



Summary of the Commission
on Children at Risk's Report:

Hardwired to Connect The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities

YMCA of the USA
Dartmouth Medical School
Institute for American Values

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Biological systems predispose human beings to form
and sustain enduring, nurturing relationships

The presence or absence of a nurturing environment during childhood
not only shapes a child’s psychological and emotional development but also
alters brain development in ways that profoundly affect long-term health

Animal studies suggest that positive nurture may neutralize genetic
vulnerabilities to depression and similar problems and perhaps even
transform what would otherwise be genetic vulnerabilities into strengths

The nature of brain development during adolescence
creates a continuing need for a nurturing environment

Human beings are biologically primed to seek moral and spiritual meaning,
and nurturing relationships are a central foundation for positive moral
and spiritual development

Nurturing relationships and a spiritual connection to the transcendent
significantly improve physical and emotional health

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Preface

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YMCA of the USA

National Executive Director



Beginning in June of 2002, Dartmouth Medical School, the Institute for American Values, and the YMCA of the USA have collaborated on the sponsorship of a national Commission on Children at Risk.

The ambitious goals of this collaborative effort have been (1) to review the latest research across a range of academic disciplines bearing on how we nurture our children and youth, (2) to integrate that research into a comprehensive conceptual framework, (3) to use that framework to begin to develop recommendations for how America can do a better job at nurture, and (4) to present this new perspective efficiently and effectively to community leaders, child and youth service practitioners, policy-makers, and the media.

Kathleen Kovner Kline of Dartmouth and David Blankenhorn of the Institute have done a superb job in convening and supporting the truly world-class group of experts that constitute the Commission on Children at Risk. The Commission, in turn, has produced a first report of extraordinary breadth and power.

Under the title *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, the report runs more than 80 pages, including seven pages of reference notes and additional appendices. In order to help disseminate the report's findings and make them accessible to a broader audience, the YMCA of the USA has prepared the summary publication you are now reading. We want to make an effort to spread the report's messages to spark a much-needed national conversation on how we can better help our children grow up healthy, whole, and ready for a productive and happy life.

What do we as a nation need to talk about? The Commission's report suggests that it's nothing less than the need for a fundamental shift in national priorities with respect to kids. The Commission frames two very practical questions: Have we made a sufficient commitment to the positive nurture of our kids? And are we targeting resources where they will make the most difference? The report argues powerfully that the answer to both questions is "no," but the question and answer are worthy of the broadest possible debate and discussions.

To dispel complacency, the Commission first presents compelling data on the rising rates of mental, emotional, and social problems among our young people and equally compelling analysis demonstrating the inadequacy of our current models and strategies to address these problems.

The Commission then proposes a fundamentally new model to guide our efforts to promote positive child and youth development. Several big ideas both define this new model and raise obvious and important questions about our current practice:

Big Idea 1. Surrounding kids with a richly nurturing environment from birth through adolescence is critical to promoting their healthy physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual development.

If this is true, then why are so many of our current youth strategies and programs focused on trying to put the pieces back together after kids are already in crisis rather than on providing the early and continuing nurture that will keep them healthy and whole?

Big Idea 2. Positive social, moral, and spiritual development is integral to the healthy overall development of children and youth, and, in turn, fundamentally depends on kids receiving consistent and effective nurture from committed and caring adults.

If this is true, then why as a nation have we become so single-mindedly focused on promoting academic competence and, relatively speaking, committed so little time, effort, and money to supporting our children's social, moral, and spiritual development? Wouldn't a more balanced strategy, and more balanced investment, yield a significantly higher return?

Big Idea 3. The work of providing this nonacademic nurture is done largely by families, neighborhoods, community groups, and religious organizations — what the Commission calls “authoritative communities.” Taken as a whole, these institutions have been growing weaker when we need them to be much stronger.

If this is true, shouldn't all of us as be working harder to strengthen the authoritative communities that are, or could be, part of our lives? Given the central role of the family, shouldn't strengthening families be a much higher and more explicit national priority? And shouldn't government and private funders be doing more to make sure that the community and faith-based groups on the front lines of nurturing our kids have the resources they need to do their jobs?

These three big ideas resonate powerfully with the YMCA’s historic mission, present work, and goals for the future, so perhaps it’s not surprising that our national strategic initiatives are all squarely aligned with the overall strategy the Commission proposes:

- We’ve entered into a long-term partnership with the Search Institute (see p. 19 of this summary) to encourage YMCAs across the country to help mobilize their communities behind a measurable, research-based strategy to make sure every child gets the support and nurture he or she needs.
- Working closely with experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard and Stanford universities, we’ve launched a 10-year effort to help Americans find a healthier way to live, with a strong focus on promoting the social, emotional, and spiritual — as well as physical — health of kids.
- Given the pressing challenge of building nurturing communities in an increasingly diverse society, we’ve undertaken a national diversity initiative to equip local YMCAs to be leaders in working with people of all races, ethnicities, and incomes.
- Finally, recognizing that America won’t meet the challenge of building “strong kids, strong families, and strong communities” without significant changes in both public policies and the allocation of public resources, we’re mobilizing to play a much more active role in the public policy arena.

Our nearly 19 million members, 625,000 volunteers, and 50,000 staff notwithstanding, we are acutely aware that the task of growing healthy kids is far bigger than the YMCA or any other single group. This subject is also sufficiently complex and involves so many difficult moral and practical judgments that deeply-held differences of opinion are to be expected even within individual organizations like the YMCA, and certainly across the broad coalition we hope will emerge in support of the Commission’s recommendations. Not every position or opinion in the report reflects the positions or opinions of the YMCA of the USA, local YMCAs, or individual YMCA professional and volunteer leaders. We suspect the same will be true in most other youth-serving organizations.

The Commission on Children at Risk is framed by, and part of, an ongoing dialogue about the elements that contribute to the healthy development of children and youth. As such, even the work of such a distinguished group is not the last word. We do not know all we need to know. We have not asked all the most important questions. We need access to the convincing evidence resulting from all the great intellectual, social, and moral disciplines of research and study.

That said, we are deeply grateful to Commission members and other scholars for the years of dedicated research that, synthesized in this report, now powerfully illuminates the challenge ahead. We are also inspired by the work and words of the many community, religious, government, and business leaders who have been, and continue to be, champions for increased investment in supporting America’s kids and families.

We at the YMCA regard this agenda as neither liberal nor conservative but simply the right and decent thing to do -- and, yes, also the most highly leveraged investment we can make in America’s future. We look forward to being part of an increasingly broad, strong, and vocal national coalition that will keep working until America has become a truly nurturing place for all of our children.

