may default to the way they were parented as teens, and/or find it difficult to balance protecting their children's safety and allowing for more independence. Consider this exchange among mothers in Long Island:

Participant: ...they are getting older and they're developing and learning how to make choices. So I have to respect their choices I guess, and that is kind of hard.

Participant: ... When we were little, we had to do what Mom said! We had to do what Mom has us to do. You know what I mean? [group laughter]

Participant: It's no longer you know, 'I'm the mom; you just do it.' And I'm still not too certain whether that should be the way it is.

Participant: I've tried that. I tell them you've got no choice until you're 18. When you get your own place, your own job, then you make your own choices.

*Mothers, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Culture may also play a role in a parent's ability to support a teen through the development of independence. For example, in many Latin American cultures, it is acceptable/desirable for a single adult child to continue to live in the home of his/her parents. Interdependence among family members is highly valued in these families.¹⁵

A few parents recognized the pressure and normalcy of teens wanting to fit in with their peers. One parent from Sacramento identified peer pressure as having an influence on this development process, while a Latina parent emphasized the importance of reinforcing to teens the importance of being your own person. This parent from San Diego made no reference to peer pressure, but it appears to us that the process she describes would be a way for a teen to resist - or become resilient against - peer pressure.

“It's the time that they're growing you know too because they are exposed to so much, and it's peer pressure. They want to fit in. They want to be like

¹³ <http://www.etr.org/recapp/theories/AdolescentDevelopment/index.htm>

¹⁴ Pierno, K. (2004). Adolescent Development. <http://www.etr.org/recapp/theories/AdolescentDevelopment/>

¹⁵ Morales-Jones, C.A., (Summer, 1998). Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin. pp 13-17. Austin, TX: Delta Kappa Gamma.

everybody else. They don't want to be different or to stand out at all."

Mother, African-American focus group, Sacramento



"One person does not have to be exactly like another person. You don't have to have the same goals or do the same thing as other people."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Health care providers, day care workers and elementary school teachers may be more apt to educate parents about the developmental milestones they should be watching for in their young children and less apt to provide the same type of education to parents about the cognitive, social and emotional developmental milestones of their adolescents. However, understanding adolescent development is as important as understanding the development of an infant or toddler. Therefore, an intervention designed to strengthen parent-child connectedness would be remiss without including some orientation to parents about the important changes occurring in their adolescents and what these changes might look like as many teens awkwardly move through the development process. The intervention should also identify ways for parents to best support their teens in meeting these developmental challenges while at the same time, meeting parents' concerns for their teen's safety. Parents who are resistant to letting their "babies" grow up may need emotional support for weathering this important transition in their parenting role.

Autonomy

Developmentally, as children get older, and especially as they become teens, they are going to seek increasing amounts of autonomy. Our conversations with teens and parents of teens made it clear that focus group families are deep into the challenge of negotiating the increasing expectations of autonomy on the part of teens. One thing that was clear from our focus groups around the issue of autonomy is that differences in parents' and teens' expectations around this issue are common within families and create relationships fraught with conflict. Conflict that is not successfully negotiated (as seen later in

this section) has a seriously detrimental effect on PCC.

Focus group teens as young as 11 clearly articulated expectations about autonomy, and these expectations were typically held strongly. Teens in most locations wanted more freedom to go where they wanted and to spend time with peers and friends away from parental monitoring. Another aspect of autonomy that emerged from our focus groups was more subtle than the issue of allowing teens to leave the house on their own. It was an issue of self-expression. Focus group teens expressed the desire for autonomy of self-expression, be it in how they talk, what clothes they wear, or the music to which they listen.

Some focus group parents recognized and validated the teen desire for autonomy of self-expression and some didn't. As one parent put it:

"She's very sporty. She's a tomboy, but I have to learn to keep my mouth shut and try to let her be who she is and express herself to a certain point."

Parent, African-American focus group, Long Island

Latina mothers from San Diego in particular had a lot to say on this subject:

"He tells me that it's very hard because it's what all his friends do. He said, 'If you love me like a friend, then you would let me dress the way I want to.' [She tells him] 'Friendship interrupts nothing, son.'"

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Here a mother asserts her influence over her son's way of dressing, limiting his autonomy. Quotes like these reflected the importance parents place on teaching their children positive values and ways of being respectful in the world. As can be seen in the section of this report on "Balancing Being a Parent with Being a Friend," many parents identify and try and hold a similar line regarding what is acceptable behavior, even if holding this line risks hurting their friendship or connectedness with their children in the short term.

The mother in the following quote also wants to limit autonomy by establishing guidelines for acceptable dress. Dressing acceptably is so

important to this mom that she doesn't want to stop at her own children. She wants standards for all children in her son's school:

"And like they were saying, if they want to dress with loose clothes - my son isn't like that, he dresses normally - but kids dress like that and I say let's go to the schools and have them give us dress codes for our kids."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Latino teens from San Diego weighed in on the other side and highlighted the criticism they receive from their parents about how they dress:

Participant 1: They tell us to behave ourselves and not to go out on the street looking like that.

Participant 2: Don't go around looking like a bum.

Teens, Latino focus group, San Diego

Some of the conflict in Latino families over clothing styles and the values they represent may very well be a product of the differential acculturation of parents and teens. Immigrant parents often hold on to values from their home country while their children, growing up in a new culture, incorporate more of the values of that culture. These differences can create misunderstanding and conflict, especially since both sides believe they are representing, from their individual perspective, "what is normal."

Generational differences, resulting in differences in taste, also appeared to affect parental acceptance of fashion or styles:

"I have a similar situation with my older daughter. She doesn't like to dress like a lady. I mean she's just jeans, the t-shirts and whatever her brother wears. She'll take her brother's clothes and I get upset. I'm like, 'Why don't you try wearing nice clothes instead of wearing big t-shirts down to your knees?' There's no reason she can't wear regular shirts. She's little."

Mother, African-American focus group, Long Island

This parent wants her daughter to dress like a "lady," an identity that we would guess has little or no resonance for the teen. When these differences impinge on a teen's sense of being accept-

ed by parent(s), they often created conflict in the relationship. From both a teen's point of view and a developmental perspective, the teen is using fashion to express himself or herself, or to fit in with peers, which is a normal part of adolescent development. Therefore, it strikes us that parents would be well advised to grant teens some autonomy over how they dress and not make this a barrier to connectedness.

Privacy was an important part of autonomy expressed by teens in Miami and Long Island. They expressed a desire for privacy in terms of having their own bedrooms, control over that physical space, being left alone, privacy during phone calls or, in many cases the desire to have their own phone. In another variation on autonomy, one teen from Sacramento expressed his or her need for autonomy in terms of not being nagged (emphasis is ours):

Facilitator: So it sounds like you want your space.

Participant: Kinda the same in my house, too. My Pop's be on me about my grades, so I always gotta keep them up.

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Finally, autonomy, for several teens meant not just being independent from parents, but also meant not being "saddled" with the care of younger siblings.

The attitudes of focus group teens varied widely as to the "right" of parents to limit autonomy beyond a certain age. Some of our youth participants, even those as young as 11, rejected the idea that their parents had any right to limit their autonomy. This was more likely to be the position of teens who felt that their parents' authority had lost its legitimacy as a result of adults making bad choices or modeling poor values or bad behavior, high levels of unresolved family conflict, or parents being neglectful. Most teens, however, expressed the belief that it was reasonable for parents to be the arbiters of autonomy granting. However, these teens wanted an explanation/rationale for decisions. They also wanted to be able to negotiate with their parents about autonomy.

A teen from Miami described the complex power struggles that can go on in families in regard to autonomy:

“They say, ‘No, forget it’ and so you don’t tell them, little by little. You don’t want to start doing it behind their back... and you want to tell them. You want them to be able to understand you and give you a little bit of freedom about it, but you know if you go up to them, they’re going to be, ‘No, that’s it, period.’”

Teen, Latino focus group, Miami

This teen’s position appears to be a mixture of both acceptance and rejection of her parents’ authority as well as an internal ethical struggle between what she feels she deserves and her desire to avoid deceptive means of getting it.

Ultimately, many, if not most, of our focus group teens accepted parents’ individual decisions not to negotiate and respected their parents’ rights to stand by their decisions. This acceptance seemed especially true when their parents offered an explanation for the decision and if the decision was perceived as reasonable or fair in the eyes of the teen. It was in the absence of any explanation, or in the presence of an unreasonable or unfair one, that teens reported a negative reaction to parents’ decisions about autonomy granting, and there was a correspondingly negative impact on PCC.

Focus groups with parents reveal that there may be cultural or contextual issues that make it difficult for many African-American and Latino parents to be willing to negotiate around autonomy granting. One parent from Sacramento appeared to be struggling to find a parenting style which would allow her to be comfortable explaining and negotiating her autonomy granting decisions:

“I said, ‘You don’t have any power, so I don’t have to make excuses to you.’ Children lie to their parents because we have the power. You’re powerless, so I’ll just tell you, ‘You’re not getting braces because...’ So I have this kind of thing going with my older son where he challenges me and, you know, I like to handle it correctly so that challenge can be funneled into a conversation.”

Mother, African-American Focus Group, Sacramento

Some of the African-American parents we spoke with ascribed to a “non-negotiable” style of parenting. In some of these cases, it was clear

that parents had serious concerns about their children’s physical safety, or about the influences they might fall under, if they had more autonomy.

“Actually, my boys are really just starting to be outside. I’ve always kept them in the house. I bought every toy they needed to have so they could be right there at the house because I was so worried that if you go outside, something bad is going to happen.”

Mother, African-American focus group, Sacramento

This finding supports other research that suggests that African-American parents in difficult circumstances rely on a more authoritarian style of parenting to protect their children even though this style is not as conducive to promoting PCC.

Other issues around autonomy granting appeared to be potentially linkable to race/culture/ethnicity. For example, the importance of parents chaperoning their teen children appears from our data to be a common Latino cultural norm. However, this norm on the part of parents may be in conflict with their children’s acculturation to mainstream American norms. The different expectations with regards to autonomy produced by differential acculturation may result in increased conflict that may be negatively impacting connectedness in Latino families.

The term “privileges” was used frequently by African-American parents and teens in our focus groups in a notably idiomatic way. Privileges, within the idiom we observed, are a form of autonomy that parents give and teens receive as a sign of trust in teens. They are also a form of recognition that signifies that teens are growing up and acting more responsibly. The idiom was apparent to focus group assistants in their observations of both the vocal inflection of participants and the context of their comments. While neither vocal inflection nor context can be conveyed in text, the following quote is offered to illustrate the kinds of autonomy that African-American teens see as “privileges”:

Facilitator: If you had a magic wand and could just change the way your parents talk to you and deal with you, what would you make happen?

Participant: I would get more privileges.

Facilitator: For example what?

Participant: More freedom to do whatever... like, go other places and stuff without...

Facilitator: Go other places without - like movies and stuff?

Participant: Yeah, by myself.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Consequently, being granted "privileges" creates for teens a closer bond with parents:

"Well, me and my mom have a better bond because now she gives me more privileges, and we're communicating more."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents in our focus groups illuminated various struggles with teens' expectations and decisions around granting increased autonomy. Some parents appeared to rely heavily on their children for company, friendship, support or emotional needs:

"The oldest one comes and, 'Mama, I want to go out with my friends' where as I'm used to having the kids around me all the time. So I feel like someone's leaving me, you know?"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

This need to rely on their children emotionally makes it hard for some parents to let go and grant autonomy. Other parents, because of the size of their families in relation to their work schedule or their available time, have to rely on their teens to do chores or provide childcare, creating a practical obstacle to giving the teen personal space or freedom to spend free time away from the home.

Some parents seemed to have the wishful notion that satisfying kids' basic needs or giving them luxury items would prevent a teen from needing autonomy and independence:

"She's out of my control. So I'm thinking about how I failed because now she's become rebellious and I have

given her everything she's asked for, cell phones, everything. And so now I'm analyzing how I've failed. I asked her, 'How come you don't go to school?' and she tells me it's because I treated her badly, 'because you don't let me go to my friend's house,' and because I have been very strict with her and I don't let her go anywhere... I'm trying to analyze how I'm going to talk with her because she's been rebellious for the last two weeks. She's 14 years old now. I have done nothing, only giving her what she needs."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

This parent fails to recognize how autonomy seeking is, developmentally, a normal part of adolescence. She seems to expect that providing material needs and luxuries will address her daughter's emotional and developmental needs as well.

Nonetheless, most focus group parents recognized the importance of granting autonomy as their children move into and through adolescence. One parent from Sacramento emphasized her own belief in respecting her children's privacy and generalized this respect as an important parenting skill.

Facilitator: Are there any things that you specifically do or say to try to feel closer to your teens?

Mother: Another thing is to try to respect each other and their privacy. I don't really care to go into their rooms, unless they say to look for anything. My mother was the type, when I was a kid she into every - I mean when you left she was all over your room.

Facilitator: Could you sort of indicate, was this when they were little, or was there an age when you sort of...

Participant: Oh, when they become teenagers. When they reached 14 or 15 I was like, 'Well, I'll wash your sheets and throw them on your bed, but you better make that bed. I'm not going into your room.'

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Some focus group parents demonstrated a deep understanding of granting autonomy. They illu-

minated their understanding of its relationship to child or adolescent development regarding children learning good judgment and decision-making. These focus group parents illustrated how the most basic part of this is simply recognizing the need to grant autonomy around decision making. They went on to illuminate the more difficult part, teaching teens and children decision-making skills by giving them the freedom to make some decisions and come to conclusions or experience consequences on their own, instead of trying to make them follow parental advice:

"I think it's allowing them to come to conclusions on their own. It has to do with my daughter and her clothes. She picked the outfit. I had to allow her to choose it, take it into the dressing room, try it on and see how it actually looked. So it's allowing them to see for themselves.

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Parents who fail to appreciate the depth of the need to grant autonomy risk creating barriers to connectedness on two levels: the refusal to grant autonomy may hurt connectedness in and of itself while it also hurts connectedness by communicating, explicitly or by implication, criticism of teens' judgment, maturity or level of responsibility.

Our focus group discussions painted a picture of how various adults in a particular child's life can create obstacles for each other in creating a clear policy and set of messages around autonomy granting. Differences in autonomy granting on the part of multiple parents connected to a single child can be a challenging source of stress on their relationship or, from the perspective of one parent, can be seen as "interference" on the part of the other, especially if the parents are divorced or separated. Parents also have to contend with and negotiate around their children's comparisons of their autonomy granting to what is going on in their peers' families. As one parent explained:

"[Our] communication is good until their friends get to do something that I don't allow... My youngest one, I can feel him shutting down because 'So-and-so's mom let him do that,' and

'You don't let us do that,' and 'Mom, you're old.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Resistance/Rebellion

Focus group parents, primarily African-American parents, made conspicuous use of the terms "resistance" and "rebellion" to describe their teen children's behavior when it challenged structure, rules, discipline and parental decisions. Behavior they identified as resistance or rebellion includes: questioning parents' structure, rules, discipline and decisions out loud, acting out, misbehaving or doing poorly in school. Specific examples of teenage children rebelling or resisting included: teens challenging chores based on their observations of peers who don't have any chores, challenging the requirement to go to school, questioning their curfew, talking back, or what one parent called "having a mouth on him," calling the police on their parents, trying to "run the home," purposely doing poorly in school and making a big deal out of things.

A few focus group parents made a connection between resistance/rebellion and respect:

"I've got a stepson, and he's eleven. He's rebellious - his mouth. When his [biological] father came home, if his mama [had] heard the father tell him that 'You ain't gotta listen to that; you ain't got to listen to him [focus group participant speaking - the boy's stepfather], I'm your father.' He got him so he started rebelling against me and not respecting me. But like I told him, I said I don't care if he doesn't like me, respect me at least."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

And:

"When you're an adult and you're upset, you shouldn't say anything until the situation calms down and you go back and you say [to child], 'Well there was a miscommunication, you

misunderstood, but when you're challenging, you're disrespectful."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

From these quotes we see how, for these parents, having their children challenge their authority is synonymous with being disrespectful.

