



# Helping Alabama Families “Stay Connected”

## Impact Statement

### The Problem/Issue:

As our world becomes increasingly high-tech, more parents feel out of touch with their children, particularly their teens. Research, however, has long shown that effective communication between parents and children is critical to a healthy relationship and to fostering positive developmental outcomes.

### What's Been Done:

Alabama Extension's Stay Connected effort is a flexible program designed to enhance communication and interactions between parents and adolescents. This program can be used in a broad range of settings with diverse audiences. The program includes goals for teens, goals for parents and joint parent-teen activities. Each goal addresses an area that is of current concern and importance for contemporary families and communities. The parent and teen goals are designed to complement one another so that programs can focus on building parent and teen strengths independently as well as bringing parents and teens together for joint activities that enhance communication and understanding.

Parents and teens are helped to take each others' perspectives on a range of topics. Examples of areas covered with both parents and teens include: effective communication, dealing with conflict, discussing sensitive topics, rules and tolerance and diversity. Teens also address understanding why parents worry, taking responsibility and identifying trustworthy adults in their support system. Additional goals for parents include recognizing when teens need help, including teens in family decision-making and gender stereotypes. Collectively the goals for parents and teens and the joint activities promote positive parent-adolescent relationships and effective relationship skills for all participants.

### Why We Care:

A total of 185 adolescents participated in the Stay Connected program. All of these adolescents were African American students (60 males and 135 females) who were taking family and consumer Science courses. The majority of participants were in the ninth grade (n=104), followed by the 10th grade (n=50), 11th grade (n=23), and 12th grade (n=8).

Results of the retrospective pre/post-evaluation of knowledge gained from participation in the Stay Connected

program indicated that, across the group of participating adolescents, perceived increases in knowledge were observed for nine of the 10 goal areas addressed.

Stay Connected was used at Auburn University as part of the personal growth and development courses offered to Auburn employees. Parents of adolescents attended a two-hour workshop on parenting teens. Stay Connected also was presented at two multistate conferences. During 2004, the Stay Connected program will be added to the (<http://www.aces.edu/teens/>) Web site, which will make it widely accessible to youth and family professionals across the state and country. Future plans are to continue this program for at least the next three to five years and to increase the number of Extension employees who are aware of this program and how to use it. Its flexibility makes it a valuable resource for a wide range of programs addressing many different topics of interest to youth and parents.