As discussion of the Hardwired to Connect report commences, we expect healthy debate and dialogue among those engaged. This is a good thing, and to be most welcomed. ■

Companion Summary

Introduction

This companion summary of the report *Hardwired to Connect* has been published to assist in the dissemination and encourage the discussion of findings of that larger study. Jointly sponsored by the Dartmouth Medical School, the Institute for American Values, and the YMCA of the USA, the *Hardwired to Connect* report itself is the product of the dedicated work of the Commission on Children at Risk, a group of 33 distinguished children's doctors, research scientists, and mental health and youth service professionals. See Attachment A for a list of Commission members.

The sponsoring organizations convened the Commission because of their concern over the rising rates of mental illness, behavioral problems, and emotional distress among U.S. children and adolescents and their concern over fundamental inadequacies in our conceptual models for thinking about how to promote positive child and youth development.

Over the past two years, the Commission has reviewed recent research in a number of disciplines on the role of nurture in human development and has considered the implications of this research for reshaping both our youth development models and the social policies that those models imply.

The New Scientific Case for the Importance of Nurture

Work in biology, neuroscience, and a range of other disciplines is shedding important new light on the biological systems that, in a very real sense, hardwire in human beings the need for enduring nurturing relationships and the drive to form a moral and spiritual perspective on life. Key findings include:

- **Human beings are hardwired to form relationships.** Biological systems predispose human beings to form and sustain enduring and nurturing relationships and to develop a moral and spiritual perspective that gives meaning to life.
- **Early nurture powerfully affects brain development.** The presence or absence of a nurturing environment during childhood not only shapes a child's psychological and emotional development but also irreversibly alters brain development in ways that profoundly affect long-term health.
- **Nurture can neutralize genetic vulnerabilities.** Animal studies suggest that positive nurture may neutralize genetic vulnerabilities to depression, anxiety, and similar problems and even transform what would otherwise be genetic vulnerabilities into strengths.

■ **The biologically-based need for nurture continues through adolescence.** Recent research indicates that the teenage propensity for risk taking, novelty seeking, excitement, and peer affiliation is partly biologically based — a conclusion that highlights the importance of the social environments that we create, or fail to create, to meet these needs in our adolescents.

■ **Human beings are biologically primed to seek moral and spiritual meaning, and nurturing relationships are a central foundation for positive moral and spiritual development.** The presence or absence of a nurturing environment may deeply affect a child’s ability to develop a moral and spiritual perspective conducive to health, fulfillment, and a productive life.

■ **Nurturing relationships and a spiritual connection to the transcendent significantly improve physical and emotional health.** There is mounting evidence that individuals who give priority to living a loving, nurturing life and to developing a moral and spiritual perspective that supports this commitment to nurturing relationships are likely to be significantly healthier and happier than individuals who do not.

Implications of the New Scientific Case for the Importance of Nurture

This new scientific perspective on the role of nurture in healthy human development provides a powerful lens that brings into sharp focus three key sets of issues:

■ **Rising rates of mental, behavioral, and emotional problems among American young people raise a red flag about how well we are nurturing our kids.** Significant long-term increases in serious mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders among American children and youth suggest an urgent need to re-examine how we are nurturing our kids. The fact that this has occurred during a period of sustained economic prosperity and important medical advances in the ability to treat depression and other mental disorders underscores the urgency of the issue.

■ **Our conceptual models for thinking about how to promote positive child and youth development fail to recognize the central importance of long-term nurture.** The broadly accepted “at-risk model” encourages us to focus only on those young people most at risk of negative outcomes, to intervene too late, and to focus too heavily on the role of experts rather than the responsibility of the community at large. The “pharmaceutical model” is

even more heavily disease oriented.

■ **We need a new ecological model focused on promoting healthy child and youth development by surrounding all of our children with a network of nurturing, supportive relationships.** This new model should: (1) be firmly grounded in the science of nurture, (2) help us identify the institutions in our society most central to the nurturing of our children and youth, and (3) give us a clearer understanding of how to strengthen these institutions by spotlighting the characteristics they must possess if they are to perform their nurturing role most effectively.

The Critical Nurturing Role of “Authoritative Communities”

We need a name for the set of institutions most central to nurturing our children. The critical first step in defining a new ecological model of child and youth development is to create a new intellectual category of institutions, the set of social institutions that is most central to the positive nurture of our children and youth.

The Commission proposes to call this set of institutions “authoritative communities” (or “authoritative institutions”) because of the role they play in providing children and youth with a safe, secure, and supportive environment in which to form both enduring relationships and a positive moral and spiritual perspective on life. The Commission suggests a simple working definition: “Authoritative communities are groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life.” Essentially, they are groups that live out the types of connectedness that our children increasingly lack.

The family is (or at least should be) the most important authoritative community. Other core authoritative communities include youth organizations such as YMCAs, other community groups involved with children, religious congregations, and schools.

Authoritative communities have 10 key characteristics. Based on careful analysis of both the new science of nurture and the existing child development literature, the Commission identified the following 10 principal characteristics of an ideal authoritative community:

- 1▶ Authoritative communities include children and youth.
- 2▶ They treat children as ends in themselves.
- 3▶ They are warm and nurturing.
- 4▶ They establish clear limits and expectations.
- 5▶ The core of their work is performed largely by nonspecialists.
- 6▶ They are multigenerational.
- 7▶ They have a long-term focus.
- 8▶ They encourage spiritual and religious development.
- 9▶ They reflect and transmit a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
- 10▶ They are philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all people and to the principle of love of neighbor.

Over recent decades, authoritative communities in America have grown weaker. While America has historically been blessed with an exceptionally strong web of authoritative communities, a range of social forces has seriously weakened both the family and other authoritative communities, significantly reducing their effectiveness in nurturing our children and youth.

When authoritative communities become weaker, children suffer. Abundant data and multiple analyses confirm what the authoritative communities model predicts: When authoritative communities grow weaker, children suffer.

Renewing authoritative communities should be a central national priority. Given the strong scientific evidence demonstrating the powerful preventive and protective effects of nurture on child well-being, and the equally strong evidence that the authoritative communities we rely on to provide that nurture have grown weaker, the Commission recommends that renewing authoritative communities become a central national priority.

Strengthening authoritative communities in our poorest and most troubled neighborhoods is particularly important and will be particularly challenging. It is particularly important because the children in these communities have the greatest needs and are most at risk. It will be particularly challenging for two reasons. In many of these neighborhoods, the network of authoritative communities that we take for granted elsewhere is badly depleted or even non-existent. Further, other problems in these neighborhoods — joblessness, poverty, crime, lack of medical and mental health care, and other difficulties — make everything harder. Responding to this challenge must involve our society as a whole, not just government. But to be successful, this work of renewal will also require greater attention and investment from all levels of government.

Commission Recommendations

To strengthen authoritative communities, the Commission recommends that America adopt the following broad social goals:

GOAL 1

Deepen our society's commitment to those values that build and sustain authoritative communities, and reconsider our commitment to those values that often replace or undermine them.

GOAL 2

Increase measurably in the next decade the proportion of U.S. children who are members of authoritative communities and whose lives are improved through their participation in them.