It is possible that equating rebellious or challenging behavior and disrespect is strongly tied to African-American culture since the comments that support this notion were made exclusively by African-American participants in our focus groups. However, a closer look would be required to confirm this finding, especially as the concept of "respeto" (respect) is valued in Latino cultures although it did not emerge prominently in our focus groups.

Teens Feeling Embarrassed by Parents

Teens from several focus groups reported feeling embarrassed by certain things their parents do or say. Teens become conditioned to physically or emotionally withdraw from parents to avoid embarrassment. As a result, this reaction ultimately has a negative impact on parent-child connectedness. Specific examples of parental behaviors that embarrassed the teens we interviewed included: discussing private/family matters in front of other people, yelling or reprimanding teens in public, telling childhood stories about their teens, adjusting teens' clothing, simply being with teens in public and being seen by someone the teens know, talking loudly in public or yelling so the neighbors can hear, calling attention to something teens have done that they are already embarrassed about (e.g. tripping), showing physical affection to the other parents or to the teens in public, laughing in a derisive way at the teens, acting "cheap" or "penny-pinching" in public, making a fuss over something that teens think is minor/petty, and trying to act cool, hip or young. Several teens from Sacramento, Miami and Long Island shared their perspectives on this issue:

"...the children don't like being around their mothers and fathers because they embarrass them."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

"Sometimes when we go out, my mom, she's always fixing my clothes, 'Oh wait your shirt and your pants,' and I'm like, 'Mom, I'm old enough. I know what I'm wearing. I can fix myself."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

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"My daddy, he don't bother talkin' loud until we get in public. Like if I trip, he like, 'Are you okay from your fall?' And I hate that cause everybody turn their heads."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

■

"Some kids are ashamed of their parents' looks. Or ashamed because they know what their parents do, and they don't want other people to know."

*Teen, African-American focus group, Long
Island*

Some parents seemed to have awareness that some of their behaviors may embarrass their teens. One parent from Sacramento seemed to use embarrassment as way to condition her children to follow the rules.

"And if you don't want me to embarrass you, don't embarrass me. That's my policy. So they know the rules."

*Mother, African-American focus group
Sacramento*

Teens feeling embarrassed by things their parents do and say seems to be rooted in their desire for autonomy and to fit in with their peers, increasing need for privacy, and desire to express their individuality. For example, having your mom "fix" your clothes in public might make a teen feel she is not able enough or smart enough to care for herself. Parents who discipline in public or share stories about their children in public may be violating the teen's sense of privacy. From the parent's point of view, it may be a challenge to determine when to stop certain child caring behaviors (e.g., fixing a child's clothes) and start granting more independence to their teens. Some parents may not be emotionally ready to accept that their children are growing up and therefore will need and/or rely less on their parents.

Parents may benefit from an orientation in adolescent social, cognitive and emotional development to help understand why teens may feel embarrassed by certain parental behaviors. Parents and teens may also benefit from an opportunity to talk about parental behaviors that might embarrass teens and negotiate how issues that precede these behaviors might be better handled in the future.

Teen Support

Both parents and teens talked about the importance of parents providing teens with support, encouragement and praise. Parents reported providing their teens with support on a range of issues including: helping them find a group to fit into, telling them that it's okay to make mistakes/not be perfect, being present at child's special events, giving praise, encouraging them to achieve their goals, providing them with positive reinforcement for good behavior, giving them money, and cooking and caring for them. One parent from Sacramento described how she has encouraged her son to talk to her sister and brother-in-law for support on issues that he feels he rather not talk to her about. This approach strikes us as a generally positive or constructive child support practice for those parents who have other trustworthy adults to whom they can direct their children, since no one adult is likely to be able to provide support on every issue.

One parent from Sacramento talked about the skills or personal strengths needed to be supportive to her daughter. Although she may feel like she might "fall apart" on the inside, she felt it is important not to show her daughter that part of herself when her daughter needs her support. This parent thought it was important for a parent to recognize that you might have a reaction to something that your child tells you and that it is okay to take a minute away to compose yourself so that you can be in a better position to support your child. She said:

"Sometimes, when it gets scary like that you gotta try to keep it together - no matter how much you're falling apart on the inside - because it is difficult. But I had to tell her because she was feeling bad she let me down and she knew I expected more. She's like, 'Mom, I feel so bad. I feel so ashamed.' I said, 'Well you know, no one is perfect.' I said

there are certain things we all did, but we don't talk about it until we get caught."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents from three focus groups talked about supporting their children by assuring their "safety" or "protection." A San Diego mother wanted to make sure her daughter was not being touched by other adults in inappropriate ways. A Miami mother wanted to make sure that her teen understood that mom would always defend her. A mother from Sacramento actually defined parent-child connectedness as children feeling secure and stable as a result of their parents' support.

Teens talked about appreciating different kinds of support from their parents. One teen who was abandoned by her biological parents and was being raised by her grandmother talked about support in the simplest terms - simply being there to raise their children. Not surprisingly, she reported that teens who do not have this basic kind of support do not feel close to their parents:

Facilitator: Why do you think it's hard for some teenagers to feel close to their parents?

Participant: Well some people don't care, like they're raising themselves, so they don't feel like they have to answer to [their parents], so they just don't do it. They probably don't want to be close.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Several teens talked about wanting their parents to be supportive by responding to them in a timely way. Not obtaining a timely response resulted in frustration for teens, and in some cases, seemed to discourage a sense of dependability in their parents. One teen from Sacramento described how his father was unresponsive to his questions or efforts to engage.

Facilitator: What are you feeling inside when he doesn't answer you right away? What are you thinking?

Participant: I'm like, I'm kind of mad because when he asks me stuff, I answer him or I tell him right away.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Support can be defined in many different ways from providing basic care to emotional counseling and giving guidance to children. Teens are likely to need a range of types and levels of support and for that support to be well-timed. Parents may have to act as detectives to figure out the support that their children need at any given time because teens may not have the self awareness or words to identify the kind of support they need. For example, one Long Island parent took a very proactive approach in supporting her daughter during a socially difficult time:

“... but since she started at the high school, she's been having a lot of problems not fitting in, and we're trying to find ways to kind of help her out a little bit, and one of the things my husband suggested was that she join the choir that I'm in at church. At first, I wasn't really keen on the idea because at the time, there were no children there her age, but from the moment she got there, there was a change.”

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Parents and teens might benefit from a dialogue about the type of support teens need and the types of support parents are capable of providing. Community resources, as well as family members, might be good alternative sources of support to augment what parents are able to provide.

Parent Themes

Parent's Childhood

Parents in several focus groups felt comfortable enough to share painful memories from their childhood. Parents reported experiencing a variety of traumatic events that included: sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse, neglect, separation from one of their parents, growing up “too fast” (i.e., having to assume adult responsibilities while still a child), living with an alcoholic parent, and living on the “streets” and/or in poverty. These traumatic experiences continue to have a powerful impact on the self-esteem and mental health of the parents who shared these stories, as well as on their ability to connect with their children. For example, sever-

al parents talked about their childhood trauma resulting in an inability to say “I love you” to their children, a difficulty expressing physical affection to their children, a fear of repeating the cycle of abuse with their own children, a mistrust of their own parenting skills/decisions, and problems in their marriages.

“Those words [I love you] just don't come out of my mouth because I never received anything like that [from my parents]. I love my kids, but in my heart. Maybe once a year I'll tell my son 'I love you,' but it is very difficult for me. There are kids who want to hear 'I love you' from their mothers or fathers, but for me it is very difficult.”

Mother, Latina focus group in San Diego



“... I think some parents might be going through something [childhood trauma] and can't get past it to bond with their kids, and I feel if they can get past it, then they might find a relationship with their kids.

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami”*

A teen from Miami demonstrated awareness of how a parent's upbringing can affect his/her ability to parent:

“Like parents are not close to their kids because when they were young, their mothers weren't close to them, so they have that same feeling, you know, basically they don't feel loving like their moms.”

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

A focus group discussion that took place in a San Diego deserves particular attention with respect to the consequences of childhood trauma on parenting. Of the 11 Mexican-American mothers who participated in this focus group, five reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse during their childhoods. Their disclosures were highly emotional, characterized by sobbing, anger, and lengthy descriptions. These disclosures occurred toward the end of the focus group discussion starting with one mother sharing her story. This mother's story seemed to give permission to others to open up and

share their stories. Several mothers seemed almost desperate to give testimony to the abuse they endured as children.

Several parents identified the importance of healing from, or working through, the traumas from their own pasts in order to better parents and feel connected to their children. These parents talked about not repeating the cycle of abuse with their own children as a sign of success in working through their childhood experience. Others talked about the fear they have that they may repeat their parents' mistakes.

"... because one day when I get married and have kids, I'm not going to treat them like I was treated... I may have made mistakes as a mother, but I haven't abused them, and many times I say thank God I can let my past go. Otherwise I would not be a good mother."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego



"...I tried my hardest not to follow in their footsteps [his parents], their past, but you can do things subconsciously."

Father, African-American focus group, Baltimore

In contrast, a father from Baltimore talked about positive memories he had of his dad parenting him and uses his dad as a role model for how he tries to parent his children.

"Well with me, my father passed when I was eight, but I only have good memories of him, you know, so how it affected me as a father. I try to do everything that I can remember him doing with me as far as walking me to school and being with me and talking to me, things of that nature, and also try to do some more stuff, things he might have done like take my kids to the mall, hang out with them when they hurt or something."

Father, African-American Focus Group, Baltimore

In addition to having supportive spouses, parents talked about support groups and individual psychotherapy as being helpful to them in healing from their traumatic childhood experiences.

"There are not a lot of people who really understand so I am grateful for those programs. Like I said, I saw a psychologist because I also was sexually abused when I was a girl but I didn't know it, it was repressed."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Childhood trauma did not come up in all parent focus groups, but when it did surface in a focus group, it surfaced with intensity. Parents who have experienced traumatic events in their childhood may benefit from support or counseling as adults. The goal of this counseling should be to work toward healing the pain experienced in the past and support the adult survivor of abuse in his/her ability to parent, love and connect with their children. Creating a space for parents to simply gain an awareness of how their childhood experiences affect their parenting may be a good place to start. Community resources and referrals for parents who need more focused attention should be made readily available.

Parents' Relationships with Each Other

The dynamics of the relationship between parents can affect the quality of parent-child connectedness in several ways. When the dynamics of the parent's relationship are good, parent-child connectedness appears to be positively affected. For example, one mother from San Diego talked about having a very loving relationship with her husband, and she attributed her ability to have a loving relationship with her kids, in part, to her relationship with him. Mothers from Long Island and San Diego described how the relationships they have with their husbands are healthy and strong enough for them to teach their husbands about their differences in their children and effective ways of treating each child, making for a better parenting experience for both the children and the parents. Parents who have a good relationship can also support each other during times of family and personal stress. This support can help parents care for their children in more effective ways.

When the parents' relationship dynamics are bad, parent-child connectedness appears to be negatively affected. Parents who participated in

our focus groups talked about negative relationship dynamics such as interference, conflicts, name calling/bad mouthing, separation and inflexibility as problematic to parenting in general and to connecting with their children.

Several parents talked about having relationships that can be characterized as "rocky" or conflicted. The tension resulting from this type of relationship can lend itself to one or both parents "bad-mouthing" the other. This "bad-mouthing" can have a negative impact on PCC for the both the parent being talked about and the one who "bad mouths." A teen may begin to believe the bad mouthing and doubt the love, sincerity and/or parenting abilities of a parent whom others put in a bad light. On the other hand, parents who "bad mouth" other parents may find their connectedness diminished with teens who intuit the malice behind what is being said, or perceives it as untrue or exaggerated. A father from Baltimore shared his experience on this issue:

"Yeah, she's older now to understand that I'm not in a household with her and her mother, and everything her mother says is not true... and her mother was just telling her wrong stuff, stuff about me and now she's [daughter] old enough to understand. She's getting to the age to understand where I'm coming from."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Many parents talked about parenting situations in which the other parent does not live in the household. Sometimes these separated parents held very different beliefs, values and practices around parenting. Although these kinds of differences also exist for parents who live together, parents living apart appeared to have less opportunity to resolve these differences. One father from Baltimore described disagreement over discipline as a key challenge in his relationship with his son's mother. He talked about feeling lost with regard to disciplining his son when there is no agreement and no follow-through between him and his son's mother.

Conflicting messages related to rules and discipline can be especially confusing to the teen and, in some cases, leave the teen conflicted over choosing allegiance to one parent or the other. One mom from Sacramento talked about this type of conflict that she recently experienced with her son and his dad:

"...[The son says], 'Well Mom, my dad said that I can say what I want, do what I want.' And I said, 'You know what, then you can go live with your dad. I don't have a problem with letting you go.'"

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parental relationships may be a difficult variable to affect by potential interventions because both parents must be committed to coming together, and agreeing, and then enforcing similar values and practices. This level of communication and agreement may be especially difficult for parents who have a history of dysfunctional, abusive and/or conflict-ridden relationships. Parents in this situation might benefit from more intensive family and/or couples counseling. It would be reasonable to expect, however, that a more universal community-based intervention could teach parents skills for dealing with conflict and ways to cope with the frustration they may experience with their children's other parents.

Drugs and Alcohol

Overall, there was not a lot of mention of alcohol or other drug use in our focus groups. However, the few times that this use was mentioned, it usually pertained to how parents' use of drugs and alcohol created barriers to connectedness for teens. Teens described a few common reactions to how a parent's drug and alcohol use affects PCC - namely, they withdraw from their parents or refuse to abide by parents' rules and structure. In the latter case, teens described how, when parents are often under the influence, their rules are not credible.

Parent Support

Parents from several focus groups talked about needing or wanting support from their spouses, children, other family members or outside sources. This support included: general parenting of their children (disciplining, communication, etc.), completing chores around the house, caring for sick/disabled children and personal issues. Returning to a quote from a father from Baltimore, who previously gave us some perspective on bidirectionality, we can also see in this quote how touched he feels by his child

offering him emotional support when the child sees he is having difficulties:

“Me and my older son got a connection because we talk and it's like when I'm going through something, like when I got laid off of work and I call him and say, 'Look, we ain't gonna be able to go to the park this weekend. Daddy not working no more.' He be like, 'OK Daddy, it's OK, everything be alright. You'll find another job, you know.' And I might be feeling bad one day, and I'll call him up, and he be like, 'What's wrong Daddy?' and I'll be like, 'I need you to help me stick,' and he'll be like, 'OK Dad, I got you. I got your back.'”

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Single African-American mothers talked specifically about the desire to have more “down time” whether it is resting alone in their bedrooms, doing something passive like playing a video game or watching TV, or talking on the phone with a friend. It is at these times that their desire for support is greatest because there is nobody else to take over their parenting responsibilities. As a result, they often do not get the down time that helps them to relax and recharge. This lack of downtime can sometimes contribute to parents being less patient with their children's needs/wants and more likely to use less respectful language with their children. One mother from Sacramento found it challenging to do everything she needs to do to care for her children as well as herself:

“Sometimes I try to sacrifice things that I need to take care of for me first, but I feel it's a duty of mine to always give, and I've kind of got to readjust that in my life because I'm hurting myself.”

African-American Mother from Sacramento

Parents talked about different types of community parent groups that have been useful in providing them with support on parenting and other issues. One mother from Sacramento thought her participation in the evening's focus group was supportive and wanted to know if our group would come back again. Interventions designed to promote parent-child connectedness might consider offering a space for parents to support each other through active listening, exchange of resources and ideas, and

problem solving. Single parents especially seem vulnerable to unhealthy levels of stress from lack of support. Support from other parents or professionals might be delivered in the form of community meetings, phone calls, home visits or email groups/on-line chat rooms.

