

# mercer island youth and family services

By **Cynthia Goodwin**, Director, Mercer Island Youth & Family Services

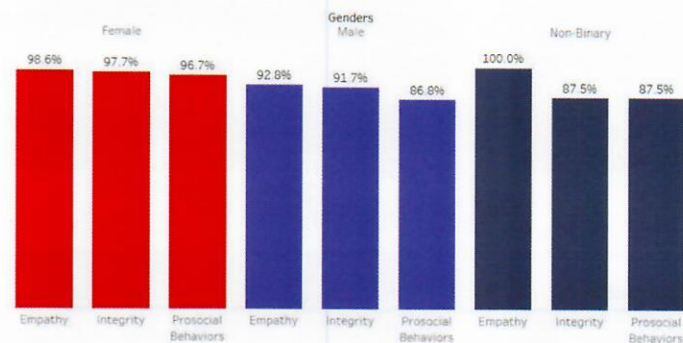
## GEARING UP FOR SUMMER

– FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION ON OUR YOUTH WELL-BEING STUDENT SURVEY

Mercer Island is a unique and beautiful community with its own set of challenges just like other communities. In April a renowned expert in youth resilience and vulnerabilities, Dr. Suniya Luthar, Professor Emerita at Columbia University and Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University, confirmed this in her report back on her survey of Mercer Island High School youth. Her conclusions include concerns as well as compliments and provide a robust profile on the well-being of Mercer Island youth in comparison to other youth in high-achieving schools.

Dr. Luthar's studies explore substance use, adjustment difficulties (anxiety, depression, rule-breaking) and positive attributes (empathy, prosocial reputations, integrity, self-compassion). Her work identifies the family, peer, and school factors most strongly predicting the adverse outcomes. Mercer Island youth show worrisome levels of binge drinking and other risk behaviors while, at the same time, showing many positive attributes previously stated.

The data show the positive strides Mercer Island youth are making in the right direction as a result of the strong collaboration between Mercer Island Youth and Family Services, specifically our mental health and substance prevention counselors embedded at MIHS and our school district.



As summer approaches, here are some actionable recommendations for parents and community members to do to further promote positive youth well-being:



Dr. Suniya Luthar

- Have fun with your child, regardless of age, this summer. Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships – “I feel seen and loved for the person I am, at my core.” This is true for children – and for those who tend them.
- Parents and parent-figures are “first-responders” to highly-stressed youth; however, risks for their own stress, including burnout, can affect relationships with their children.
- Maintain good, open communication, starting in early childhood – “I tell my mother about my problems and troubles.”
- Be watchful for your child distancing him/herself – “Talking over my problems with my mother makes me feel ashamed or foolish.”
- Be vigilant for distress among youth. Check in frequently, be sincere even when brushed off. Seek professional help if at all worried.
- Set appropriate and consistent limits, hold disciplinary boundaries for youth infractions with substance use, rudeness, bullying, rule-breaking, and cheating.
- Be a good role model. Show kindness and decency in family, community and business dealings. This is particularly important in competitive subcultures.

Dr. Luthar's evidenced-based research will inform Mercer Island Youth and Family Services (MIYFS), the Mercer Island School District, as well as other youth-serving organizations, as we develop future prevention and treatment programs. As a parent, please stay involved in the important conversations that will take place in the coming months as MIYFS develops strategies to capitalize on Island strengths and address areas of weakness. To follow this work, as well as other MIYFS work, follow MIYFS on Facebook or the city's website.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MercerIslandYouthandFamilyServices>  
 City Website/MIYFS Department Page: <https://www.mercergov.org/SectionIndex.asp?SectionID=45>