GOAL 3

Win support for a major shift in public policy, in which policy-makers at all levels seek to meet youth needs by utilizing and empowering authoritative communities. ■

The Report

I.

The New Scientific Case for the Importance of Nurture in Promoting the Healthy Development of Children and Youth

SOCIETY'S CONTINUING conversation about how to nurture healthy kids has traditionally been shaped primarily by educators, social workers, and religious and moral leaders. Needless to say, these perspectives remain tremendously important. But an important new perspective has emerged from recent work in the hard sciences.

Work in biology, neuroscience, and a range of other disciplines is shedding important new light on the biological systems that, in a very real sense, hardwire in human beings the need for enduring and nurturing relationships and the drive to form a moral and spiritual perspective on life.

It's hardly news that human beings are biologically hardwired to have sex. But a much more complex and compelling story is emerging from this continuing scientific research. It is becoming increasingly clear that the biological drive to have sex is just a small piece of a complex neurological system that also biologically predisposes human beings to form long-term relationships, to bear and nurture children, and to seek deeper meaning in life.

Further, and perhaps most significantly, this research is fundamentally recasting the age-old “nature vs. nurture” debate. The traditional view has seen genes and environment as independent variables in a lifelong tug-of-war, with genes determining an individual's biology and nurture shaping the individual's character. By contrast, the new science suggests an elegant interaction in which positive nurture has the power not just to counter “bad genes” but also — at the biological level — to change the way particular genes operate so that what would otherwise be genetic vulnerabilities are neutralized or even transformed into strengths.

Finally, there is mounting evidence that individuals who follow rather than fight these biological cues — that is, those who give priority to living a loving, nurturing life and to developing a moral and spiritual perspective that supports this commitment to nurturing relationships — are likely to be significantly healthier and happier than individuals who do not.

This story can be briefly summarized in terms of the following key findings ▶

a. Biological systems predispose human beings to form and sustain enduring, nurturing relationships.

Based on studies of both animals and humans, neuroscientists have come to understand that a complex system of hormones and other chemical messengers in the brain guides how we react to what's happening to and around us. An important part of this system biologically predisposes us to form and sustain strong attachments to other people. Let's start with sex. Sexual intercourse triggers a woman to release an attachment hormone, oxytocin, that stimulates her brain to feel both a sense of well-being and an impulse to become emotionally attached and to engage in nurturing behavior. Childbirth and nursing also trigger a spike in oxytocin, triggering the same sense of well-being and desire to nurture, this time focused on her newborn child.

Moreover, some biochemical signals not only initiate, but also powerfully reinforce, the process of forming long-term nurturing relationships. Recent animal studies show, for example, that when male marmosets engage in nurturing behavior toward their pups, this triggers the release of more of the hormone prolactin, which, in turn, likely reinforces the father's impulse to continue the nurturing.

Other studies indicate that similar hormonal feedback loops reinforce nurturing behavior in human males. For example, when a man becomes married (i.e., involved in a sustained, culturally-supported, intimate relationship with a woman), his testosterone level — and thus his biological drive toward both aggression and promiscuity — actually goes down significantly. In short, forming the long-term, stable, intimate relationship triggers the man's hormonal system to shift gears in a way that makes it more likely that he will want and be able to be a nurturing, supportive husband and father over the longer term.

So, men and women are biologically primed to form and sustain intimate relationships and to nurture the children those unions produce. But all of this is only prologue for the most extraordinary chapter in the new scientific story.

b. The presence or absence of a nurturing environment during childhood not only shapes a child's psychological and emotional development but also alters brain development in ways that profoundly affect long-term health.

For thousands of years, human societies have recognized the importance of nurture in forming a child's character, but neuroscience is now beginning to show that the positive effects of nurture go far deeper, actually shaping a child's brain in ways that will provide lifelong health benefits. Sadly, a lack of nurture likewise affects brain development but in

ways that may permanently increase a child's vulnerability to depression, social isolation, and other negative outcomes.

Needless to say, the neurological mechanisms through which this occurs are highly complex, and there is much about them that scientists still don't understand. But it's now clear that the system of neurotransmitters, hormones, and brain receptors discussed above plays a central role. A simple way to think about what happens is that when infants and young children grow up in a secure, highly nurturing environment their brains develop in a way that helps them have healthy relationships with others and that helps them cope with stress. It is as though the emotional circuits that are used more frequently — the secure attachment circuits in this example — develop more capacity, while those used less frequently — the stress circuits in this example — develop less capacity.

In a way, it's like adding an amplifier to the attachment circuits and a resistor to the stress circuits. When, later in life, the child becomes a parent (or perhaps even takes on some other nurturing role), the biological experience of having been so well taken care of as a youngster will predispose him or her to take good care of the next generation. Conversely, the increased resilience of the biological stress system, which results from strong nurture, will dampen the brain's response to stress signals.

If, on the other hand, the child grows up in a highly stressful and unnurturing environment, the opposite occurs: The child's brain develops greater sensitivity to stress and less propensity for healthy nurturing behavior.

The important point is this: For better or for worse, the presence or absence of early nurture actually affects a child's brain circuitry. The results become hardwired in a way that can profoundly affect lifelong behavior. While new research is looking for ways to enrich an older child's nurturing environment to compensate for early deficits, it is clear that early investment in supportive nurturing pays lifelong dividends.

C. Animal studies suggest that positive nurture may neutralize genetic vulnerabilities to depression and similar problems and perhaps even transform what would otherwise be genetic vulnerabilities into strengths.

A fair question at this point in the story would be: "How strong is this effect of nurture on a child's neurological development? Is it a weak effect, or is it powerful enough to overcome significant genetic vulnerabilities?" Recent animal studies suggest that the "nurture effect" is, in fact, quite strong.

A long-term study of a colony of rhesus monkeys at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development is particularly provocative. Over the course of several generations, scientists identified three genetic subpopulations within the colony. The first group had a genetic vulnerability to anxiety and timidity. When given regular access to alcohol, these monkeys drank heavily and steadily, mimicking the "self-medication" drinking pattern sometimes seen in humans suffering from depression or anxiety. The second subgroup was genetically prone to aggression, poor impulse control, and binge drinking. These monkeys were

not well liked and often succumbed to early deaths. Finally, the third group was a group of supernurturing females — supermoms — who cuddled and groomed their infants much more intensively than other mothers in the colony.

After identifying these three subpopulations, the researchers began an adoption experiment in which infants from the genetic subgroup prone to anxiety were raised by the supernurturing females. The researchers found that when raised by the supermoms, these monkeys' above-average rates of anxiety, timidity, and alcohol abuse disappeared. Strong nurture effectively neutralized the genetic vulnerability to anxiety and anxiety-related alcohol abuse.