Gender

Parents and children within families are acculturated to follow certain gender roles and to exhibit the attitudes, behaviors and assumptions associated with those gender roles. These attitudes, behaviors and assumptions are taught to men and women in our society by various sources including the family, culture, religion, media, peers, and politics. So what happens when parents and children interact within, or across, different gender roles? How do these gendered interactions affect the establishment and maintenance of PCC? The data from our focus groups suggest several answers to these questions.

Overall, our data indicate that parents do not believe that a parent's gender has any deterministic effect on the level of PCC between parents and teens. That is to say that there is no reason that father-daughter relationships or mother-son relationships would necessarily be any less close than gender-alike parent-child relationships. Over the course of conducting our focus groups, we heard about every possible permutation - exceptionally close fathers and daughters, distant father-daughter relationships, strongly bonded mothers and sons and alienated ones, as well as the same variation in gender-alike relationships.

Nonetheless, many focus group participants, parents and teens, perceived gender roles as shaping their relationships and affecting their level of closeness with their parents. One parent talked about her son becoming more distant from her as a result of her holding him to stereotypical male roles like being tough, not crying or not being scared. She described how she is less tolerant of his perceived weaknesses than of her daughters'. She acknowledged that when she takes this tough stance with him around his masculinity, he draws back from her.

Other parents identified how the traditional roles of mother and father, as they have been defined along gender lines, are not equal in their connectivity. The male father figure, tradi-

tionally expected to be the disciplinarian, "bread winner" and authoritative head-of-household, is typically seen and experienced as less nurturing than the traditional mother who is affectionate, understanding, empathetic, caring and responsible for creating a warm home environment.

Many of our focus group parents were single parents, or have been single parents at some point, and have been forced by that circumstance to take on all aspects of the parenting role. This may be why they were very aware of gender differences in parenting roles and often emphasized the need to break out of those narrowly defined traditional roles. Consider this quote for example:

"My father was more of a disciplinarian person. My mother was the more affectionate... But my kids, I mean I tried - I show my kids more the affectionate than the disciplinarian, but I don't discipline, not my girls anyway."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

As well as this one:

Facilitator: Do you see anything that he's [the father] doing to create that close bond with his children?

Participant: Well, he's not as close to them, and I don't know if it's because they're girls, you know, and he feels that there's female things that I should handle. But I think that he should be close. To me it shouldn't matter that they're girls.

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Parents also spoke about the need for equitable treatment of children of different genders with regards to rules, structure, chores, privileges, etc. This is evidenced in the following quote:

"Treat them like equals, just because you are a boy and you are a girl does not simply mean that house chores need to be done differently. Don't wash dishes because you are a boy or do something else but not like a girl... or serve your brother food because you are a woman or do different chores... treat them like equals. 'Even though you are a boy, you too have to help me

wash dishes'... so that they feel equal."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Teens echoed the sentiment that they wanted to be treated the same as their siblings regardless of gender differences. Focus group teens perceived gender-neutral treatment as an important part of fairness and conversely reported experiencing differential treatment by gender as a barrier to, or having a negative impact on, PCC. This is a position that fits with other comments by focus group teens about the importance they place on fair and equitable treatment.

Perhaps more than any other theme that emerged from our focus groups, our teens' comments about the role of gender in parent-child relationships matched the perspectives of parents to whom we spoke. Like the parent participants, teens talked about the possible effects of the permutations of gender-alike and mixed gender parent-child relationships. Teens also matched parents when they were discussing how parents sometimes take on the more traditional gender roles associated with being a father or a mother. Teens also talked about what their parents' beliefs about children being treated in accordance with prescribed gender norms looks like:

In some ways, it seems like boys are more closely related to their mother, in a way, because mothers will baby the boys, and they won't be so stern with them because they're boys. So, they're supposed to be men and they're trying to be men so they need to be a certain way. They're not supposed to cry like little girls... I think that a mother, she would be more harsh on her daughter, like talking about sex and things like that. She would be a lot more harsh, 'You'd better not do this or I'm going to kill you.' Where a father, he would not touch her. He would just baby her.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Modeling

When we use the term "modeling," we are referring to parents demonstrating values and behavior. When parents model consciously, they are selecting values and behaviors they want their children to emulate. On the other hand,

parental messages and behaviors serve as modeling for children regardless of whether a parent intends to model or is conscious of the fact that he or she is doing so.

In some of our previous work on PCC, the concept of modeling was the focus of critical discussion around the question, "Is there bad connectedness?" At the heart of this question is the issue of whether being connected emotionally to a parent who has poor social skills, is abusive, or engages in behavior that is destructive to him or herself or their child is better or worse for a particular child than the absence of connectedness. And at what point is the line drawn given that most parents are likely to have some bad habits or negative behaviors? At first, it seemed useful to distinguish between "connectedness," the emotional bond itself, and the modeling that the parent does in the context of the relationship. The functional value of this distinction between connectedness and modeling has since come into question, specifically as a result of the comments of Kevin Haggerty, Co-investigator of the Raising Healthy Children project at the Social Development Research Group at University of Washington in Seattle, Washington.¹⁶ It remains an important question.

Modeling was an important theme that emerged from our focus groups as well. Focus group participants, for the most part parents, positioned modeling, conceptually speaking, outside of the specific construct of connectedness. In positioning in conceptually outside of connectedness, parents spoke of it in terms of it being another, albeit different, critical dimension of parent-child interactions that shape the character of the parent-child relationship. Although it did not come up with the same level of frequency as some other themes, such as shared activity, the intensity with which focus group participants talked about modeling clearly demonstrated its importance.

Parents in San Diego, Miami, Baltimore and Long Island articulated their recognition that their children are watching them, watching what they do, and emulating it. As one parent put it:

"My daughters watch what I do, you know what I'm saying? For a long time children... for a long time I'd [as a

child] always watch the person and do what they did - not what they said, but what they did. So I've got to always be mindful that I'm doing the right thing because I know they're watching, you know what I'm saying?"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

The point about modeling was so important to this parent that he repeated it again within the same commentary:

"They don't go by what I'm saying; they go by what they see me doing. They know I'm not on the corner no more. They know I'm not using drugs no more. They know I go to church every chance I get. I work every day... They know I'm always practicing my principles and my morals, and it kind of affects them because they see me doing it."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

This same father goes on to stress his belief that children will not take directives from parents unless they see parents living by those things themselves:

"I found out that if you tell me one thing and I see you doing another, I'm not going to pay them no mind. That's how children are - even with their friends. I can get their friends' attention because they see me doing the things that I do... I go out and do things I didn't do before and my children watch me and I see them do [those things too]."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Our sense is that teens supported the last point made by this father. Their position seemed to be that parents not modeling the behavior and values that they expected, i.e. "not walking their talk" or, worse yet, modeling behavior inconsistent with their talk, is hypocrisy. This hypocrisy appears to have a negative impact on PCC. It is our assumption that this is a result of undermining the trust between parent and child. In both our previous work and this study, trust

¹⁶ Personal communication, August 9, 2004.

continues to appear to be the foundation on which PCC is built.

One teen from Long Island talked about modeling a little differently. She described how her father behaves badly when he is unable to control his temper. She sees this as a lack of self-control, the absence of maturity, or just poor judgment, and recognizes how her father's behavior has the effect of making her feel less connected to him. At the same time, she is able to identify the positive behaviors she would prefer that he model.

Facilitator: Are there things that your parents say or do that you don't like, or that kind of drive you crazy or make you feel like your relationship is just distant, not close but distant?

Teen: It's just his attitude towards things sometimes. It makes me frustrated with some of the things he does. Like, say my brothers and my sisters are outside and they're playing and everything, and he wants us to help. Sometimes he'll just yell and tell us to 'come over here,' or ground us or something really stupid. And sometimes I'm just like, 'Why doesn't he just think about it?' Sometimes I think when he gets really angry, he doesn't use good judgment. His good judgment is put on the back seat, and his anger takes over completely to the point where he doesn't think about it until maybe a few hours realizes exactly what he did wrong. And sometimes it gets me really frustrated with the things that happen while his anger is in overdrive. If he could just put it away, I'd be much happier. We'd all be much happier if his attitude wasn't there so much and he had a little bit more self-control.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Pride

For both Latino and African-American parents, feeling proud of their children was identified as one of the things that contributed to them feeling more connected to them. Specific things that parents listed as things teens did to make them proud included: being respectful towards other

people, helping out around the house, helping others who need help, making eye contact with people, looking out for siblings, getting good grades, having a strong sense of themselves as individuals, and having a big heart. School performance, as a source of pride, was mentioned by parents from all ethnic backgrounds, but came up with a very high degree of frequency among Latina mothers. For example, one mother commented:

"About the positive things my son does, well he feels good about himself because he studies and is moving ahead and has received [academic] recognition from the county..."

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Parents "feeling proud," or teens experiencing parental pride, did not come up with the same frequency or intensity as some other contributing factors, such as "shared activity." However, it appears to be a distinctive contributor to PCC in that it may reflect some very specific values, as in the example of school performance, a source of pride frequently mentioned by Latina mothers. For African-American parents pride in their children was often strongly linked to how their children act in public, and how their behavior reflects on their parents. This feeling is embodied in a comment from a mother from Sacramento:

"That was something I was taught when I was growing up. When you go out of this house, you do the right thing. You make the right choices. And I am proud of my children because when they go places, that's one of the things that people tell me - that they are very respectful and they do make eye contact. And I'm proud of that."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

We surmise that values, reflected in what makes parents feel proud of their teens, are linkable to ethnic identity and/or gender and/or class. However, our study is not rigorous enough to prove specific links, only to report their recurrence as themes. Interestingly, as one Sacramento mother pointed out, a sense of pride can sometimes be a barrier to parent-child connectedness. She described how parents can let their ideas about pride, specifically how their children's behavior reflects on them, get in

the way of seeing their children in a positive light and consequently keep them from feeling connected.

For teens, doing things to make their parents feel proud of them was identified as something they do, or that teenagers could or should do, to increase their connectedness with their parents. Teens reported wanting to feel like their parents are proud of them. Driven by this desire, at least one teen advised that parents recognize what otherwise might seem like small successes in order to promote the perception on the part of their children that they are proud of them. The idea that teens can take an active part in doing things to make parents feel proud, and their recognition that this contributes to feelings of connectedness, is an excellent example of how establishing and maintaining PCC can be, and is, a bidirectional process to which both parents and children contribute positively.

Household/Family Themes

Monitoring

In this report, use of the term "monitoring" refers to parents tracking where their children are physically, who they're spending time with, and what they're doing with their free time as well as measuring their performance on schoolwork and chores. Monitoring can also extend to knowing the direction in which their moral development is headed, as evidenced by this quote:

"[My mother says] it's not appropriate for 'a little girl's age.' She doesn't like me swishing my butt when I walk. She doesn't like me standing in inappropriate ways."

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

Our focus groups did not yield much commentary that specifically used the term monitoring even though it is a very prominent construct in the general body of parenting literature. Despite the absence of the specific term, however, we believe that the concept of monitoring emerged from our focus groups with the same prominence as in the literature. In the context of this definition, parental monitoring is the converse of autonomy granting. To recognize the prominence of monitoring in our focus group data,

one can therefore look at the frequency and intensity with which autonomy-granting is discussed. For example, a discussion of monitoring by Latina mothers in San Diego yielded the same conclusions about its potential negative impact on open communication as similar discussions elsewhere about the absence of autonomy granting.

Ultimately, whether we discuss it in terms of autonomy granting or not, the outcome is the same - too much monitoring, as perceived by teens, can negatively affect their level of connectedness with their parents. We also learned that this dynamic has behavioral implications. If teens perceive that responding to parents' "monitoring questions" will result in restrictions, many of them are more likely to withdraw from open communication, or to withhold information. We know from our focus group responses on the topic of communication that withholding, or the absence of disclosure/open communication, makes both sides feel less connected.

Expectations

We have used the terms "expectations" and "structure" to identify two distinct but related/overlapping themes that emerged from our focus groups. "Expectations" is used in relation to participants' comments about what parents expect from their teenage children. One can think of expectations as "performance standards" or "performance measures" within families. Typically, parents set the expectations in families, and most of the explicit comments from participants about expectations reflect this fact. However, teens have their own expectations of parents, expectations they appear to communicate and attempt to enforce, usually through reactive behavior.

Focus group participants identified common parental expectations: appropriate dress, behavioral standards (both at home and in public), academic performance and a demonstrated work ethic. The following quote from a teen in San Diego provides an example of a parental expectation around academic performance:

Participant: She understands that I'm trying, and she plays with me and tries to do homework with me, and she's driving me to do a little bit more.

Facilitator: You don't like that?

Participant: It's not that I don't like it 'cause I know she's trying to make me better. It's just that sometimes I'm really tired, and it's too much pressure on me.

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

Another quote suggests the same expectation:

Participant: You get good grades and they tell you to get better ones.

Facilitator: They pressure you.

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

And this quote identifies a parental expectation around demonstrating a "work ethic":

"...Or [they say] that you're lazy - they want you to do more in school and around the house."

Teen, Latino Focus Group, San Diego

A less common parental expectation was identified by a Long Island teen. Her primary caregiver/guardian, in this case her grandmother, has expectations around her demonstrating a certain level of independence. The teen feels that it is unfair for her grandmother to have expectations of her when the grandmother has never taught her the skills necessary to meet these expectations:

Facilitator: What could she do now to make you feel more loved by her or more supported by her?

Participant: She could have done a lot of things...Okay, the simplest things - I taught myself how to wash clothes. I taught myself how to cook and clean.

Facilitator: ...she could have given you more instruction about ways of taking care of yourself?

Participant: Yes, because now she expects me to do so much when she taught me so little.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Parental expectations around chores elicited by far the most frequent and intense comments from teens. Based on these comments, teen respondents perceive themselves as having responsibility for a large workload. Focus group teens overwhelmingly reported negative feel-

ings towards chores:

Facilitator: What are some things that your parents say or do that you don't like?

Participant: Washing dishes, clean your room, mow the lawn.

Facilitator: So chores? Giving you chores, uh-huh. And what is it you don't like about it?

Participant: I just don't like doing chores.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Many of the teens with whom we spoke expressed the belief that it was reasonable for their parents to expect them to do chores and help out around the house, however. One teen articulated what she thought a fair expectation was around responsibilities and chores. This teen accepted doing her part but did not want to be overburdened with what she saw as other people's share:

Participant: Every Friday night is my day to clean up the whole house. On Saturday mornings I have to go to the bowling alley. I'm on the bowling team, so I have to go to the bowling alley at nine o'clock. She tells me that I have to do everything, and if I don't do everything, I can't go to the bowling alley or do my activities the next day. That's very irritating.

Facilitator: Okay, and what would you want her to do differently then? Or how would you want her to deal with you about doing your chores and all that?

Participant: Just clean up my part of the house instead of the entire area.

Facilitator: So you think she should give you, sort of fewer chores, that have to do just with your stuff?

Participant: Yes.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Some focus group teens failed to distinguish between chores and what we might call "courtesies." For example, a parent asking a teen to retrieve her some item from another room while

the teen was engaged in something else. Our focus group teens often perceived requests for such courtesies as capricious and "chorelike," in the pejorative sense of them being an unfair and unwanted burden:

Facilitator: So you're saying she asks you to do something and you'll be playing with her and saying, 'No, I'm not gonna do it' and then she'll hit you or smack you or whatever?

Participant: No, it depends on what she says she's gonna do... She's on the phone and says [for me to] get something and I say, 'No.' I'm in trouble. But she isn't doing anything, and she doesn't go get it.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

This comment suggests to us that one possible PCC intervention activity might be to introduce the conceptual difference between chores and courtesies to teens.

