Strengths of our families

Summary of findings from the Halton Youth Parent Survey
Our Kids Network

Our Kids Network (OKN) is a Halton-wide partnership of organizations who embrace the vision: All children thrive! Our mission is to promote the healthy development, security, and safety of all children, youth, and families through neighbourhood collaboration, service integration, and measuring results.

The Halton Youth Parent Survey

The Halton Youth Parent Survey (HYPS), developed and coordinated by OKN, focuses on parenting issues. All parents of Grade 7 and Grade 10 students in the Halton District School Board and the Halton Catholic District School Board were invited to participate. Topics include school climate, bullying and/or harassment, parenting challenges and parenting supports. The survey also measures five categories of Family Assets®. The results reported here are a high level summary of the findings by grade.

Use this summary as a conversation starter and add the information to what you already know about families in Halton. We hope that it will provide insights on the challenges and rewards of parenting today, and build awareness of the needs of parents in Halton.

These results complement other OKN research about children, youth and families in Halton, including:

• The Halton Youth Survey (HYS), a Halton-designed, region wide survey of Grade 7 and Grade 10 students that measures key factors related to healthy youth development and 20 Developmental Assets®

• The Kindergarten Parent Survey (KPS), a Halton-designed survey of parents of kindergarten aged children

More information is available at www.ourkidsnetwork.ca.
Survey highlights

• The majority of parents surveyed had very high levels of Family Assets
• Many parents of Grade 10 students in our survey had lower levels of Family Assets than those in Grade 7
• Most parents surveyed want to learn more about parenting through multiple approaches
• The majority of parents surveyed face challenges during a child’s adolescent period
• Fathers in our survey reported fewer parenting supports than mothers

Why survey parents?

Parents’ voices help us understand family life and complement what we hear from students in our community, contributing to a rich evidence base of knowledge. To ensure the best possible outcomes for children and youth, Our Kids Network believes that all parents and caregivers need:

• Connections to the supports and services they need to help raise their children and youth
• A voice in building supportive environments and programs
• Connections to other parents and caregivers

Parents matter. For a child’s self-esteem, academic achievement, and behaviour, parenting is the strongest contributing factor in healthy child development. (Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, 2008).

Who participated?

In early 2013, OKN completed the Halton Youth Parent Survey (HYPS). We heard from over 1,700 parents in Halton. Although the findings may not be representative of all parents, OKN’s first survey of parents of Grade 7 and 10 students does add to the growing body of OKN research. More detailed information about our respondents can be found in Table 1 on page 7.

The majority of parents surveyed had high levels of education, high household income and were born in Canada.

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1 The 2013 Halton Youth Parent Survey was completed by parents of Grade 7 and 10 students in January and February of 2013. The overall response rate was 14%. The results include a total of 1,056 parents of Grade 7 students and 706 parents of Grade 10 students, with a total sample size of 1,762 parents.

2 The findings may not be representative of all parents due to self-selection bias. For instance, those parents who were willing to take the time to answer the survey may be more likely to have higher levels of family and school involvement, and/or strong opinions on certain topics than those who chose not to complete the survey. In addition, the survey relies on self-reported information on potentially sensitive topics. Social desirability or social acceptance may have influenced responses. Caution should be exercised when interpreting the meaning of findings as they may not be representative of all parents.
Family Assets

The Family Assets were developed by the Search Institute® using comprehensive research and building on the Developmental Assets that relate to youth. In good times and challenging times, the assets are the everyday interactions, values, skills and relationships families can focus on to help them thrive. Children, teens, parents, and other family members all play a part.

The Search Institute’s Family Assets study shows that Family Assets are linked to positive outcomes for both parents and kids. The more Family Assets a family has, the better off they are – regardless of family income, parent education level, immigration status, relationship to child or living arrangement. Kids from families with more assets are more likely to do well in school, develop close relationships with others, and participate in healthy activities.

Nurturing RELATIONSHIPS
• Positive Communication
• Emotional openness
• Affection
• Support for sparks

Establishing ROUTINES
• Family meals
• Shared activities
• Meaningful traditions
• Dependability

Maintaining EXPECTATIONS
• Openness about tough topics
• Fair rules
• Defined boundaries
• Clear expectations
• Contributions to family

Adapting to CHALLENGES
• Management of daily commitments
• Adaptability
• Problem solving
• Democratic decision making

Connecting to COMMUNITY
• Neighbourhood cohesion
• Relationships with others
• Enriching activities
• Supportive resources

What are parents in Halton saying?

The majority of parents surveyed had very high levels of Family Assets:

• Parents of both grades generally demonstrated very high levels in all five categories. The top three highest reported assets were:
  ♦ Maintaining Expectations (Grade 7 = 97%; Grade 10 = 91%)
  ♦ Establishing Routines (Grade 7 = 93%; Grade 10 = 87%)
  ♦ Nurturing Relationships (Grade 7 = 93%; Grade 10 = 86%)

• Two-thirds of parents of Grade 7 students scored high in all five categories (67%). Over half of parents of Grade 10 students scored high in all (52%).