Strong nurture had an even more profound effect on the second subgroup. Not only did this group's tendency toward inappropriate aggression and binge drinking disappear, but members of the group actually became more successful than average in making their way to or near the top of the colony's social hierarchy. In this case, strong nurture transformed an inherited genetic vulnerability into a positive behavioral asset!

Unfortunately, the long-term effects of a lack of early nurture are equally profound. Decades of research on human infants who have been deprived of their mothers has produced a remarkably consistent body of results. As they grow older, many of these children may be more likely than others to have difficulty forming more than superficial relationships, have little empathy for others, and possess a limited capacity to experience and express emotions.

Clearly, the “nurture effect” is not to be taken lightly.

d. The nature of brain development during adolescence creates a continuing need for a nurturing environment.

The biologically-based need for a nurturing environment does not end with early childhood. Recent advances in neuroimaging demonstrate that significant brain growth and development continue through adolescence and into an individual's early 20s. And some of the challenging behavior patterns that we consider most characteristic of adolescents now appear to arise directly from the changes occurring in the brain during this period of life.

Adolescence is a period of particularly rapid change in the portions of the brain responsible for judgment and insight and in the functioning of some key neurotransmitters. Of particular interest, changes during adolescence in the activity of the key neurotransmitter dopamine appear to cause what some researchers are calling a “reward deficiency.” Translation: For the adolescent, any pleasurable stimulus, from music to drugs, may need to be especially powerful and intense in order to pass the adolescent brain's recently altered (‘reward deficient’) threshold for interest, pleasure, or excitement. Thus many teens' quest for adventure, novelty, and risk may simply reflect their efforts to feel good.

Teenagers may also suffer the consequences of risk taking more intensely than do adults. For example, young people who abuse alcohol and drugs appear biologically primed to suffer more harm than adults who do the same things because of the distinctive characteristics of the adolescent brain.

Some of the moodiness and unhappiness we associate with adolescence also may be rooted in developmental changes in the adolescent brain, again involving changes in the functioning of various neurotransmitters (brain chemicals).

In short, scientific research is increasingly demonstrating that adolescence is a biological as well as a social phenomenon. The teenage propensity for risk taking, novelty seeking, excitement, and peer affiliation is partly biologically based — a conclusion that highlights the importance of the social environments that we create, or fail to create, to meet these needs in our adolescents.

e. Human beings are biologically primed to seek moral and spiritual meaning, and nurturing relationships are a central foundation for positive moral and spiritual development.

The next chapter in the new scientific story focuses on the moral and spiritual development of children and youth. The major themes closely parallel those discussed above in relation to the biological impulse to form relationships with other people: (1) growing evidence indicates that we are biologically primed to seek moral meaning and a spiritual connection to the transcendent, (2) evidence points to a powerful interaction between the brain and the environment, and (3) nurture (or lack of nurture) plays a central role in shaping the substance of the child's moral and spiritual beliefs.

Child development specialists tell us that children's moral and spiritual development is driven by their innate impulse — arising from the human brain's capacity for self-awareness — to try to understand their place in the world. This process begins in childhood and intensifies during adolescence. The universality of the process, across cultures and across time, strongly suggests that it reflects an inherent, biologically-based part of the human development process. And recent brain imaging studies have discovered particular patterns of brain activity associated with spiritual practices such as contemplative prayer and meditation, again suggesting that our capacity and desire for spiritual experience are, to some degree, hardwired.

In turn, the particular moral and spiritual perspectives children and youth develop — altruistic and empathetic at one extreme, nihilistic and antisocial at the other — depend largely on the quality of children's relationships with the key adults in their lives, particularly their parents.

For infants and very young children, parents are the central reality. If parents provide a secure and nurturing environment, the young child develops a strong emotional bond with the parents and a strong desire to please them. Over time, as the child understands more and more clearly what actions will win parental approval, the child also begins to internalize a sense that these actions are not only parent-pleasing but are also, in a moral sense, the right thing to do. Experts see this internalizing and idealizing of parental norms as the bedrock foundation for the development of conscience and morality.

But lack of effective parental nurture can short-circuit this entire process. As discussed above, in extreme cases in which infants and young children are deprived of parental nurture, their brains may develop in ways that severely limit their capacity for empathy or for forming strong emotional bonds. In such cases, the children will have neither the capacity nor

the incentive to internalize and idealize parental norms. Two other dysfunctions, while less extreme, are probably far more common. Parents may be present but fail to provide the nurture and security essential to forming a strong parent-child bond, resulting in a correspondingly weak desire on the part of the child to understand and internalize parental norms. Or, parents may model norms that are themselves dysfunctional, as with parents who are domineering, deceitful, or bigoted.

In later childhood and adolescence, the child's more sophisticated self-awareness and expanding world produce both more complex questions — Where did I come from? Why am I here? What's my connection to other people? How should I live? What should I do? — and a broader set of adults who, along with parents, help shape the child's evolving answers.

During childhood and adolescence, a high proportion of children begin to develop a strong spiritual perspective on life. Research over many decades has established that, within monotheistic traditions, a child's concept of God is often heavily influenced by the child's experience of his or her parents. More specifically, children are very likely to attribute to God — for better or for worse — the qualities they have experienced in their parents. As children mature, many other influences shape, and in some cases fundamentally reshape, their concepts of God. In some cases, a deep spiritual life may compensate for nurture lacking in relationships with parents. But, the fact remains that the nature and quality of parental nurture may profoundly affect a child's ability to develop a sustaining and life-affirming spiritual framework for life.

By the time children reach adolescence, while parents still play a central role in guiding moral and spiritual development, the broader community is also increasingly important. Cross-cultural studies indicate that a key dynamic in the moral and spiritual development of adolescents is their development of an idealized view of the person they aspire to be. Other studies have found that the content of this ideal is heavily influenced by the adults whom the adolescent is closest to and/or most admires. Again, this can be good or bad news. Yet other studies have shown that when an adolescent has close nurturing relationships with adults who are positive role models — a teacher, coach, mentor, youth worker, or other adult friend — the adolescent is very likely to internalize their values and relatively unlikely to engage in risky behaviors. Conversely, in the current youth culture, young people who lack these positive role models have no shortage of negative ones.

f. Nurturing relationships and a spiritual connection to the transcendent significantly improve physical and emotional health.

As the foregoing evidence indicates, we are biologically primed to connect with other people and with moral and spiritual meaning. But are these impulses that we should embrace or resist? There is mounting evidence that individuals who follow these biological cues are likely to be significantly healthier and happier than individuals who do not. Studies of the health effects of marriage are illustrative of the broader literature about the health effects of nurturing relationships in general. For example, one series of recent studies found that close sexual relationships, especially those of married couples, resulted in significantly improved health, including stronger immune systems and more rapid healing

of wounds. Conversely, high-conflict marital relationships appear to weaken the immune system and increase vulnerability to disease.