Teens, especially African-American teens, reported that their resentment towards chores lowered their connectedness with their parents. This seems particularly significant in the context of our having talked to economically challenged Latino and African-American families. Parents in these families typically do not have the time or financial resources to pay someone else to do chores like cooking, cleaning and childcare. Already stressed by their responsibilities for jobs and families, these parents are dependent on children to complete chores on their own. The findings from our focus groups suggest that parents in these families pay a price for having to rely on their children for chores and having to deal with the conflict that arises from the situation. These parents lose, or risk losing, connectedness with their children. This is a risk that other, more financially advantaged parents are not forced to take.

The issue of chores surfaced less in our discussions with Latino teens and parents. Often, traditional Latina mothers will see themselves as the provider and nurturer of all things in the home. Taking care of her family is paramount to her identity as a good mother, wife and woman. Assignment of chores to the children of the family may be a less prevalent practice than it is to African-American families.

Parents from Long Island talked about chores

also having a negative impact on PCC for them. According to these parents, teens' resisting and arguing about chores is frustrating and a waste of time better spent on more enjoyable shared activity:

"I used to have one that was very diligent, and the other three were just a mess. It is becoming harder and harder and harder and no matter how I try to rationalize it, no matter how I try to get them to understand, if you get this out of the way that gives us more time to go out and do other things."

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Miami*

The comment reflects this mom's feelings of annoyance with her children around their resistance to chores. It appears that she also feels that their resistance represents their failure to learn the positive values or life skills she was offering to teach them.

Participant: The older girl, she's helpful... My older son, forget it... 'I can't wash these, I can't do this...' He wants money, but he doesn't want to earn it. Now he's taking the garbage out and that's been going pretty good. My other two, the younger girl, she'll pretty much clean, and I can leave her alone.

Facilitator: What I'm really asking is not so much whether or not they'll do the chores, but what happens in your relationship when you're asking and they're not doing it? Do you get ignored?

Participant: I get annoyed.

Facilitator: Annoyed. You get annoyed.

Participant: Because they should be doing something at this age instead of watching TV and running outside and having little responsibility. And so I'm learning - teaching them how to do the things you do as you get older, and I do get upset.

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Finally, one parent recognized an important difference in the way teens react to chores depending on how they're asked to do them:

"There are times, like on Saturday, if I

go ahead and start to clean then everybody else is doing what they're doing in their rooms and they're cleaning. So I guess it's only when you want to demand it from them it's 'Oh my gosh.'"

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

This parent seems to suggest that having chores be part of a regular schedule or structure and then "leading by example," or "instructing them by doing" produces less resistance to chores than asking teens to do them "on demand," with no predictability. Similarly, focus group teens gave us a powerful clue as to how parents could make chores more palatable. While negative comments about chores were widespread, occasionally teens admitted to enjoying them:

"Simple things, like I'll wash the car together with my dad, or just be with him, or with my mom and dad. We'll just talk at home, or go to the supermarket together."

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

■

Facilitator: What makes you feel closer to her?... What kinds of things do you do with your grandmother?

Participant: I like to talk to her about things, and wash clothes or watch TV with her.

Facilitator: And when you do those things with her, what is it like for you?

Participant: I feel good that I helped her.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

And:

"I work with my father."

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

As seen in participants' comments, a more positive attitude toward chores came about as a result of completing them together with parents. In this context, chores become a positive form of shared activity. Parental understanding of this dynamic and ability to infuse it into chores could be a powerful strategy for establishing and maintaining PCC. However, this

strategy may be difficult for economically challenged parents who are relying on their children to relieve them of some of their workload at home.

Structure

We have used the term "structure" in this report to describe the framework parents use to establish (and in many cases negotiate), communicate, and maintain their expectations. It might also make sense to include how parents enforce their expectations within the theme of "structure." However, the particular character and prominence of this theme as it emerged from our focus groups suggested it be separated out into its own theme, one we've called "discipline."

Focus group parents placed value and importance on structure and rules. However they communicated and implemented rules and structure according to different styles. Some parents imposed rules arbitrarily without warning or explanation and expressed belief that this is the right of a parent to do:

"We have household rules, and I tell my kids. My son is much like my husband actually. He'll say, 'Yesterday you said we can have one cupcake.' Well, not something that stupid, but he'll remind me of 'rule #15,' like my husband. And I'll say, 'I'm the parent, and the rules change by the second, and I make them, so keep up.'"

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Other parents expressed similar positions that reflect a belief in the absoluteness of their authority:

"I'm the parent. I know best. Don't tell me that I can't go into your room. Your space is my space. I pay the rent. I go through their stuff. I want to know what's going on."

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

In some cases, parents reported their belief that this authority extended to influencing or even controlling their teens' tastes, specifically with regards to tastes in clothes and music. However, it is reasonable to expect that teens are going to

develop differences from their parents, especially with regard to tastes. Given this assumption, it seems likely that parental attempts to control their children's tastes would strike teens as especially capricious and illegitimate. This was certainly the case among our focus group teens and resulted in them feeling resentful and reducing the degree to which they felt connected to their parents.

Interestingly, even the limited sample represented by our focus groups suggests some links between ethnic/racial groups and the types of issues that lead to contention between parents and teens. In our African-American families, parents being strict about their children doing chores came up with high frequency and intensity, whereas in Latino focus groups, it did not seem to be much of an issue. Among our Latino participants, parents tended to be strict about the way their teens dressed, but dress was not an issue in our African-American focus groups. In fact, a couple of African-American parents described how they came to recognize their teens' choice of clothing as a legitimate form of individual self-expression.

Turning to the comments of our focus group teens, there is evidence that too much parental authoritarianism, or "strictness," around rules generally lowers PCC. Strictness, as defined by our teens, would include one or more of the following characteristics: too many rules, rules that are inappropriately restrictive, are imposed without explanation or rationale, and are whimsical or arbitrary, restricted access to TV/phone, and, as discussed above, attempts to control personal tastes (clothing, music, etc.) and choice of friends. One teen quote illustrates a typical reaction to parental strictness:

Facilitator: So what's a time when a teenager might need a parent, and what's a time when... you're just hanging out, [and need a parent] to be more like a friend?

Participant: Sometimes rules. I mean rules, yes, you need rules for most things. Sometimes rules go, sometimes rules can go too far to the point where the child feels overwhelmed.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

As does this quote:

"Sometimes they give you too much of

the rules and everything, and everything has a consequence. You kind of get ticked off... A kid doesn't want to know that the littlest thing, like not cleaning their room, has the biggest consequence in the world, and sometimes parents don't understand why some kids rebel. Some kids rebel because they're under too many rules... to the point where they get suffocated and they don't know what to do, so what they're going to do is they're not going to listen and they don't care."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Although they reacted negatively to what they perceive as parent strictness, focus group teens generally acknowledged the appropriateness of parental rule setting. In the course of discussing this issue, they also defined what legitimate parental authority looks like, giving it the following characteristics: parents having discussions and negotiating about rules, and accompanying rule declarations with explanations/rationale. These comments from teens suggested to us an intervention strategy for working with parents on the issue of strictness. One such activity might be to have parents review their rules and make clear their rationale for each one. This activity would help parents examine their rules and determine which are really a matter of personal taste and thus negotiable and which are not negotiable because they convey family values, promote their children's health and safety, or help their children learn responsibility.

It is important to note that focus group parents typically reported noticing their teens reacting negatively to rules and structure. Several of our parents asserted the importance of sticking by their rules and following through with consequences even though they recognized that this behavior often resulted in damage to PCC. Such parents tended to view this damage to PCC as short term, as evidenced by this quote:

Participant: I have to sort of mean what I say for them to come out and do it and then they know I'm not playing.

Facilitator: How does that exchange affect your sense of connection with each other?

Participant: I already know that they're

going to be upset with me for the moment, for the most part, and then after a while...

Facilitator: It blows over?

Participant: It blows over.

*Parent, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

These quotes suggest that such parents believe that enforcing rules and structure did not have any significant negative impact on connectedness over the long term:

Facilitator: Establishing those rules doesn't sound like - that doesn't get in the way of establishing closeness.

Participant: No. I think sometimes, mainly with my daughter, she kind of holds back a little bit. But they come around.

*Parent, African-American Focus Group,
Sacramento*

Using focus group data alone, it is impossible to correlate parents' comments with their parenting practices in terms of the strictness or fairness of their rules and structure. It is possible that the parents who do not believe that their rules and structures have a negative impact on connectedness with their children are parents who already explain their rules, negotiate them and use other parenting practices that reinforce a sense of fairness. However, focus group teens commonly perceived rules and structure, especially the authoritarian variety, as negatively impacting their closeness with parents. This finding suggests that teens and parents have very different perspectives on this issue. If PCC truly is bidirectional, as we postulate, these data suggest that it is important for parents to be aware of their children's perceptions of rules and strictness and negative impact on PCC that can result. These data also suggest that intervention strategies that would help families address this issue would be useful.

Discipline

Discipline, what we think of as the methods that parents use to enforce their rules, structure and expectations, was a prominent theme for both parents and teens in our focus groups. Many focus group participants, both parents

and teens, made comments about the effects of discipline on the parent-child relationship. Parents tended, far more than teens, to cite discipline as a source of contributions to the parent-child relationship. One mother asserted strongly her belief that children and teens really want discipline:

"They like you for allowing them to express themselves and keep themselves busy. They like structure. They do like discipline - they do like it even though they act like they don't."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents described a variety of techniques they use for disciplining their children. One parent reported her use of consequences, taking away things that her son likes, as a highly effective system of discipline:

"I grounded him and told him that if he doesn't want to study, then he can go back to live with his father in his country because I don't want to see you fail. So we are going to get rid of your clothes [teen clothes in fashion, e.g., baggy pants], we are going to get rid of a lot of things. And after a week, he brought home a report card with 100%. He wasn't absent one day. He wasn't behind in anything."

Parent, Latino focus group, Miami

One mother talked about how she uses positive reinforcement:

Facilitator: The question is what are some of the things that you try to do or that you might actually say to try to, you know, build that bridge to your child, to try to get that connection going?

Participant: ...oh, the other thing is lots of positive reinforcement. I used to do it the other way, 'If you don't do this...' How about, 'If you do this, then you have the option to get this, and this and this. Which one do you want?'

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

The theme of positive reinforcement also came up in a Long Island parent focus group, and a father from Baltimore also described a positive

reinforcement approach:

"I look at two things and where they're used. One is the discipline and the other is my effort to instill a work ethic, 'Alright you wash the dishes, and do this for the rest of the week and you can get \$50 as an allowance.'"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

What this father calls a "work ethic," actually appears to be a reward system rather than a value system.

Another aspect of effective discipline articulated by a mother from Miami is how important it is that teens not feel disciplined simply for disagreeing with their parents. In order to ensure that she isn't disciplining simply because her daughter disagrees with her, this mother makes a point of fostering communication, i.e. sitting down and discussing the issue as well as actively listening to her teen:

"When she's in disagreement, I'm not challenging, I'm not disciplining her more for the disagreement...[I'm] listening to her more instead of just saying, 'Well, you shouldn't have done this, you're timing out, or no computer - go outside with this.' But instead of taking it away, I'm sitting down and we're talking about it."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Miami*

This mother's approach appears to be the opposite approach of those of parents, like the ones discussed in the "Resistance/Rebellion" section above, who felt that any challenge to their authority, including disagreement, was a form of disrespect that had to be addressed with discipline or negative consequences.

Despite all of the approaches to discipline described by parents, it is interesting to note that the majority of them only used the exact word "discipline" to mean physical discipline. Focus group parents were split on the issue of physical discipline. Some felt it was okay, while others were opposed to it. One parent felt that as her son was getting older and growing physically larger, the increasing difficulty she was having in disciplining him physically was a having a negative impact on their connectedness:

"I'm having problems, as far as keeping our connection connected as close as we have been, because we're both getting a little standoffish toward each other... We're the same height, so I can't throw him to the ground any more. I can't do it, and he can do it to me, and he doesn't want to and so I'm having that kind of a problem."

*Mother, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

By contrast, half the fathers in one focus group, responding to a facilitator's informal poll, reported that physical discipline "puts a strain on their bond." A Sacramento mother recognized that her children reacted to her physical discipline, especially her "swatting" them, by avoiding her and not communicating.

The word "strictness" came up a lot in our focus groups related not only to structure and expectations (the severity of the rules themselves) but also to the inflexibility of consequences for rule breaking. Furthermore, the term was often offered with a subtle inflection that suggested "strict" parents are parents who either yell or hit. This use of the term "strict" was particularly prevalent in comments from teens.

It is also worth noting that several teens acknowledged the appropriateness of parents engaging in discipline, and some saw it as having a positive effect on children. However, focus group teens were much more likely to perceive discipline as having a negative rather than a positive effect on PCC:

Facilitator: So right now he is disrespectful in what way?

Participant: Sometimes the things he does kind of pisses [sic] me off completely. Like yesterday, he was getting on me over nothing... I was on the phone longer than I was supposed to, and I didn't think it was a big deal. I almost cried on the phone. Sometimes the things he does, especially with my mother... I really think it's evil.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Teens, like the one above, were especially likely to describe a negative influence on PCC when discipline involved yelling, anger or hitting.

Below we find a few more examples of these kind of quotes:

Participant: They do it [hitting] to get respect and hope that you'll be afraid to do it again.

Facilitator: Oh, to intimidate them. And do you think this works?

Participant: No, no.

Facilitator: What affect do you think hitting has on children?

Participant: It affects them emotionally.

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

Facilitator: Some of you talked about discipline and parents who hit their children. What do you think about this type of discipline?

Participant 1: It's bad.

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

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It affects you emotionally, and in the future, we remember how we were hit.

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

Teens also described discipline as having a negative impact on connectedness with their parents in instances where they perceived the discipline taking place unfairly or over minor things. This perception is evidenced by the following two quotes:

"My brothers and sisters are outside and they're playing and everything, and he wants us to help. Sometimes he'll just yell and tell us to 'come over here!' or ground us for something really stupid."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

■

"No, I'm not trying to say mine, but some parents, if you do something - if you don't hardly do anything wrong - they'll just beat you up or knock you down."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Like parent respondents, quite a few teen respondents talked about discipline using the specific terms "strict," or "strictness." In several instances, the vocal inflection of the teens who used these terms suggested that "strict" was a code word for parental discipline involving yelling or hitting. Even where this implication was not present teens talked about "strictness" on parents' part as being a negative aspect of discipline and having a negative effect on connectedness, as in the following two examples:

Facilitator: And how about the rest of you? I'm trying to compare the relationship with your mother and your father.

Participant: I get along better with my mom 'cause my dad's a lot more strict than my mom.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

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Facilitator: Okay, so you started this [discussion.] You said that teenagers don't like their parents. They gave a couple of examples. Do you have one, something a teenager just might not like about their parents?

Participant: Too strict.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Instead of strictness, with its characteristics of unfair severity and inflexibility, teens looked for parents to incorporate negotiation into their style of discipline. This is evidenced in the following quotes from a teen and a parent:

"I have a friend who used to get hit, but he used to get mad and so he explained to his father, 'You can't do that to me anymore,' and 'Would you punish me with something else?' I think they went to workshops and learned about disciplining and so then he made him do 100 push ups."

Teen, Latino focus group, San Diego

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"I said to him, 'You know you're misbehaving. You lost the year in school. 'Yes,' he said. 'You know that you deserve to be punished. Okay, your punishment is going to be for one

month and afterwards you can do what you want.' This was like a contract."

Mother, Latina focus group, Miami

Negotiation appears to be something that children and teens highly value as a part of the discipline process. Teaching parents to negotiate and still hold their line could make for a beneficial intervention strategy.