![Figure 1. Percentage of parents scoring high in Family Asset categories, by grade of student](image)

Many parents of Grade 10 students in our survey had lower levels of Family Assets than those in Grade 7:

• According to the Search Institute, Family Assets tend to be higher in families of 12-year-olds compared to families of 15-year-olds. In Halton, Family Asset levels decreased from Grade 7 to Grade 10 as children transition into secondary school. “Adapting to Challenges” saw the largest decrease, with 79% of Grade 7 parents demonstrating that asset, compared to 66% of Grade 10 parents.

• A few questions showed differences across the two age groups. Parental awareness of youth online and social media activity dropped sharply from Grade 7 (91%) to Grade 10 (75%). The percentage of parents reporting that they know the names of their child’s close friends went from 93% to 85% between Grade 7 and 10. Lastly, the percentage of parents reporting that they are able to talk openly with their child about a range of issues dropped from 96% in Grade 7 to 88% in Grade 10.

Most parents surveyed want to learn more about parenting through multiple approaches:

• Parents want to get information on parenting using different approaches. Seventy-three percent of parents reported that they would like to learn more about parenting through at least three different avenues.

• Parents most often want to get their information from reading books, the Internet, and face-to-face discussions.

![Figure 2. Percentage of parents who reported wanting to learn more about parenting through each approach](image)

Note: Percentages don’t add up to 100% because respondents could give multiple responses.
Parents are facing some challenges

The majority of parents surveyed face challenges during a child’s adolescent period:

• Family life and parenting can become more challenging as children develop and enter adolescence, and a parent’s stress can increase as a result. Twenty percent of parents of Grade 7 students and 19% of parents of Grade 10 students reported feeling extremely or very stressed in the last two weeks, compared to just 12% of parents of kindergarten aged children.

• The percentage of parents who report eating meals together as a family all five days in a school week decreases from kindergarten (82%) to Grade 10 (53%).

• The percentage of parents including their child/youth in problem solving when they disagree about something also decreases as children age from kindergarten (94%) to Grade 10 (71%).

• Parents of Grade 7 and 10 students reported lower levels of support and fewer people they can turn to for parental advice (82%) than parents of kindergarten children (93%).

Fathers in our survey reported fewer parenting supports than mothers:

• Fathers report having fewer people they can turn to for support with parenting than mothers.

• Fathers consistently scored 5 to 10% lower on parenting questions and were more likely to answer “don’t know” compared to mothers.

Men report the same struggles and concerns about parenting as women, but sometimes perceive a motherhood focus in child and family services that is exclusionary or not suited to their needs\(^4\). Tips for programming include creating awareness of services among men, emphasizing men’s roles in parenting rather than just promoting child wellbeing, and reaching out to dads early on – programs that promote prenatal and early years involvement tend to have lasting effects throughout fatherhood\(^5\).


Halton parents are doing a great job!

They know it’s important to have high but realistic expectations, regular routines and positive relationships with their kids. As a professional in the community, you can try these simple acts to help parents feel welcome, heard and supported as their children grow:

- Tell them that parenting isn’t easy and that they’re doing a good job
- Educate parents about Family Assets and Developmental Assets
- Help them identify their strengths as parents and as a family, as well as their child’s strengths
- Help them find credible sources of parenting information
- Engage parents, especially fathers, in all aspects of your program/agency – they are the experts!
- Talk about life transitions and the importance of maintaining expectations, routines and relationships
- Create a warm and welcoming climate for parents
- Encourage discussion groups and social time for parents to support each other
- Encourage families to build systems of support for when things get tough
- Provide tips, handouts, workshops, and other resources

Table 1. Who Participated in the Halton Youth Parent Survey, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of child</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>351</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s municipality</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halton Hills</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oakville</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<th>Relationship to child</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>158</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level of respondent</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or less</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from trade, college or university</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>626</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Living arrangement of child</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lives in one home</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splits time between homes</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>81</td>
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<table>
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<th>Immigration status of respondent</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recent immigrant (&lt;5 yrs)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated over 5 yrs ago</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Canada</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>513</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family income level</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $50,000/yr</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001 - $100,000/yr</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $100,000/yr</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>422</td>
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Resources for supporting families

- www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/Parents-and-Families
  - New Kind of Parenting videos
  - New Kind of Parenting booklet
  - Halton Parenting Directory
- Asset-Building Toolkit
  - www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/AssetBuilding-Toolkit
- OKN Data Portal
  - www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/DataPortal.html
  - www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Public/About-the-OKN-Data-Portal
- Simple Acts video spots
  - www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/Simple-acts
- www.parentfurther.com
- www.search-institute.org

Eight partners form the foundation of Our Kids Network (OKN): Halton Children’s Aid Society; Regional Municipality of Halton; Halton Regional Police Services; Halton District School Board; Halton Catholic District School Board; ROCK Reach Out Centre for Kids, Halton Multicultural Council; and ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development. These partners have signed a formal agreement to work together to provide leadership, financial support and share information and resources to further the OKN mission.