A large and growing body of research also demonstrates significant health benefits associated with religious faith and practice. For adults, religious practice correlates with improved overall health, increased longevity, higher levels of reported personal happiness, and a stronger sense of purpose in life. For adolescents, religious practice is significantly linked to higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes about life, reduced risk of intentional and unintentional injury, reduced substance abuse, and a range of other positive health outcomes.

Perhaps most provocative is a recent study of individuals infected with HIV. The study found a positive connection between spirituality and long-term survival, and, more specifically, found that in these cases spirituality and religious belief were associated with lower levels of stress hormones, more optimism, and greater commitment to helping others. It is striking that the physiological and emotional resilience associated with spirituality is the same kind of resilience, as discussed above, associated with positive parental nurture. In short, the two kinds of connectedness analyzed here — connection to others and connection to the transcendent — seem to influence the same biological systems in quite similar ways.

II. Implications of the New Scientific Case for the Importance of Nurture

WHAT IF SCIENTISTS discovered a wonder drug that could stimulate children's brains to develop in ways that enhanced lifelong ability to meet challenges, form positive relationships, and deal effectively with stress? What if that same drug could help children overcome genetic vulnerabilities to anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and violence, and protect against the particular risks of adolescence? And what if, finally, that drug could powerfully aid children in developing a positive moral and spiritual perspective on life? It's hard to imagine that as a nation we wouldn't hail the discovery as a tremendous breakthrough and set out to make sure that every child in America received this miraculous new medicine.

The scientific results summarized above make clear that we have, in fact, already discovered this wonder drug. It's called nurture. We now have strong scientific evidence that if we surround children and

youth with a rich network of supportive, nurturing relationships — beginning with their families, and extending to their neighborhoods, schools, youth organizations, and religious congregations — we can improve their life prospects across a number of important dimensions. This is tremendously good news! It offers us a powerful new tool with which we can enrich the lives of all of our children.

Where do we start? As with any important new discovery, we should first use this new insight as a lens through which to assess our current efforts to support the healthy development of our children and youth. How are we doing? And how could our new understanding of the powerfully beneficial effects of nurturing relationships and environments help us to do better? The Commission on Children at Risk considered this question carefully and came to three principal conclusions.

- **Rising rates of mental and emotional problems among American young people raise a red flag about how well we are nurturing our kids.**

While many American young people are thriving, many more are not, and there are worrisome signs that as a society we are losing rather than gaining ground. Notwithstanding sustained increases in material well-being and important medical advances in the ability to treat depression and other mental disorders, the rate of serious mental and emotional disorders among American children and youth has been rising steadily. Eight percent of high school students have clinical depression, 20 percent report having seriously considered suicide during the past year, and, according to the Surgeon General, 21 percent of 9- to 17-year-olds have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that will cause at least minimum impairment. A recent study of mental health problems among college students at

a large Midwestern university found that over the past 13 years, the number of students being seen for depression doubled, the number of suicidal students tripled, and the number of students seen after a sexual assault quadrupled. It would appear that complacency is not in order.

- **Our conceptual models for thinking about how to promote positive child and youth development fail to recognize the central importance of long-term nurture.**

Two conceptual models, the “pharmaceutical model” and the “at-risk model,” have driven most recent thinking about how to promote the positive development of children and youth. While both models help bring certain important issues into sharper focus, the Commission concluded that both are fundamentally inadequate because they fail to sufficiently recognize the central importance of nurturing relationships and environments.

The broad availability in recent years of new medications to treat depression and other mental, emotional, and behavioral problems has yielded enormous benefits for millions of suffering children. Moreover, mental illness in America is still undertreated among children and adolescents, and especially among those living in less affluent communities. But against the backdrop of rising rates of mental and emotional disorders, it is important to look beyond the treatment of individual patients — as the pharmaceutical model fails to do — to understand and address the environmental factors that are causing more and more of our children and youth to need treatment.

The broadly accepted “at-risk model” encourages us to focus only on those young people most at risk of negative outcomes, to intervene too late, and to focus too heavily on the role of experts rather than the responsibility of the community at large. Like the pharmaceutical model, the at-risk model is disease based, focusing on identifying those young people most likely to become ill rather than on creating a nurturing environment that supports all young people in becoming healthy. And because it is focused on the least healthy young people, the model places heavy reliance on targeted interventions by highly trained professionals while focusing little attention on issues such as family structure or the role of voluntary civic and religious institutions in improving children’s lives.

- **We need a new ecological model focused on promoting the healthy development of children and youth by surrounding all of our children with a network of nurturing, supportive relationships.**

Children who are ill need to be treated, as quickly, effectively, and compassionately as possible. But having discovered the powerfully preventive and protective effects of nurturing relationships, we no longer need be, nor should be, content to simply treat illness and dysfunction. Instead, we need a new conceptual model — an ecological model — that will enable us to think more clearly about how to create communities that surround our children with a rich network of nurturing, supportive relationships.

This new model should: (1) be firmly grounded in the science of nurture, discussed above, (2) help us identify the institutions in our society most central to the nurturing of our children and youth, and (3) give us a clearer understanding of how to strengthen these institutions by spotlighting the characteristics they must possess if they are to perform their nurturing role most effectively.

The Commission proposes such a model, centered on a new intellectual construct — what the Commission’s report calls “authoritative communities.”

III.

The Critical Nurturing Roles of “Authoritative Communities”

NAMING THE NEED. Based on careful analysis of both the new science of nurture and the existing child development literature, the Commission concluded that the critical first step in defining a new ecological model of child and youth development is to create a new intellectual category of institutions — the set of social institutions that is most central to the positive nurture of our children and youth.

The science of nurture indicates that the healthy development of children and youth depends on nurturing relationships that help children connect to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. Strikingly, social science has no name for the set of institutions that play this nurturing role. This namelessness is highly significant: These institutions have no name because

social science hasn’t recognized the critical importance of their role.

The Commission proposes to call this set of institutions “authoritative communities” (or “authoritative institutions”) because of the role they play in providing children and youth with a safe, secure, and supportive environment in which to form both nurturing relationships and a positive moral and spiritual perspective on life. The Commission suggests a simple working definition: “Authoritative communities are groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life.” In essence, they are groups that live out the types of connectedness that our children increasingly lack.

With this working definition, it is possible to begin to identify the set of institutions most central to the nurture of our children, and to begin to identify the common characteristics critical to that nurturing role. Certainly, the family is (or at least should be) the most obvious authoritative community. Other core authoritative communities include youth organizations and other community groups involved with children, religious congregations, and schools.

The key characteristics of authoritative communities. Having created this working definition of authoritative communities and identified the principal social institutions that fall within this newly defined category, the Commission then considered what common characteristics of these institutions are most critical to their effectiveness in nurturing our children and youth.