Conflict

Previous findings on PCC indicate that family conflict can have a serious negative impact on PCC for both parents and teens. How serious and long-lasting that impact is depends on how the conflict is handled and whether it is resolved. If family conflict arises and is managed and resolved, it is believed to have no lasting negative impact on PCC and may even have a positive effect by fostering trust in the relationship, testifying to its resiliency, and positively reinforcing conflict resolution skills. When conflict within families goes unresolved, however, especially if it is widespread, then it can have a crippling effect on PCC. One focus group teen shared his experience with unresolved conflict and its impact on connectedness:

Participant: Yeah, everybody is distant in the house. My mom gets home late, so we don't really talk to her or anything. And I get home late so nobody really talks.

Facilitator: How does that feel for you?

Participant: A lot of tension builds up because problems don't get solved, so, I don't know. It's bad.

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Discipline clearly causes conflict within some families. Some of the signs of conflict reported by participants reflect behaviors that characterize parents' style or approach to discipline. These included: name calling, yelling, threats of physical violence and actual physical violence. The first three are all evidenced in the following quote:

"[S]he be angry sometimes and she don't know how to control herself. And my momma, I hate what she do. It could be something like my report card

- I make a bad grade but I be trying hard or something and she cuss me out or something. It's crazy, she call me all types of names and stuff... She calls me every name in the book... (Laughter and comments in the background) I don't want to see her no more... (Laughter and comments in the background) I could fight her if I wanted to."

Teen, African-American focus group, Miami

Yelling and name calling on the part of one teen as a sign of conflict is further evidenced in this quote:

"I'm always at basketball practice and when I come home, my mom is always on my back because I ain't there or something. And my sister is just getting on my nerves, so I'm getting into an argument with both of them. And then I just get mad and kick 'em both to the curb when I talk to them."

Teen, African-American focus group, Sacramento

Intimidation through the threat of violence is a feature of this comment:

"I sneak out to my auntie's house, so I could play with my cousins. And then she'll come, it'll be like eleven o'clock and everybody will be in the house or on the porch, so she'll be like, 'I'm gonna beat you! This and that!'"

Teen, African-American focus group, Miami

And finally, actual physical violence is an indicator of the chronic, unresolved conflict in this family:

Participant: There are days that I don't... It's weird - my mom and sister fight.

Facilitator: Okay, specific fighting between your mother and your sister. Are there specific things that they say or do in that fighting?

Participant: A lot of hands on.

Facilitator: So there's actual physical fighting. And what happens with you when you see that?

Participant: Well, a few times I wouldn't care, but a few times I would. And I just try to tell them to calm down.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Our focus groups also identified other signs that there is conflict within families. These included: cursing, family members withdrawing/not talking, one member or part of a family blaming another member/part of a family, threats involving separation, threats of neglect/not meeting basic needs, slamming doors, parents yelling and arguing with each other, problems not getting solved, and sibling(s) arguing with/yelling at parent(s).

There was a great deal of overlap between the signs of conflict within a family and the causes or factors that contributed to the presence of that conflict. Some factors reported by focus group participants as contributing to conflict include: one member or part of a family blaming another member or part of a family, children/teens changing environments or coming into a new environment, teens' puberty/hormone changes, sibling antagonism, parents fighting with siblings, "getting on each others' nerves"/being overly sensitive/taking things too personally, parents' financial challenges, chores not being done, and family members not following through on agreements. In the list above, several of the items are both signs that conflict exists and contributing factors to conflict. Two in particular merit discussion, namely sibling-parent conflict and parents nagging.

In our focus group families, conflict between a teen's parent(s) and one or more of his or her siblings is a common and powerful type of conflict. This type of conflict affects the child's connectedness with parents. In situations where this kind of conflict exists, teens not only withdrew from family/parent contact to avoid the conflict but also reported a noticeable decrease in connectedness with parents:

Participant: Well, what I wish is that my mom and dad would be together, and my sister, she gets in the way sometimes because she's always getting in trouble. She never listens.

Facilitator: And that effects your ability to be closer to your parents? Keep on talking. Say more about it.

Participant Well she's always getting

into trouble, and then whenever I try to talk to my parents, here she comes and they start yelling and there's always a lot of yelling in my house. So either I go into my room and just come in for a snack, and I take one in [to my room] so I stay closed in.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Parents nagging teens was another issue frequently cited by teens as both a sign, and a prominent source, of family conflict. Parental nagging has already surfaced as topic in the section of this report on expectations. Much of that section is devoted to parental structure and expectations around chores and focus group teens' negative reactions to being reminded, in their view - nagged - about chores. Given the severity of teens' reactions to being nagged about chores, it is not surprising that this kind of interaction becomes a significant source of conflict in families:

"And we usually argue about little things... If I'm washing clothes and I forget about my clothes. Because I'm always on the run, I'm always going somewhere, so if I forget about my clothes, she'll complain about that and I'm like, 'Why are you always complaining? It's nothing to blow steam over. What's the big deal? It's clothes.' You know, she's whacked."

*Teen, African-American focus group, Long
Island*

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"My dad and I, because we're so much alike, we disagree about almost everything. If my room isn't clean, 'Why isn't your room clean? Shouldn't you be cleaning your room?' We just don't get along."

*Teen, African-American focus group, Long
Island*

Besides "getting on teen's backs" about chores, as they put it, other parental behaviors were identified as forms of nagging that engender conflict for teens. One type of nagging cited prominently by teens was parents repeating themselves over and over, or not "dropping" an issue:

"I ask her to go to the store. If she says

no, I'll be like, 'Then I won't go to the store.' But then she'll just keep bringing it up and bringing it up and bringing it up. Just bury it. It's over with!"

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

"That's what my father does because he hates saying no. So if he does say no, he's got to explain it a thousand times why he said it."

*Teen, African-American focus group, Long
Island*

Here teens report conflict arising from their negative experience of parents' repetitive explanations, directives or reminders as "nagging." In reporting this experience, teens are sending conflicting messages and putting parents in a difficult position. The reports of explanations and reminders as sources of conflict contradicts, to some extent, teen's requests for these things as evidenced in other themes explored in this report. For example, in the sections on discipline and communication, teens expressed wanting their parents to explain their rules and decisions, as well as wanting parents to be understanding around teens forgetting what those rules are and needing reminders. In some of their comments selected for discussion of discipline and communication, teens described how these explanations and reminders can be a way for parents to preserve connectedness while dealing with challenging aspects of the parent-teen relationship, such as disciplinary action. Here teens seem to be saying the opposite -- that explanations and reminders are "nagging" and cause conflict that negatively impacts PCC. Assumedly it is confusing and challenging for parents to figure out how to operate in a seemingly narrow band of behavior between and appropriate levels of explanation and reminders and conflict-inducing levels of "nagging."

According to both parent and teen participants, unresolved conflict in the family results in detrimental effects on PCC and the parent-child relationship in general. One theme that emerged in terms of the specific effects of unresolved conflict was the idea that teens "act out" as a result of them. "Acting out" consists of rebellious behavior that can encompass a wide variety of specific behaviors, including truancy, delinquent behavior and risk-taking behaviors such as early initiation of sex, promiscuity and

substance use. One teen explained how he thought his friend acted out as a reaction to the conflict between his parents:

Participant: I've seen other people, like my friend, his house is horrible like that. Every time I go there I spend the night, and we'll be in the room and his parents are kind of trippy. They'll be all cool with each other. We'll see them kiss and things, but when the night time comes, they are arguing, slamming doors and little kids [are] crying. And it's like, 'Wow.' I don't want to be there no more. I just leave. It's crazy and that messes him up. He's twisted.

Participant: He just does stupid things, messes with girls, dumb stuff with girls like getting tattoos with girl's names on them.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

A second specific outcome might be inferred from focus group parents' comments. These parents emphasized the need for parents to have a good adult-based support system to help them with their parenting challenges. It seems logical to assume that conflict within their families would add to parents' need for this support system. Presumably, the absence of this support system would contribute both to lowering parents' ability to parent in a way that prevents conflict as well as amplifying the negative effects of family conflict on parents and their ability to connect with their children.

Methods for resolving family conflict that were described in our focus groups included: family meetings, letting go of or not focusing on "the small stuff," and apologizing. No mention was made of formal conflict resolution techniques by either parents or teens. These strategies are discussed in more detail in the Communication and Program sections of this report.

Siblings

The fact that a teen has siblings does not, in and of itself, mean that she or he is less likely to experience a sense of connectedness with his/her parent. What seems to be important is how parents treat each sibling. For example, several teens talked about losing a feeling of connectedness with a parent because the parent

takes the side of the sibling in conflicts between the teen and the sibling. This treatment was reported as especially irksome when the teen felt that the sibling was largely responsible for instigating the conflict. In "blended families" (families composed of parents and children from previously distinct families) where parents do not use a consistent set of rules with all the children, the differential treatment that results is experienced as unfair, breeds resentment and negatively impacts PCC. One teen shared his experience of being treated unfairly by his parents with regard to his younger sister (biological):

"... and they always take her side. She's not allowed to hit me, and I be in trouble for her hitting me. They take her side. She may be in my room, and I may tell her to do something or like she do something to nag me that bothers me, and I may just kick her out and she goes and tells my mom and then I get in trouble."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Another teen from Sacramento said:

"My sister usually messes everything at home. She don't clean up nothing, but I got to clean up after her."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Teens will look closely and make judgments about issues of fairness regarding parents' treatment of siblings. Often they will react negatively to differential treatment that strikes them as unfair. Whether real or perceived, teens may feel jealous, frustrated and/or angry in response to differential treatment. As a result, teens may withdraw from the parent or act out in other ways.

Several teens reported how much they resented their parents for assigning them the responsibility of looking after younger siblings. This resentment was exacerbated by siblings who behave poorly or are otherwise challenging to care for. One teen from Miami especially resented the fact that he gets in trouble with his parent for his sibling's misbehavior.

"...Because I want to like be with my friends and stuff, and he's very aggravating, and he's bad, and he don't listen

to nobody. So I don't like watching him because he'll like run off somewheres. Then she like, 'Where's your brother?' And I'm like, 'I don't know.' And she's like, 'You better go find him, and I counting to three ...' Blah, blah, blah, and all that crap. And if I don't find him, she be like, 'You better do this.' And I don' know what she be saying cause I be ignoring her. He don't get the whupings, but I get crunched down."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Miami*

Parents from several focus groups recognized the importance of treating children equally. Examples of equal treatment included: telling all your children that you love them, spending individual time with each child, and buying things for all your children when you're out shopping.

In some cases, parents talked about the importance of treating each sibling differently in order to accommodate different personalities and needs. Parents commented that children are not all alike, so it's important not to treat them as if they have exactly the same needs as their siblings. The more that a teen's unique needs are being met, the less problem that teen will have with the treatment of siblings:

"My husband focused on the baby, and our older son felt pushed to the side, and he started to have problems in school. That's when I started talking to my husband. 'Our older son needs you more than our younger one now. He feels when you are not there. He needs your attention. You need to talk more with him, play with him, spend more time with him.'"

Mother, Latina focus group, San Diego

Understanding how family structure can affect PCC has a specific implication for interventions that aim to increase parent-child connectedness. An assessment tool that looks at family structure and sibling relations would be useful in customizing programs to the needs of different family members and their unique personalities and attributes. Assessment tools for PCC are rare and those that exist have mostly been developed for researchers rather than practitioners. The one assessment tool we know of for practitioners is unpublished. Finally, to our

knowledge, no assessment tool currently exists that looks specifically at family structure.

Separation

We use the term "separation" to refer to a physical separation between a parent and his or her teenage children. It is distinguishable from the term "availability," where a parent has access to his or her child but does not, or cannot make himself or herself available to spend time, create shared activity or engage in focused communication with that child. Notably, the issue of physical separation was only reported in our focus groups with African-American respondents, or in the case of focus groups with teens, those groups with a mix of African-American and Latino respondents. However, in these groups, some form of physical separation between teens and one of their parents or relatives serving as their guardian was widespread. Teens reported being separated not only from their parents but also from grandparents and other members of their extended family. In these cases, teens reported that separation has a largely negative impact on their relationships and feelings of connectedness with individual relatives and on their sense of belonging to a cohesive family unit:

Teen: My cousins, they have to live with her, and they don't want to live there anymore...When they come to visit, they can only stay a few hours, for one day, and it's not even a whole day. They have to leave early because they live upstate and if they get home late, she won't let them come down for a while.

Facilitator: And that...you don't like that?

Teen: Mm-hmm.

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Typical causes of separation that affected relationships for focus group families included: divorce, a family member moving away, work responsibilities that take a parent away from his or her family, a parent needing a vacation, and a parent in jail. The experience of separation from children resulting from incarceration was particularly prevalent among the African-American fathers we talked to at the Center for Fathers, Family and Workforce Development in

Baltimore, Maryland. An informal poll conducted by the focus group facilitator showed that roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of these men had been incarcerated for some period during their children's lives. In one extreme case, the father we spoke to had been incarcerated for the entirety of his teen's life:

"Well, I had problems (inaudible). She was born and I got locked up, and I came home and I got locked right back up again, so I wasn't really in her life for the whole 15 years that she is."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

This father went on to describe the amazement he felt at his daughter's reaction when he got out of prison the second time:

"I just came home August 13th last year, but just the little bit of time [we've had together], even though [I'd been locked up] she still loved me. I was, like, 'How is that possible?'"

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

This father's experience illustrates one of the two opposing reactions to separation that parents reported teens having. In this case the teen feels connected to the parent despite the separation. In such cases, the reestablished contact was described by parents as a treasured experience and sometimes cited as a source of extra appreciation for the relationship.

In the opposing case, parents described intensely negative reactions from teens towards parents after a significant separation. Their teenaged children expressed feelings of resentment when the parent reappeared, expressed a sense of their lives being intruded upon, or displayed a lack of respect toward the parent. These reactions appeared more common when the separation occurred early in the child's life and/or was maintained for a long period of time.

Teens themselves reported a variety of reactions to separation from their parents, including embarrassment, shame, resentment, withdrawal, withholding love, disrespect, acting out/disobedience, and feelings of abandonment and anger. At least one teen reported that his father's absence created financial hardships for the family. Many of the teens who reported

these reactions characterized the situation as negatively impacting PCC.

Focus group parents had their own observations about their children's reactions to separation, about how parents deal with these reactions, and advice about how parents should deal with these reactions. Interestingly, several parents reported observing the same particular reaction on the part of their child to the end of a period of separation, namely that the child clings to the parent and just can't get enough of that parent's time and attention:

"When I go to see my son, he's so happy, he wants to do a hundred things at a time. 'Come on Dad, we're going to go over here, we're going to go outside, we're going to do this.' He wants to do a hundred things at one time because he feels that I'm just there for a short time, and he's trying to get all of it at once."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Several fathers in Baltimore described how some men let their children's anger, resentment and criticism of their separation drive them away from the relationship even after the period of separation is over.

Interference

Parents and teens from several African-American focus groups talked about how interference from other family members can be detrimental to parent-child connectedness. The issue of "interference" did not seem to surface in our focus groups with Latino parents and teens perhaps because Latinos often incorporate the extended family into decision making and child rearing. Interference was generally characterized as another family member (e.g., other parent, grandmother, parent's new partner) teaching a child a different set of values, setting different rules, badmouthing a parent, restricting access to the child, and buying things for the child without the parent's approval. This interference often leaves parents feeling frustrated, and at times powerless, while teens feel confused about whose rules or values they should abide by.

For example, two mothers (who also happened to be sisters) from one of our Long Island focus

groups complained about their mother's interference in the raising of their children. One of the mothers specifically stated that this interference made her feel "pushed out" and affected her connectedness with her children. She also described how her children use the situation to manipulate her and her mother to their advantage. A parent's ability to maintain consistency and trust can be eroded by the interference from outside family members which can then result in a decreased sense of connectedness with their children. This erosion of trust can be seen in several of the examples described below.