The Commission identified the following 10 principal characteristics of authoritative communities:

- *Authoritative communities include children and youth.*
- *They treat children as ends in themselves.*
- *They are warm and nurturing.*
- *They establish clear limits and expectations.*
- *Their core work is performed largely by nonspecialists.*
- *They are multigenerational.*
- *They have a long-term focus.*
- *They encourage spiritual and religious development.*
- *They reflect and transmit a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.*
- *They are philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all people and to the principle of love of neighbor.*

Assessing the strength of authoritative communities in America. After defining the concept of authoritative communities and identifying their key characteristics, the Commission then considered the health of authoritative communities in contemporary American society: How strong are our authoritative communities, and are they getting stronger or weaker? In brief, the Commission concluded that while America has historically been blessed with an exceptionally strong web of authoritative communities, a range of social forces has seriously weakened those communities in recent decades, significantly reducing their effectiveness in nurturing our children and youth.

The long-term weakening of American families. The steady and pronounced weakening of the American family from the mid-1960s through the mid-1990s is perhaps the clearest example of the declining strength of authoritative communities. The scientific research discussed above highlights the critical importance of parental nurture, and abundant research has established the hardly surprising proposition that in general — and with conspicuous individual exceptions on both sides of the equation — two-parent married families have a greater capacity to nurture children than do single-parent families. Since about 1995, a number of negative trends related to the strength of marriage and the family

appear to have either slowed down considerably or come to a halt. Although this is good news, these recent changes are not large or definitive, and it remains to be seen whether the decades-old trend toward family fragmentation in the United States is about to be replaced by a trend toward reintegration.

The weakening of American civil society. Professor Robert Putnam, in his celebrated 1995 article “Bowling Alone,” and in his subsequent book of the same name, advanced the thesis that the great majority of U.S. social institutions that serve as vehicles for civic engagement — a set of institutions that overlaps substantially with what we are calling authoritative communities — have declined significantly in recent decades. Putnam’s thesis has been broadly debated, and this debate has produced some important qualifications, but today there is a rough scholarly consensus that Putnam was largely correct.

These two parallel trends — the long-term weakening of both the American family and the broad class of social institutions through which Americans connect with each other to create community — indicate that in recent decades America’s authoritative communities have been growing weaker rather than stronger. The implications for America’s children are not good.

When authoritative communities become weaker, children suffer.

Abundant data and multiple analyses confirm what the authoritative communities model predicts: When authoritative communities grow weaker, children suffer. As noted above, many studies have demonstrated that, on average and with conspicuous individual exceptions, children from two-parent families

The Developmental Assets Strategy

One of the Commission’s key conclusions is that strengthening “authoritative communities” is fundamentally not a “them” strategy — something that government or experts or anyone else can do for us (although government and experts have critical supporting roles) — but an “us” strategy that we as individuals and communities must own and drive.

What does such an “us” strategy look like? The “Developmental Assets” strategy pioneered by the Minneapolis-based Search Institute, a nonprofit think tank focused on promoting positive youth development, provides an excellent example.

Based on years of research, the Search Institute in 1990 articulated a series of positive supports and opportunities young people need for successful development. This framework of 40 developmental assets draws on a synthesis of the vast literature in child and adolescent development, prevention, and resilience to identify “building blocks” of development which enhance health and well-being. Twenty of the developmental assets have to do with the settings (e.g., families, neighborhoods, congregations, schools, youth organizations) that shape young people’s lives. These are called external assets. And the other 20 assets have to do with the personal strengths, commitments, values, and competencies that all young people need to be caring, responsible, and successful. These are called internal assets.

The complete list of assets is included in Appendix C. A quick review of the list makes clear how closely aligned the assets model is with the “authoritative communities” framework proposed in the Commission’s report. A high proportion of both the external and internal assets focus on the twin developmental challenges identified by the Commission: helping kids connect positively to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning. More information on the assets model and the underlying research is available online at www.search-institute.org/assets/introassetbuilding.html.

Over the past decade, Search has tested this conceptual framework in more than 1,000 urban, suburban, and rural communities in the United States and Canada. More than 2 million youth have been included in these studies. Across a broad range of communities, this research has consistently demonstrated a robust positive *(Continued on page 21)*

fare better on a broad range of outcomes than children of single-parent families. And Robert Putnam presents a fascinating analysis testing the correlation, on a state-by-state basis, between 14 indicators of social connectedness and 10 indicators of child well-being. It is worth quoting his statement of the results: “Statistically, the correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analysis of this sort.”¹¹ Of course, Putnam is stating positively a correlation between social connections and child well-being that, in the context of the declining social connectedness that he documents, is producing profoundly negative effects on American children.

Renewing Authoritative Communities. Based on the foregoing analysis, the Commission strongly recommends that America adopt the strengthening of authoritative communities as a central organizing principle for our efforts to improve the well-being of our children and youth. Needless to say, other goals and strategies are also important; we must, for example, address the economic, health, and educational needs of our young people. But given the strong scientific evidence demonstrating the powerful preventive and protective effects of nurture on child well-being, and the equally strong evidence that the authoritative communities we rely on to provide that nurture have grown weaker, the Commission believes that renewing authoritative communities must become a central national priority.

Strengthening authoritative communities in our poorest and most troubled neighborhoods is particularly important and will be particularly challenging. It is particularly important because the children in these communities have the greatest needs and are most at risk. It will be particularly challenging for two reasons. In many of these neighborhoods, the network of authoritative communities that we take for granted elsewhere is badly depleted or even nonexistent. Further, a range of other problems in these neighborhoods — joblessness, poverty, crime, lack of medical and mental health care, and other difficulties — makes everything harder, including the critical task of revitalizing authoritative communities. Responding to this challenge must involve our society as a whole, not just government. But to be successful, this work of renewal will also require greater attention and investment from all levels of government.

IV.

Recommended Social Goals

Based on the analysis outlined above, the Commission recommends that the nation adopt three broad social goals focused on strengthening the role of authoritative communities in the lives of America’s children and youth:

GOAL 1 — Deepen our society’s commitment to those values that build and sustain authoritative communities, and reconsider our commitment to those values that often replace or undermine them.

GOAL 2 — Increase measurably in the next decade the proportion of U.S. children who are members of authoritative communities and whose lives are improved through their participation in them.

GOAL 3 — Win support for a major shift in public policy, in which policy-makers at all levels seek to meet youth needs by utilizing and empowering authoritative communities.

V. Policy Recommendations

The members of the Commission believe that the authoritative communities model and the three broad social goals that follow from it provide a powerful framework within which we, as a society, can and should begin to formulate a broad range of more specific initiatives to strengthen authoritative communities.

The Commission recognizes that formulating such a comprehensive set of strategies to strengthen authoritative communities will require a broader range of substantive expertise than represented among the members of the Commission. Nonetheless, in the hope of stimulating that broader conversation, the Commission has proposed a preliminary set of policy recommendations illustrative of what will be required for a serious long-term effort to strengthen America's authoritative communities. These specific recommendations are included as Appendix B. ■

1 — ROBERT D. PUTNAM,
BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE
AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY
(NEW YORK: SIMON & SHUSTER, 2000): 296-297.

(Continued — The Developmental Assets Strategy) correlation between the presence of developmental assets in a child's life and thriving behavior and an equally strong negative correlation between lack of assets and high-risk behaviors. Additional research shows that developmental assets are powerful across all racial/ethnic and economic lines and family types. The key message in all of this is that "the more assets, the better." The challenge is that most youth experience 20 or fewer of the 40 developmental assets.

To help communities become more intentional in promoting developmental assets for all young people, Search Institute in 1996 launched the national "Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth" initiative to raise national consciousness about the urgency and feasibility of mobilizing individuals, communities, policy, and resources to take positive action on behalf of all children and adolescents, and to assist communities in developing and implementing coordinated, long-term efforts to promote the healthy development of all children and adolescents. To date, more than 500 communities have joined this effort. More information is available online at www.search-institute.org/communities.

Building on a collaboration that began in 1995, the YMCAs of the United States and Canada in 2001 joined with Search in a long-term "Abundant Assets Alliance" with three long-term goals:

- To support the transformation of local YMCAs to be asset-rich resources;
- To equip local YMCAs to be catalysts and partners in creating asset-building communities; and
- To join with other organizations across North America to influence social norms and policies to more strongly support positive youth development.

Through the Alliance, the YMCA and Search Institute are collaborating to produce resource materials and provide training to YMCAs across North America to strengthen their capacity to be leaders in helping their communities mobilize their asset-building power for all kids.

More information is available at www.abundantassets.org.

Appendix A

Members of the Commission on Children at Risk

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Elizabeth Berger | American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists
David Blankenhorn | Institute for American Values
T. Barry Brazelton | Harvard Medical School
Robert Coles | Harvard University
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David Gutmann | Northwestern University
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Paul Vitz | New York University
Judith Wallerstein | Center for the Family in Transition
W. Bradford Wilcox | University of Virginia
Larry Young | Emory University

Appendix B

Policy Recommendations of the Commission on Children at Risk

Concerning all citizens:

1. We recommend that all adults examine the degree to which they are positively influencing the lives of children through participating in authoritative communities, and try where possible to a better job.
2. We recommend that all families with children as well as youth-included organizations and initiatives examine the degree to which they meet the 10 basic criteria for authoritative communities, and try where possible to strengthen themselves in accordance with those criteria.

Concerning families, neighborhoods, and workplaces:

3. A child's first and typically most important authoritative community is his or her family. We recommend that we re-evaluate our behavior and our dominant cultural values, and consider a range of changes in our laws and public policies, to substantially increase the proportion of U.S. children growing up with their two married parents who are actively and supportively involved in their lives.
4. We recommend that some U.S. "work-family" advocates change their priorities, putting less emphasis on policies that free up parents to be better workers, and more emphasis on policies that free up workers to be better parents and better guides for the next generation. Examples of the latter include flexible and reduced work hours, tele-working, job sharing, part-time work, compressed work weeks, career breaks, job protection and other benefits for short-term (up to six months) parental leave, and job preferences and other benefits, such as graduated re-entry and educational and training benefits, for long-term (up to five years) parental leave. We suspect that, if more leading advocates and analysts were to reconsider their priorities, at least some corporate decision-makers might follow suit. Perhaps the new emphasis could be conveyed by a new label, "family-work." This shift would benefit not only families but also neighborhoods and civic life generally.
5. We recommend that large employers reduce the practice of continually uprooting and relocating married couples with children.

Concerning adolescents:

6. We recommend a creative societywide effort to respond more effectively to adolescents' needs for risk taking, novelty seeking, and peer affiliation. The goal is to provide healthy opportunities for young people to meet these needs in the context of significantly greater adult support, participation, and supervision. "Integral to these efforts," according to Michael Resnick of the University of Minnesota, "is a philosophical commitment that young people are resources to be developed, not problems to be solved."¹
7. We recommend that authoritative communities attend more purposively to the gendered needs of adolescents. Equal opportunity and equal rights do not mean that boys and girls have identical patterns of development. The goal is to address their needs for meaning and sexual identity in pro-social ways, including mentoring, rites of passage, opportunities for adventure, exploration and service, discussions about the meaning of fertility, and guidance regarding the appropriate means of managing sexual and aggressive energies. Much more than it is today, adolescence should become a time for adult engagement with, not retreat from, young people.

Concerning moral and spiritual development:

8. We recommend that youth-serving organizations purposively seek to promote the moral and spiritual development of children, recognizing that children's moral and spiritual needs are as genuine, and as integral to their personhood, as their physical and intellectual needs. For organizations that include children from diverse religious backgrounds or no religious background, this task admittedly will be difficult. But it need not be impossible and should not be neglected. In a society in which pluralism is a fact and freedom a birthright, finding new ways to strengthen, and not ignore or stunt, children's moral and spiritual selves may be the single most important challenge facing youth service professionals and youth-serving organizations in America today.

Concerning private and public resources:

9. We recommend that a major funding priority for philanthropists who want to help children at risk should be the goal of empowering and extending the influence of authoritative communities.
10. We recommend that corporate foundations and charitable giving programs reconsider the practice of refusing even to consider giving grants to faith-based organizations whose mission is to improve the lives of children. There is nothing inherently improper about religiously informed efforts to help children, and these efforts, just like purely

1—MICHAEL RESNICK, "BEST BETS FOR IMPROVING THE ODDS FOR OPTIMUM YOUTH DEVELOPMENT," COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AT RISK, WORKING PAPER 10 (NEW YORK: INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES, 2002): 13.

secular efforts, should be judged strictly by the secular results that they produce. The issue is understandably difficult and complex. In a pluralistic society such as ours, there are significant differences in viewpoints and values, and tolerance for these differences is essential. But religious and philosophical pluralism is a challenge to be embraced, not avoided by arbitrary exclusiveness.

11. We recommend that the U.S. Congress, as well as state legislators, shift their approach to providing social services for children, seeking wherever possible to use and empower authoritative communities to deliver services and meet human needs.

12. We recommend a special national commitment of both private and public energy and resources to rebuild authoritative communities in disadvantaged, low-income neighborhoods.

13. With Isabel V. Sawhill of the Brookings Institution and her colleagues², we recommend that, in order to improve the life prospects of children in low-income families and neighborhoods, the United States in the near term allocate an additional 1 percent of its gross domestic product to children, and especially to the goal of strengthening those authoritative communities that affect the lives of children in low-income, troubled neighborhoods.

14. We recommend that the U.S. Congress create a new federal tax credit for individual contributions of up to \$500 (\$1,000 for married couples) to charitable organizations whose primary purpose is improving the lives of children and youth. The goals of this policy change are to increase charitable giving and volunteerism and to diversify and decentralize the financial supports for authoritative communities and other nonprofit youth-serving organizations.