When parents who do not live together set and enforce different rules, the teen has the opportunity to choose the rule that best benefits him/her, leaving parents open to being undermined, disrespected and less capable of disciplining their teen. These conflicts can result in a decreased sense of connectedness between the teen and his/her parents. For example, one mother from Sacramento explained how her son's father advised the teen not to tell his mother about the son's new girlfriend and, as a result, undermined the trust she had developed with her son. As trust is the foundation of parent-child connectedness, this example illustrates a potentially disastrous form of interference.

One father raising a stepson talked about the interference he experiences from his stepson's biological dad:

"But one of the things that got in the way was his actual biological father telling him he doesn't have to listen to me. And his father is successful. He has a good job, real good job, but his father doesn't spend time with him, you know what I'm saying? ... His father didn't come around until I showed up, and then his father was telling him [stepson], 'You don't have to listen to him [stepfather]. He doesn't know what he

is talking about.' And so he [stepson] rebelled. He used to get smart with me. He'd disrespect..."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

From the other perspective, several biological fathers from Baltimore had the opposite problem - namely, unwanted interference from the male partners of their children's mothers. These fathers typically said that they wanted those

male partners to call them when they were having difficulty with their children. They felt that it was interference for these partners to discipline or guide their children since they often did not share the same parenting principles as the father.

“I want you to make sure that you don't holler, raise your voice to them, even if their mother is out of town. You gotta call me.”

*Father, African-American Focus Group,
Baltimore*

Several Baltimore fathers reported that when they are absent from their children's lives because of incarceration or geographic separation from other family members, the children's mothers often speak disparagingly about them, hurting their connection to their children.

“...being out of their lives, you can't let the kids be listening what their mothers and fathers be saying about us. Oh God, you know this, this and that and then. I ain't gonna say it's just the mothers because sometimes your family be saying the same.”

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

■

“When mine [mother of his children] talked bad about me, my kids didn't listen because the kids are not dumb, and they know who love them and who don't love them because I didn't give up. I kept coming around, and I said, 'I heard her talk bad about me,' but then it's like they loved me more.”

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Two focus group teens reported not wanting to invest emotionally in connecting with their mothers because of their mothers' romantic male partners. The participants described how their mothers always side with their adult male partners against them, or only have time and energy for the male partners. The teens see the

romantic partners, in one case a stepfather, as interfering with the relationship with the mother:

“Boys don't care about their mothers because like if they have a stepfather, their mother is always going to listen to their stepfather.”

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

It appears that interference from other family members can be rooted in lack of communication, or the desire to be the favored parent, to hurt the other parent and/or to protect or provide for the child. Whatever the reason, interference that results in confusing messages to a teenage child is likely not to benefit the child and to hurt connectedness between the child and one or both parents.

Money

One objective of our PCC focus group study was to explore how financial limitations affect parent-child connectedness. In an effort to respond to this study objective, a concerted effort was made by focus group coordinators to recruit parents and teens from low-income neighborhoods to participate in the PCC focus group study. Using the zip code data we obtained from both parent and teen demographic questionnaires,¹⁷ we estimate that the average median household income for all focus group participants was \$36,390, and on average, 31.4% of the families living in the neighborhoods represented by all focus group participants live in poverty.¹⁸

The issue of limited financial resources and the stress resulting from working long hours surfaced in both teen and parent focus groups. In some cases, teens talked about wishing their families had more money to help ease some of the stress experienced by family members. Easing this stress might create more opportunities for families to spend time together and have fun. One teen from Sacramento, when asked what he would change in his family if he had a magic wand, said:

¹⁷ We used zip code data as a proxy for income level of focus group participants. The zip codes reported in parent and teen questionnaire were researched using Census 2000 data for median household income.

¹⁸ According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the 2004 poverty threshold for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states was \$18,850.

"The amount of income that comes in.
That would make everything better."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Other teens saw money as the only way to "connect" with their parents, even though they admitted that it was not a very satisfying connection. For example, one teen talked about money being the only thing her father provides as far as parenting:

"The only thing he does is send me a check, so that's all he's good for. That's all I call him for. 'Hi, How ya doin'? Can I have some money. Can you send me some money?' That's basically it."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Long Island*

Other teens felt that their parents giving them money was a contribution to connectedness because they see this money as a type of reward. One teen from Sacramento, when asked about how his parents giving him money would help him feel closer to them, said: "It would just make me feel like they could reward me whenever I do good." In contrast, a teen from San Diego said that parents who buy a lot of things for their children sometimes wind up with kids who are not very motivated or well behaved.

Although a few parents talked directly about money during our focus group discussions, more parents talked about the stress related to working two jobs, long hours, and/or inconvenient shifts in order to make ends meet for their families. African-American mothers, in particular, talked about the challenges of being single parents and single sources of income for their families. Several talked specifically about not being able to rely on their children's fathers to provide financially.

Having more household income might allow for more resources for parents to have fun with their children (e.g., going out to dinner, going on vacations, going to an amusement park). Even more important, however, making a fair salary within a reasonable number of hours would likely reduce parental stress and increase the amount of time and energy parents have to spend with their teens, monitor their activities and communicate - variables that are more closely related to developing parent-child connectedness.

"The Most Important Things to Creating PCC in Families"

How did our focus group participants answer the question of what is most important to understand about PCC in their families? Although we did not have the conclusion to this section of the report in mind when we asked the question, we did in fact ask our focus group participants, both parents and teens, to comment on what they thought was most important to establishing and maintaining PCC in their families. In fact, we typically asked them to identify the three most important things to creating PCC in families. We documented responses to this question in 13 of our 16 focus groups. We asked participants to record their answers on 3x5 index cards and then share their answers with the group as a way of bringing closure to the discussion. (The absence of responses from three of the 16 groups is attributable to choices by individual facilitators to modify the focus group protocol around closure, plus, in one case, loss of data.)

The 13 focus groups from which we recorded answers to this question produced responses that we were able to generalize into 30 different categories of the "most important things for creating PCC in families." Table 2 on the next page shows the 30 categories and the number of times participants gave a response that fit into each category.

Obviously this is not a scientific survey. The question was originally designed to bring closure to the focus group process and was not intended to serve as a formal research question. Any scientific treatment of this data is hampered by inadequate sample sizes, inconsistency in sampling and subjective interpretations made while grouping responses into categories.

However, a look at the table of responses to this question raises some interesting ideas about how focus group families view PCC. First, choosing a cutoff point to identify the largest "vote-getters" yielded a top seven list, namely: communication, love, spending time together, respect, trust, understanding and openness. We would say that almost all of these match well with the themes that emerged most strongly in our focus group commentaries. The one exception to this is the "love" category. It is interesting to note that at second place, it is exceedingly prominent in this list, but focus group participants did not have as much to say about it as

Table 2: Participant Responses to the Question - "What are the Three Most Important Things for Creating PCC in Families?"

	Fathers	Teens	Mothers	TOTAL
Communication (talk/listen)	11	14	15	51
Love	8	11	15	34
Spend time together	11	12	8	31
Respect	1	12	11	24
Trust	3	7	9	19
Understanding	7	4	7	19
Openness - be able to say anything	4	1	9	14
Honesty	5	1	5	11
Show that you care	1	3	3	7
Play and imagination	1	3	2	6
God/prayer	1	0	4	5
Hugs and kisses/affection	0	2	2	4
Be involved	1	0	3	4
Discipline	0	3	0	3
Be consistent	2	0	2	4
Have faith in your child	0	2	1	3
Give more money	0	3	0	3
Be nosy/ask questions	0	1	1	2
Balance	0	2	0	2
Give privileges	0	2	0	2
Patience	2	0	0	2
Share ideas	1	0	1	2
Stability	0	0	1	1
Show more feelings	1	0	0	1
Give more responsibility	0	1	0	1
Encouragement	0	0	1	1
Learning from each other	0	0	1	1
Commitment	1	0	0	1
Forgiveness	1	0	0	1

other themes that did not make it into the top seven. Perhaps the personal, private and intimate nature of love makes it less easy for focus group participants to talk openly about it in a public discussion.

Another interesting exercise is to look at the categories that made it into the top seven overall but that are not in the top seven of individual subgroups. Notably, teens and mothers were in

perfect agreement up to sixth place. At seventh place, mothers put emphasis on openness, as did fathers (whose four responses represent almost 1/6 of their total subgroup), but teens did not put a strong emphasis on it. In fact, a clear seventh place "winner" is difficult to identify for the focus group teens as a wide variety of items yielded the same tally.

With fathers, we see one significant difference

between the overall top seven and the top seven within the subgroup. (Note two issues with the father subgroup: first, the group only represents African-American fathers as there were no Latino fathers in the study, and second, they represent the smallest subgroup in terms of numbers with two focus groups conducted with 22 participants.) Honesty ranked as the fifth highest item for fathers but came in eighth overall. It should be noted that honesty for fathers appears much more important than the overall seventh place finisher, respect, which was only listed by one father. This result is interesting as the theme of respect came up very frequently in the commentaries of focus group fathers but only received one mention as a "most important thing for creating PCC in families."

The table shows some other interesting results with regard to what different subgroups might value differently around PCC. First, there are two examples of things that parents valued more than teens did, namely, honesty, which was discussed above, and being consistent although the discrepancy with regards to the latter is based on a very small tally. Fathers lent greater importance to honesty than mothers. Fathers also rated patience higher than mothers and teens. Mothers were the only subgroup that put religious or spiritual issues, what we characterized based on their commentaries as God/prayer, among the most important things to creating connectedness.

There are several examples of things that teens valued more than parents did: discipline, giving money, balance, and giving privileges. Again, it should be noted that these discrepancies are based on very small tallies. However, the importance of being given money and privileges is highly consistent with what focus group teens, especially boys from the Sacramento area, said in their commentaries. Balance is a very difficult response to interpret but most likely means parents balancing being both a friend and a parent, as this was a prominent theme. Its prominence in focus group discussions could explain the importance teens gave it in their ratings.

Discipline is the surprising result with regard to teens. An overwhelming number of teens had negative comments about discipline, especially when it was overly punitive or involved hitting or spanking (to which the item here does not necessarily refer). In focus group discussions, a

few teens did place importance on discipline and characterized it as having a positive effect in families, so it may be these individuals who "voted" for it. Also, many focus group teens described experiencing a decrease in connectedness resulting from bad behavior on the part of their siblings and conflict in the family arising from this. Teens with this experience may be listing discipline as important to PCC because they see it as a way to bring their siblings under control.

More surprising is the absence of any mention from focus group parents of discipline in their assessments of the three things most important to creating PCC in families. Many more parents than teens had discussed the need for discipline within families. Perhaps the table identifies a distinction between parents' perception of the instrumental need for discipline and a lack of belief that it contributes significantly to connectedness.

Finally, we see some items on this list that we would have expected to rank higher than they did based on our observations of focus groups as well as on our model of how PCC is established and maintained in families. Based on observations of focus groups, we would have thought that God/prayer would have been much more prominent in the parent tally. Based on both the commentaries of focus group teens about what is important to them, and on the elements that our model suggest are important to PCC, we would have thought that stability and being consistent would have ranked higher than they did (though certainly not in the top seven or even in the top 10). Teens spoke frequently and passionately about their need for stability in their lives, their hurts and fears when it wasn't present, and their intense need for fairness and consistency from their parents, but the low ranking of stability and being consistent do not reflect their seeming importance. Our model suggests that these items would be part of the stable platform necessary to establish a climate of trust, which we see as an essential foundation for a strong connection. Perhaps these sentiments are embedded within trust, which ranked in the number five spot. These rankings suggest either that the model is capturing something that parents and teens themselves fail to recognize or that the model needs to be revised.

■ Section 4: Program Implications

We see our work on PCC as valuable only insofar as it advances knowledge in ways that increase the capacity of practitioners to improve the lives of families. Our goal in attempting to understand PCC is to be able to communicate this understanding to practitioners and translate it into resources, specifically intervention activities, which practitioners can use with the families with whom they work. We pursued this goal in our focus groups by spending the last 15 minutes of both parent and teen focus groups on questions related to designing programs to impact parent-child connectedness. We asked participants for their recommendations on content, approaches, recruitment, appropriate setting and program leaders.

Several themes related to program content surfaced during our analysis of parent and teen focus group data including: opportunities to share time together, improving parent-child communication, opportunities to simply get to know each other better, and need for parent support and family counseling. Many of these themes were presented in combination with each other. For example, a program might include a family picnic. This would be both a shared activity and an opportunity for parents and teens to practice their communication skills.

Communication

Parents in particular identified communication as an important, if not essential, piece of any program designed to strengthen parent-child connectedness. Communication skills are important in building connectedness with a teen as well as for achieving more effective resolutions of family problems. Several elements of communication were discussed by both parents and teens including: empathy, listening, learning about each other, venting, speaking with

respect, talking about sexuality, conflict resolution and effective ways to discipline. The element that seems to appear with the most intensity and frequency was the desire for a program to create a space for parents and teens to simply "hear" and validate each other.

Although "empathy" was not a word used by focus group participants, the idea of creating a space to really understand what parents and teens feel was expressed many times. Parents and teens talked about wanting an opportunity to "air their grievances" or "vent" as well as understand "each others' feelings" and "points of view." There was a loud and clear message that both parents and teens want to be heard and understood, and that such opportunities would be helpful, if not therapeutic to the individual and the parent-child relationship. One father from Baltimore said:

"He can have himself [an opportunity] where he can vent out all his pain, his aggravation, whatever it is that is eating him up inside because that is where the problem lies inside of a child..."

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

A teen from Sacramento said:

"I would say you and your mom and dad sit down like in one room. It comes out what you all don't like about each other, like what you think ought to change in a stormy relationship, and all hear each other's view without cutting anybody off. Listen to what everybody has to say."

*Teen, African-American focus group,
Sacramento*

Several participants described activities that could develop an increased sense of empathy and understanding. One mother from Miami

suggested an activity (that educators would typically call a "fishbowl") where both parents and teens take turns listening to each other without interruption. Several fathers from Baltimore suggested a similar fishbowl activity where fathers could learn about mothers' perspectives and vice versa. A Latina teen from Miami suggested that parents and teens practice role plays separately and then come together later to share experiences. Perhaps this teen has a hunch that having the ability to role play without influence (from a parent) would allow for more honest/authentic sharing of feelings.

"Separate the kids and the adults - put them [parents] to one side, put us on the other side. And I think, maybe it would be a risk and you know, like maybe tape or videotape kids talking and a big group discussion and show it to the adults."

Teen, Latina focus group, Miami

An African-American mother from Miami described role plays as a way for parents and teens to empathize with each other.

"...then after you have a couple of meetings, bring them both together. Bring them both together and then you can hear your child's point of view or what she thinks. In other words, have two role playing of people who have considerate conversation. Okay, here's my son and he is going to play my role."

Parent, African-American focus group, Miami

In addition to the desire for a program to create space for parents and teens to empathize and understand each other, several teens talked about wanting a program that would help them know their parents more as people - their likes, their friends, their history, etc. Suggestions for this exchange included guided discussions with a facilitator, journaling, "getting to know you" questionnaires, and interviews. Several teens noted that making time for these types of conversational activities may be challenging for families in which parents work long hours and teens are busy with school and friends. For example, one teen from Long Island said:

"... for parents and teenagers to have a room where they could spend time with each other. It's also like interacting

with each other, like getting to know each better, even though they've lived with each other like half of their lives they need to know each other better. Most of the time they don't spend time with each other because sometimes the teenagers might be out with their friends and their parents might be at work all day and they just like wouldn't have fun."

Teen, African-American focus group, Long Island

Shared Activities

Opportunities to simply have fun with each other was another program theme that featured prominently in focus group discussions, especially since for many of the families with whom we spoke, it is challenging to find the time and money for some types of shared activities. Teens and parents seemed to agree about the types of activities they would enjoy doing together, which is a credit to parents' awareness about their teens likes and dislikes as well as their willingness to make shared activities teen-centered. In fact, one mother from Long Island stressed that programs needed to be fun and incorporate "play" into everything they do so that parents and children who attend those programs receive benefits both from mutual enjoyment of the program, as well as from the information or skills it teaches. Another mother from Sacramento talked about a program called "15-Minute Play Time" where the child is given the opportunity to direct an activity and the parent's job is to follow what the child wants to do. She found that the child is more cooperative later on, and the bond between them is closer when she practiced this activity regularly. Notably, one teen from Sacramento said that he would be willing to go antique shopping with his mother because he knows she would enjoy it even though he would find it boring.

Focus group teens and parents provided many ideas about the kinds of recreational activities they would like to see a program facilitate for families. These activities included: a barbeque or picnic, a trip to a park or beach, going out to eat, sports activities, movies, camping, fishing, spending time outdoors, going to amusement parks or retreats, playing board games, working together to make something, having parent-teen

competitions (parent and teen on the same team), and volunteering in the community. One exchange with several teens from a Long Island focus group suggested that recreational activities be custom designed for different parent-child pairings such as a mother-daughter workshop or father-daughter dance. One teen from Sacramento wanted a male adult mentor, similar to those in the Big Brother/Big Sister program who could serve as some kind of a surrogate father. A father from Baltimore talked about the need for a program that would help mitigate the separation between parents and their children (especially incarcerated fathers) by facilitating visits that would allow father and their children to spend time together.

Counseling

Several parents and teens talked about the need for both individual and family counseling. Others talked about the desire for something less formal like a support group. For some parents, counseling might provide the support needed to work through personal problems or mental health issues. For example, one mother from San Diego talked about how valuable counseling has been in helping her heal from her own childhood sexual abuse. Several parents from a Long Island focus group talked about the fact that many parents need to work on their own self-esteem and personal challenges like abusive relationships and/or drug abuse. A father from Baltimore talked about the desire to see a counselor to work on his own issues so he could be a better influence on his child.

“What I would like is to first deal with some of the unresolved issues that I have, to first help me to love myself more and to build up my self-esteem more so I don't display or transfer these negative influences that I've had in my life onto my child.”

*Father, African-American focus group,
Baltimore*

Location

Several suggestions were made about the best location to hold a program designed to increase parent-child connectedness. Both Latino and

African-American talked about the church as being a good place to hold a program although several Latina mothers also said that the church may not be a good place if the program would also talk about sexual issues - "a taboo subject." Others suggested a well known community-based organization. As a location to hold a PCC program, schools received mixed reviews. Schools may be trusted locations in the community, but several Latina mothers talked about inconvenient hours of programs at schools or not being notified about programs.

Program Leaders

When asked about the qualities of a parent-child connectedness program leader, parents and teens had many recommendations. According to our focus group participants, program leaders should be: committed, skilled at talking about and solving family problems, good mentors and role models for kids (especially noted for African-American male teens), skilled at getting to know parents and teens and building trust/rapport, skilled at facilitating discussion about feelings, someone who can make you feel safe and secure, educated in his/her field, and credible in the community. Some parents thought a peer parent program involving actual parents from the community who were trained to educate parents and teens would work well.

Recruitment

Parents mentioned several things that program leaders should pay attention to with regard to parent recruitment and attendance. Program leaders should: consider parent work schedules and parent responsibilities to their children (e.g. preparing meals), schedule programs on a regular, predictable basis so parents can plan for them, give parents enough notice about program schedules, not rely on promotional flyers brought home by children because kids often forget to give the flyers to their parents, rely on more personal recruitment strategies such as phone calls or word of mouth from other parents, plan something "catchy" at each session to attract parents, use a "catchy" title (some title suggestions from Latina mothers from Miami included: "I Need You to Listen," "I'm Here for You" and "Time for Parents and Kids"), make

programs affordable, give parents choices about what presentations to attend and don't expect parents to attend every session. One mother talked about the difficulty she has had in trying to get her son to go to parent-child activities at school. She reported that her son would rather babysit his younger siblings (normally a dreaded chore) than go to a parent-child night. It is possible that teens may be more successfully recruited to a parent-child program if their circles of friends (and their parents) are also recruited.

Some Latina mothers emphasized the language and cultural barriers that prevent them from attending programs. They stressed that programs need to be offered in Spanish and at times that are convenient to parents who work late shifts. They also mentioned that husbands are sometimes opposed to their wives "getting involved," and wives will often comply with their husbands' wishes in order to avoid conflict or violence. Program leaders might consider invitations to the entire family, including fathers, or special invitations to fathers to help appease this particular husband-wife dynamic.

When asked for their ideas on PCC programs, Latina mothers from Miami suggested activities that focused only on their children such as tutoring programs, sports programs, sexuality education programs and mentoring programs. The facilitator attempted several times to redirect the question to elicit ideas that would build parent-child connectedness. However, the mothers in this focus group did not suggest activities that involved both parents and teens or activities that would have an obvious impact on PCC. In many Latino families, family matters are often addressed within the family with little or no outside support, especially if culturally competent services are lacking in the community.¹⁹ The idea that an outside program might help family relations may not feel comfortable or appropriate to some Latino families. This cultural norm may explain why the answers to this question seemed to focus more on the teen rather than on the family. Creating rapport (*confianza*) with parents and teens would be a critical task for program leaders to achieve in order to work within this norm.

¹⁹ Schuster, C. (2003). *Issues at a Glance: Latina Adolescent Health*. Washington DC: Advocates for Youth.

■ Section 5: Next Steps

Over the past two and half years, our project team has built an understanding of parent-child connectedness linked to the prevention of unintended teen pregnancy and adolescent sexual risk-taking. Our next step will "spring-board" off of the general understanding of PCC among economically challenged families of color given to us by our focus group participants as well as their recommendations specific to programs and services. This next step will utilize our evolving understanding of PCC to inform the design of interventions that can be used widely to increase PCC in families with the ultimate goal of reducing unwanted teen pregnancy.

This understanding will be combined with the application of health behavior theory (e.g., social learning theory) and a program planning framework. We will use the BDI (Behavior-Determinant-Intervention) Logic Model²⁰ program planning framework to develop PCC interventions. Our BDI logic model will describe the key parent and teen behaviors that lead to PCC and the determinants of those factors, and then finally suggest designs for intervention activities that are likely to change or strengthen those determinants through the application of specific applied behavioral theories.

The PCC project team will take what it has learned about the behaviors that contribute to parent-child connectedness (e.g., empathy, shared time together and respectful communication) to develop targeted activities to strengthen these behaviors. We will carefully breakdown the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will support the strengthening of a particular behavior. For example, learning how to empathize requires some knowledge about

active listening - as well as the actual skills necessary to listen actively, reflect and demonstrate emotional understanding - an attitude or belief that empathy is a beneficial skill to have, and a willingness try a new communication technique for the benefit of enhancing a parent-teen relationship. We will also look at ways to engage parents, teens and future program facilitators in the activities we develop. For example, what language should be used to attract parents and teens to these intervention activities? What training will CBO staff implementing these intervention activities need, if any? How can we design activities in a way that will make them easy to implement?

The team will also look at factors that pose barriers to parent-child connectedness (e.g., conflict, lack of autonomy granting and poor parental self-esteem/mental health). A similar analysis will be applied to these factors to design intervention activities that may lessen the presence of these barriers in families and the negative impact they have on PCC.

Our team will have to make decisions about what contributing or challenging factors that intervention activities will not address due to limitations of time, funding, or "leverage." For example, it is clear that poverty or limited financial resources challenge the development and maintenance of PCC in families. However, our team will likely not be able to develop interventions to eliminate poverty or increase financial resources for particular families or communities. Likewise, our team does not have the expertise to develop advanced psychotherapeutic interventions for parents who are suffering the consequences of childhood physical or sexual abuse.

²⁰ For more information about the BDI Logic model, visit: <http://www.etr.org/recapp/BDILOGICMODEL20030924.pdf>

After a long period of research, we are finally ready to build the "bridge" in PCC BRIDGE. As practitioners, we are excited to take our two and a-half years of work and apply it to the development of practical activities that other practitioners can use with families in their communities. This is the main reason why we embarked in this work in early 2003. Much was being written about the protective nature of parent-child connectedness, but little was available about how to support it. We expect our first collection of PCC intervention activities to be available in November 2005. To learn more about this upcoming work, visit the ReCAPP website at www.etr.org/recapp for updates, or email Steve Bean at steveb@etr.org or Lori Rolleri at lorir@etr.org.

■ Appendix A: Focus Group Locations and Participants

Location	Date	Parent or Teen	African-American or Latino	Number
Sacramento	4/8	Mothers	African-American	7
Sacramento	4/9	Teen Boys	African-American	8
Miami	4/26	Mothers	Latina	10
Miami	4/26	Teen Girls	Latina	3
Miami	4/27	Mothers (1 grandmother serving as parent)	African-American	10
Miami	4/27	Teens - girls and boys	African-American	10
Sacramento	5/24	Mothers	African-American	10
Sacramento	5/25	Teen Boys	African-American	7
San Diego	6/3	Mothers	Latina	11
San Diego	6/3	Teens - girls and boys	Latino	11
Roosevelt	6/24	Mothers	African-American	3
Roosevelt	6/24	Teens - girls and boys	African-American	8
Roosevelt	6/25	Mothers (2 grandmothers serving as parents)	African-American	8
Roosevelt	6/25	Teens - girls and boys	African-American	7
Baltimore	6/29	Fathers	African-American	12
Baltimore	6/30	Fathers	African-American	10

Total number of focus group participants = 135

Total number of parent participants = 81

Total number of teen participants = 54

Total number of African-American participants = 100

Total number of Latino participants = 35

■ Appendix B: PCC Focus Group Protocol - PARENTS

Overall Research Questions

1. What does "parent-child connectedness" (PCC) mean to parents?
2. What kind of intervention activities would parents see as helpful to creating/strengthening PCC in their families?

Materials Needed

- ~15 chairs arranged in a circle
- Table to arrange snacks
- Snacks for ~15 people (remember ice, utensils, cups, napkins, plates)
- Drinking water for facilitators
- ~ 15 nametags
- Thick black magic markers to write on name tags
- Focus group tape recording equipment
- Tapes for tape recorder
- 12 \$45 gift certificates
- 24 Participant Assent forms (one to be signed and collected, the other to leave with participant)
- 12 pens
- 12 participant questionnaires
- Large envelope to collect questionnaires
- Pad and pen for note taker
- Small alarm clock (digital) for facilitator to glance at
- Focus Group Guidelines on flipchart
- Introduction/Icebreaker Questions on flipchart
- Index cards
- 1 roll masking tape
- 2 clipboards

Focus Group Site Preparation (30 minutes)

1. Arrange chairs in circular formation for at least 12 participants, 1 facilitator and 1 notetaker.
2. Set-up snacks for at least 12 people.
3. Have name tags and thick black magic markers available for people to write their first names only.
4. Have assent forms and pens ready.
5. Test tape recording equipment and place in center of the circle.
6. Warmly greet focus group participants as they enter the room. Encourage them to take some snacks.
7. Give each person two assent forms to read over. Ask them to sign the form before we begin the discussion. Make sure each person receives two copies of the assent form - one to sign and one to take home with them with focus group study contact information. Make yourself available to summarize/read the form to parents who need help.
8. Ask participants to turn off cell phones.
9. Inform participants where bathrooms are and encourage their use before focus group gets started.

Introduction (3-4 minutes)

Welcome and Facilitator Introduction

"Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our discussion. I want to thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about parent relationships with teen children. My name is [name of facilitator] and assisting me is Lori. We both work for a health education organization in Santa Cruz, CA called ETR Associates."

Background on PCC Bridge Project and Purpose of Focus Group

"I'm going to tell you a little bit about our project and what you can expect today. For the last year and half, ETR has been studying parent-teen relationships mostly by reading reports and talking with parenting experts. We now want to talk to the real experts - parents and teenagers - to find out what they think is important for developing healthy parent-teen relationships. We are going to use what we learn from you today and from other discussions we have with parents and teens to design future programs for parents and their teen children."

"Our focus group discussion is going to last about an hour and a-half. Focus groups are different from workshops or classes. Once we get started, I am going to ask you questions, and you are going to share your thoughts and opinions. You will do most of the talking. I will be doing a lot of listening. Remember we want to learn from you. We are not going to necessarily "teach" you anything today."

Appreciation

"To show our appreciation for what you teach us and for your time, we have \$45 gift certificates to (name of store) that we will give to each of you at the end of the session."

How Today's Focus Group will Work (6-7 minutes)

No "Right" or "Wrong" Answers and Participation

"I will be asking you several questions about parent-child relationships over the next hour or so. I want to assure you that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers but rather different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it is different from what others have said."

"In fact, it's really important for us to hear all the different points of view in the room. If you want to follow-up on something someone said, or if you want to agree or disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Don't feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. We want everyone to have a chance to share ideas. We may need to interrupt or call on people to make sure this happens. Please do not feel offended if we do this."

Tape Recording and Confidentiality

"Before we get started, I want to remind you that we will be tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say things in these sessions, and we can't write fast enough to write them all down."

"We will be on a first name basis today and again, we will not use your real names in our report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. No one will be able to link your name back to what you said, and only project staff like myself and Lori will listen to that tape."

"Also, you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. I would also like to ask that if you talk about your focus group experience with family or friends, do not attach anyone's name here with the stories they share. Can I get everyone to agree to that by nodding their heads?" Make eye contact with each person in the group and wait for him/her to nod affirmatively.

Assent Forms

"At this point, I would like to collect everyone's signed assent forms. Does anyone have any questions about these forms before we collect them?"

After you have collected the assent forms, tell the group that you will be starting the tape recorder and do so.

Timing, Survey and Gift Certificates

"We expect to be here until _____. We appreciate you taking this time with us so we want to make sure we end on time. Lori will be watching the clock and may need to break off the discussion at times to be sure we have time to discuss all topics. Lori may also ask you some questions or remind me of something I missed."

"At about _____ (20 minutes before the end of our time together), we will end the focus group and ask you to complete a very short questionnaire. After you complete the questionnaire, we will distribute to each of you a \$45 gift certificate to (name of store) as a token of our appreciation for your time and participation."

Icebreaker (5 minutes)

"Let's begin. We have asked you wear a name tag with your first name on it to help us remember each others' names. Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves by giving our first names, who lives in your home with you, and just for fun, tell us what your favorite food to cook or eat is. I'll start..."

Focus Group Questions (80 minutes)

Opening Question

1. As you know, our team is trying to learn more about parent relationships with their teen children. Think about the last year. What are some **positive things about your relationship** with your teenager that you can remember over the past year?

Main Questions

2. Parents find different ways to develop close relationships with their children. What kinds of things **do you do or say** to try to feel close with your teen?
 - a. How do your **teens respond** when you try to do things to create closeness?
 - b. If there are **grandparents** in the group, consider asking: How do grandparents develop close relationships with their grandchildren?
 - c. Possible **father** question: Do you think fathers and mothers connect differently with their children? If so, how?

3. Not all parents feel close to their teenage daughters or sons. What makes it **hard, or what gets in the way**, for some parents to create closeness with their teens?
 - a. Do any of you **experience these difficulties**? What have these experiences been like for you?
 - b. What do you do to **overcome** these difficulties?
4. In what ways do you think family closeness affects the **lives of teenagers**?
5. Eventually, ETR will want to develop a program to support parents and their teenaged children. We want to learn from you about the type of programs or activities you think parents and teens would like. Imagine that someone from the community like a school teacher, pastor, or (local focus group coordination organization) wanted to help parents and teens who were having trouble with their relationship, **what would you advise them to do to help**?
 - a. **Who** in your community would these parents and teens want to receive help from?
 - b. Would you **actually attend/participate** in this program/activity?