Concerning scholars:

15. We recommend more and stronger partnerships between scholars and youth-serving organizations. Access to relevant research findings, scholarly analysis, and evaluation tools can help youth leaders do a better job. Connectedness to front-line leaders and local communities and organizations can help scholars do a better job, both professionally and as citizens.

16. Building on Robert Putnam's work showing correlations between high levels of social capital and good outcomes for children, we recommend that interested scholars develop precise measures of the vitality and reach of authoritative communities in the United States. Doing this work would permit scholars to examine correlations between authoritative communities and child outcomes. It would also permit scholars to develop trend line data on the vitality of U.S. authoritative communities.

17. We recommend that scholars and others consider revising their methodology in order to include families in the definition of civil society. At first glance, this issue might appear to be purely of academic interest, but it is not. Conceptually separating families from civil society has many practical consequences — most of which, in our view, tend to be unhelpful and even potentially harmful. For example, based in part on this conceptual exclusion of families from civil society, researchers and policy-makers often simply assume that family structure is not a legitimate area for inclusion in policy recommendations.³ It is. More generally, as this report has tried to demonstrate, it is important for policy-makers and society as a whole (not just scholars) to view the environment of childhood holistically, transcending the largely arbitrary intellectual dichotomy between family life and civic and public life.⁴

Concerning immediate next steps:

18. We recommend that youth service and civic leaders across the country, drawing on this report as well as other resources, help to lead a new and sustained national conversation about the crisis of childhood in the U.S. and the most effective ways to meet that crisis.

2 — ISABEL V. SAWHILL (ED.), ONE PERCENT FOR THE KIDS: NEW POLICIES, BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN (WASHINGTON, D.C.: BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS, 2003).

3 — FOR EXAMPLE, SEE LYNNE C. HUFFMAN, SARA L. MEHLINGER, AND AMY S. KERIVAN, "RISK FACTORS FOR ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL," IN HUFFMAN, ET AL., OFF TO A GOOD START (CHAPEL HILL, N.C.: FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, 2000). THESE RESEARCHERS DO REPORT THAT PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS AND FAMILY COMPOSITION MAY BE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN SCHOOL SUCCESS OR FAILURE, BUT ALSO ASSERT THAT THESE ARE "FIXED MARKERS" THAT ARE "NOT AMENABLE TO CHANGE" AND THEREFORE "NOT A REASONABLE BASIS FOR STRUCTURING TARGETED INTERVENTIONS."

4 — WILLIAM J. DOHERTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, WHOSE CURRENT WORK FOCUSES ON "FAMILY-CENTERED COMMUNITY BUILDING," PUTS IT THIS WAY: "WE HAVE WITNESSED THE EROSION OF TWO CENTRAL FORMS OF HUMAN CONNECTION IN THE PAST FORTY YEARS: FAMILY BONDS AND CIVIC BONDS. THESE TWO TRENDS ARE USUALLY NOT ADDRESSED TOGETHER BECAUSE SCHOLARS AND OTHERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT OUR CULTURE TEND TO FOCUS ON ONE OR THE OTHER — EITHER FAMILY OR COMMUNITY. I MAINTAIN THAT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ARE TWO FACETS OF THE SAME PHENOMENON, AND THAT THEY ARE TIED TO THE SAME SOCIAL FORCES. WE MUST THEREFORE TRANSCEND THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN FAMILY LIFE AND PUBLIC LIFE THAT HAS LIMITED OUR ABILITY TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF BOTH FAMILIES AND SOCIETY." SEE WILLIAM J. DOHERTY, "RENEWING OUR VOWS," REMARKS DELIVERED AT THE CENTER OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT, MINNEAPOLIS, MARCH 19, 2003. DOHERTY AND JASON S. CARROLL, "THE CITIZEN THERAPIST AND FAMILY-CENTERED COMMUNITY BUILDING: INTRODUCTION TO A NEW SECTION OF THE JOURNAL," FAMILY PROCESS 41, NO. 4 (2002): 561-568. DOHERTY AND CARROLL, "THE FAMILIES AND DEMOCRACY PROJECT," FAMILY PROCESS 41, NO. 4 (2002): 579-590

Appendix C

40 Developmental Assets

EXTERNAL ASSETS

Support

1. **Family Support.** Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive Family Communication.** Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other Adult Relationships.** Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring Neighborhood.** Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring School Climate.** School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling.** Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community Values Youth.** Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as Resources.** Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to Others.** Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety.** Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries & Expectations

11. **Family Boundaries.** Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries.** School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood Boundaries.** Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult Role Models.** Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive Peer Influence.** Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High Expectations.** Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative Activities.** Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth Programs.** Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.

19. **Religious Community.** Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at Home.** Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

INTERNAL ASSETS

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement Motivation.** Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School Engagement.** Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. **Homework.** Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. **Bonding to School.** Young person cares about her or his school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure.** Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Positive Values

26. **Caring.** Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. **Equality and Social Justice.** Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. **Integrity.** Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. **Honesty.** Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. **Responsibility.** Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. **Restraint.** Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Social Competencies

32. **Planning and Decision Making.** Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. **Interpersonal Competence.** Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. **Cultural Competence.** Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
35. **Resistance Skills.** Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
36. **Peaceful Conflict Resolution.** Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. **Personal Power.** Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
38. **Self-Esteem.** Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
39. **Sense of Purpose.** Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
40. **Positive View of Personal Future.** Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

About YMCA of the USA

COLLECTIVELY KNOWN AS America's largest not-for-profit community service organization, YMCAs build strong kids, strong families and strong communities in more than 2,500 cities and towns nationwide. The historic YMCA mission of helping individuals build healthy spirit, mind and body is as compelling today as at any point in the charitable organization's 150-year history. Today, 625,000 YMCA volunteers supported by 50,000 staff members serve nearly 19 million members, half under the age of 18. As the country's largest provider of child care, youth sports, leadership and camping programs, YMCAs also foster character development and help young people embrace the core moral values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility. Committed to cultural diversity and collaboration, YMCAs serve people of all ethnicities, faiths, ages, incomes, and abilities, and actively collaborate with other charity organizations, government leaders and corporations to fulfill the organization's mission. YMCA of the USA is the national resource office for America's 2,540 YMCAs.

About Dartmouth Medical School

DARTMOUTH MEDICAL SCHOOL is dedicated to advancing health through the dissemination and discovery of knowledge. It is committed to education of health professionals in an environment of discovery, research that advances health, formulation of health policies in the interest of our citizens, and service with our partners to maintain Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center as a local, regional and national resource for health care of the highest quality. The chief responsibility of the Medical School is to select students of exceptional character and accomplishment and prepare them to become superb and caring physicians, scientists and teachers.

About the Institute for American Values

THE INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES is a nonpartisan organization devoted to contributing intellectually to the renewal of family life and the sources of competence, character, and citizenship. By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its research, publications, and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bring new information and analyses to the attention of policy-makers in government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

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