What words/ideas should be used in a **program title/description** to appeal to parents? (optional question)

Wrap Up Questions

6. Give each parent an index card and a pen. Ask each parent to write the **three most important things** needed for creating closeness between parents and their teen children. Give them a minute or so to do so and then ask the parents to share their responses out loud. Ask for clarification if needed.
 - a. How do you think **your child** would respond to this question?
7. Is there **anything else** you would like to tell us about parent-teen relationships?

Survey (5-10 minutes)

- "Before we end today, we would like you to complete this short questionnaire. Please do NOT put your name on the questionnaire. We want to keep this information anonymous."
- Give each person a questionnaire and ask them to put the completed questionnaire in the envelope placed on the table.
- Tell the group that you are very grateful for their willingness to participate in the focus group today and that you really enjoyed learning from them. Tell them that a report will be written at the end of the year about all the parent and teens discussions that you complete. If they are interested in reading the report, they should contact the people listed on their assent forms.
- Once they have completed the questionnaire ask them to see Lori for their gift certificates.

Gift Certificates (2-5 minutes)

- Give each parent a gift certificate

■ Appendix C: Sample Focus Group Protocol - TEENS

Overall Research Questions

1. What does "parent-child connectedness" (PCC) mean to teens?
2. What kind of intervention would teens see as helpful to creating PCC in their families?

Materials Needed

- Approximately 15 chairs arranged in a circle
- Table to arrange snacks
- Snacks for ~15 people (remember ice, utensils, cups, napkins, plates)
- Drinking water for facilitators
- Boombox and CDs (to play while teens are arriving)
- About 15 nametags
- Thick black magic markers to write on name tags
- Focus group tape recording equipment
- Tapes for tape recorder
- 24 teen assent forms
- 12 \$15 gift certificates
- 12 pens
- 12 participant questionnaires
- Large envelope to collect questionnaires
- Pad and pen for notetaker
- Small alarm clock (digital) for facilitator to glance at
- Focus Group Guidelines on flipchart
- Introduction/Icebreaker questions on flipchart
- About 15 index cards
- Masking tape
- 2 clipboards

Focus Group Site Preparation (30 minutes)

1. Be sure that parent permission forms are distributed, signed and collected.
2. Arrange chairs in circular formation for at least 12 participants, 1 facilitator and 1 note taker.
3. Setup snacks for at least 12 people.
4. Have name tags and thick black magic markers available for youth to write their first names only.
5. Test tape recording equipment and place in center of the circle.
6. Warmly greet youth as they enter the room. Encourage them to take some snacks.
7. Give each teen two assent forms to read over. Ask them to sign the form before we begin the discussion. Make sure each teen receives two copies of the assent form - one to sign and one to take home with them with focus group study contact information. Make yourself available to summarize/read the form to teens who need help.
8. Ask participants to turn off cell phones.
9. Inform participants where bathrooms are and encourage their use before focus group gets started.

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome and Facilitator Introduction

"Good morning/afternoon/evening and welcome to our discussion. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about teens' relationships with their parents. My name is Steve and assisting me is my co-worker, Lori. We both work for a health education organization in Santa Cruz, CA called ETR Associates."

Background on PCC Bridge Project and Purpose of Focus Group

"I'm going to tell you a little bit about our project and what you can expect today. For the last year and half, ETR has been studying parent-teen relationships mostly through reading reports and talking with parenting experts. We now want to talk to the real experts - parents and teenagers - to find out what they think is important for developing healthy parent-teen relationships. We are going to use what we learn from you today and from other discussions we have with parents and teens to design future programs for parents and their teen children."

"Our focus group discussion is going to last about an hour and half. Focus groups are different from workshops or classes at school. Once we get started, I am going to ask you questions, and you are going to share your thoughts and opinions. You will do most of the talking. I will be doing a lot of listening. Remember we want to learn from you. We are not going to necessarily "teach" you anything today."

Appreciation

"To show our appreciation for what you teach us and for your time, we have \$15 gift certificates to (name of store) that we will give to each of you at the end of the session."

How Today's Focus Group will Work (5-10 minutes)

No "Right" or "Wrong" Answers and Participation

"I'll be asking you several questions about teens' relationships with their parents over the next hour or so. I want you to know that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, and it's okay to have a different opinion from other people in the group. It's really important for us to hear all the different points of view in the room. I want you to share your point of view, even if it is different from what others are saying, and I want you all to respect each others' opinions. Please don't make fun of what other people say or argue with them."

"I also don't want you to feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to talk to each other when discussing my questions. If you want to respond to something someone said, or if you want to agree or disagree, or give an example, you can do that, just be respectful. We want all people to have a chance to share ideas. We may need to interrupt or call on people to make sure this happens. Please do not feel offended if we do this."

Tape Recording and Confidentiality

"Before we get started, I want to remind you that we will be tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say things in these sessions, and we can't write fast enough to write them all down."

"Although we will use each other's first names today, we will not use any names in our report. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. No one will be able to link your name back to what you said, and only project staff like myself and Lori will listen to that tape. I am also going to ask all of you to keep what is said here confidential, so that everybody feels comfortable talking and knows what they say will not be repeated. Can you all do that?" (Make eye contact with each person in the group and wait for him/her to nod affirmatively.)

"You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable."

Timing, Survey and Gift Certificates

"We expect to be here until _____. We appreciate you giving us your time, and we want to make sure we end on time. Lori will be watching the clock and may need to interrupt the discussion at times and move us on to another question to be sure we have time to discuss all topics. Lori may also ask you some questions, give a summary or remind me of something I missed."

"At about _____ (10 minutes before the end of our time together), we will end the focus group and ask you to complete a very short questionnaire. After you complete the questionnaire, we will distribute a \$15 gift certificate to each of you from (name of store) as a token of our appreciation for your time and participation."

Tell the group that you will be starting the tape recorder and do so.

Icebreaker (5 minutes)

"Let's begin. We have asked you to wear a name tag to help us remember each others' names. Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves by giving our first name, our age, who lives with you in your home, and just for fun what your favorite T.V. show is. I'll start..."

Focus Group Questions (60 minutes)

Introduction Question

1. Since we are going to talk about families today, let's start our discussion by naming a movie or TV show that has a family in it. Tell me what movie or TV show you are thinking about and then tell me if you think the family is **happy or unhappy and why**.

Transition Question

2. Let's keep thinking about families, but now let's think about our own families. Think about the relationship you have with your parents. How are you and your parents **alike or different from the TV or movie family** you were thinking about?

Main Questions

3. Our team wants to find out what teenagers and parents do that make them feel close. So think back over the last **few months and tell us about something you did with your parents that made you feel close to them?**
 - a. What could your parents **do more often** that would make you feel closer to them?
 - b. What do you think **gets in the way** of doing these things?
 - c. Let's say your parent wanted to get spend time with you, but didn't know how to tell you. **How should he or she let you know?**
4. What kinds of things do your parents do or **say that you don't like?** Give us an example.
 - a. **Why** do you think your parents do or say these things?
 - b. How would you like them to say or do these things **differently?**
5. Not all teenagers feel close to their parents. What do you think **makes it hard for some teens to feel close** to their parents?
 - a. What do you think makes it **hard for parents** to feel close to their teens?
6. Keep thinking about teens and parents who do not feel close. Imagine that there are people in the community, like teachers or pastors or people at (name of local coordinating organization) who want to **help those teens and parents feel closer** to one another. What **advice** would you give to those people in the community?
 - a. **Who in your community** do you think could help these families? Why did you pick them?
 - b. **What kinds of things** could they do to help?

Wrap Up Questions

7. Give each youth an index card and a pen. Ask each youth to write the **three most important things** that parents should do to feel closer to their teenage children on the card. Give them a minute or so to do so and then ask the youth to share their responses out loud. Ask for clarification if needed.
 - a. What is the most important thing a **teenager should do** to feel closer to his/her parent?
8. Is there **anything else** you want to tell us about teens and their parents?

Survey (5-10 minutes)

- "Before we end today, we would like you to complete this short questionnaire. Please do NOT put your name on the questionnaire. We want to keep this information anonymous."
- Give each youth a questionnaire and ask them to put the completed questionnaire in the envelope placed on the table.
- Tell the group that you are very grateful for their willingness to participate in the focus group today and that you really enjoyed learning from them. Tell them that a report will be written at the end of the year about all the parent and teen discussions that you complete. If they are interested in reading the report, they should contact the people listed on their parent permission forms.
- Once they have completed the questionnaire, ask them to see Lori for their gift certificates.

Gift Certificates (2-5 minutes)

- Give each youth a gift certificate.

■ Appendix D: Focus Group Assent Form - Parents

The O.K. Program and ETR Associates (a health education organization based in Santa Cruz, CA), are conducting a study about relationships between parents and teens. As part of this study, we will be talking directly with parents and young people in the Sacramento area and in other regions of the United States.

If you agree to be part of this study, you will participate in a two-hour focus group with about 6-10 other parents. You will be asked questions about parent-teen relationships, and programs that might support parents and teens in strengthening their relationships. Your participation in the focus group is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable. Your identity will remain confidential. Your name will not be linked to reports or summaries of the focus group. The only people who will have access to the actual information shared at the focus group are the study leaders.

In addition, you will be asked to give us some basic information about yourself through a short questionnaire. Again, you do not have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable. We do not want you to put your name on the survey in order to keep this information anonymous.

The information that you provide in the focus group and the questionnaire will be used by the study leaders to design programs for parents and teens in the future. Your opinions, experiences and ideas are very important. Please be as honest and straightforward with us as you can.

If you have questions about this study in the future, do not hesitate to contact the local coordinator of this focus group or the leader of the study:

Local Coordinator
Donald Northcross
OK Program
6432 Silver Hawk Way
Elk Grove, CA 95758
(916) 206-3880
dnorthx@frontiernet.net

Leader of the Study
Steve Bean
ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
(831) 438-4060, x176
steveb@etr.org

I, _____ confirm that the
(please print your first and last name clearly)

procedures of the focus group and the questionnaire have been explained to me. I know that my participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.

- I agree to participate in today's focus group and questionnaire.
- I DO NOT agree to participate in today's focus group and questionnaire.

Your signature

Date

■ Appendix E: Focus Group Assent Form - Teens

The [name of coordinating organization] and ETR Associates (a health education organization) are studying the relationships between teens and their parents. As part of our study, we will be talking directly with teens and parents in the [name of area] area and in other regions of the United States.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in a 2-hour discussion, or "focus group," with about 6-10 other teens. We will ask you questions about relationships between teens and their parents. We will ask you for ideas about helping parents and teens have better relationships. We will be recording the focus group on audiotape and a staff person will be taking notes.

Your participation in the focus group is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable. What you say during the focus group is confidential. Your real name will not be included in any reports we write about the focus group. The only people who will have access to the notes, recordings or information from the focus group are the study leaders.

You will be asked to give us some basic information about yourself through a short questionnaire. Again, you do not have to answer any question that feels uncomfortable. To help us keep this information confidential DO NOT put your name on the questionnaire.

The information that you provide in the focus group and on the survey will be used by the study leaders to design programs for parents and teens in the future. Your opinions, experiences and ideas are very important.

If you have questions right now about participating in the focus group study, please ask one of the adults who is leading the focus group. If you have any questions in the future, you can contact the local coordinator of this focus group or the leader of the study:

Local Coordinator
Donald Northcross
OK Program
6432 Silver Hawk Way
Elk Grove, CA 95758
(916) 206-3880
dnorthx@frontiernet.net

Leader of the Study
Steve Bean
ETR Associates
4 Carbonero Way
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
(831) 438-4060, x176
steveb@etr.org

I, _____ confirm that the

(please print your first and last name clearly)

procedures of the focus group and the questionnaire have been explained to me. I know that my participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.

- I Agree to participate in today's focus group and questionnaire
- I DO NOT agree to participate in today's focus group and questionnaire

Your signature

Date

■ Appendix F: Focus Group Questionnaire - PARENTS

For office use only:

Focus Group Location:

Focus Group Facilitator:

Date of Focus Group:

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability.

1. Are you:

- Male
- Female

2. How old are you?

_____ years old

3. Are you Hispanic/Latino/Chicano?

- Yes
- No

4. What best describes your racial background?

- Black/African-American
- White
- Other (please describe) _____

Continue on next page ⇨

5. Were you born in the United States?

- Yes (If you answer "Yes" to this question, skip to question #8.)
- No

6. Where were you born? _____

7. What year did you come to the U.S.? _____

8. What is your zip code (home)? _____



9. Please tell us about each of the children you parent.

Age of Child (in years)	Male or Female? (please circle below)	Is this your biological child? Please circle Yes or No . If No, please explain (e.g., adopted child, foster child, step child, other situation).
Example:	Male Female	Yes No
	Male Female	Yes No
	Male Female	Yes No
	Male Female	Yes No
	Male Female	Yes No
	Male Female	Yes No

Continue on next page ⇨

10. What situation best describes your family?

- Two parents living with children
- Single parent living with children
- Single parent living with adult partner and children
- Single parent not living with children
- Other (please describe) _____

11. What best describes your highest level of formal education?

- No formal education
- Some elementary school (kindergarten - 6th grade)
- Completed elementary school (kindergarten - 6th grade)
- Some middle school (7th grade - 8th grade)
- Completed middle school (7th grade - 8th grade)
- Some high school (9th - 12th grade)
- Completed high school (9th - 12th grade) or equivalent
- Some college or junior college
- Completed college or junior college
- Some graduate school
- Completed graduate school

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about parent-teen relationships that you did not get to tell us in the focus group? Please tell us below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

■ Appendix G: Focus Group Questionnaire - TEENS

For office use only:

Focus Group Location:

Focus Group Facilitator:

Date of Focus Group:

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability.

1. Are you:

- Male
- Female

2. How old are you?

I am _____ years old

3. What grade are you in?

- I am not in school
- 4th grade
- 5th grade
- 6th grade
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade

Continue on next page ⇨

4. Are you Hispanic/Latino/Chicano?

- Yes
- No

5. What best describes your racial background?

- Black/African-American
- White
- Other (please describe) _____

6. Were you born in the United States?

- Yes (If you answer "Yes" to this question, skip to question #9.)
- No

7. Where were you born? _____

8. What year did you come to the U.S.? _____

9. What is your zip code (home)? _____



10. Do you have sisters and brothers?

- No, I do not have sisters or brothers.
- Yes, I have _____ sisters and _____ brothers.
(Please write in the number of sisters and brothers you have.)

Continue on next page ⇨

11. What situation best describes your family? Check all the boxes that are true for you.**(Note: A biological parent is a parent who is related to you by “blood.”)**

- I do not live with either of my biological parents.
- I live full-time in one family with: (check all boxes that are true for you)
- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological mom | <input type="checkbox"/> my step mom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological dad | <input type="checkbox"/> my step dad |
- I live with more than one family. I live with _____ families (*please write in the number of families you with.*)

One of the families I live with has: (check all boxes that are true for you)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological mom | <input type="checkbox"/> my step mom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological dad | <input type="checkbox"/> my step dad |

Another family I live with has: (check all boxes that are true for you)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological mom | <input type="checkbox"/> my step mom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> my biological dad | <input type="checkbox"/> my step dad |

- I live with foster parents(s). (check all boxes that are true for you)
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster mom | <input type="checkbox"/> Foster dad |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

- Other adults who live in my home and take care of me include: (please list below - for example: grandmother, aunt, cousin, mother's friend, sibling, etc.)

- | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 5. _____ | 6. _____ |

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about parent-teen relationships that you did not get to tell us in the focus group? Please tell us below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

