

Fast Facts

Dads Make a Difference

Believe it or not, parents are an important influence on their children's decisions about sex, love, and values. Teens say they want to hear from their parents about sex and relationships, but many parents don't believe they can make a difference in helping their kids avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood, and their consequences.

The good news is that teen pregnancy and teen birth rates are on the decline led by less sex and more contraception. That bad news is that over one-third of girls in the United States gets pregnant at least once by age 20.

Over two decades of research confirms that parents — and that includes Dads — are an important influence on whether their teenagers become pregnant or cause a pregnancy. In a variety of ways, parental behavior and the nature of parent/child relationships influence teens' sexual activity and use of contraception. While parents cannot determine whether their children have sex, use contraception, become pregnant, or cause a pregnancy, the quality of the relationships with their children can make a real difference.

What Does the Research Say About Parental Influence?

- The overwhelming majority of research studies indicates that parent/child closeness is associated with reduced teen pregnancy risk; teens who are close to their parents are more likely to remain sexually abstinent, postpone intercourse, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception consistently.
- Most studies show that supervision and monitoring of teens' behavior by parents are associated with reduced pregnancy

risk. Teens whose parents closely supervise them are more likely to be older when they first have sexual intercourse, to have fewer partners, and to use contraception.

Have Parents Lost Their Children to Peers and Popular Culture?

- Teens say their parents' influence their sexual decision-making more than any other source, according to a recent national survey conducted by The National Campaign.
- When asked where they learned the most about preventing teen pregnancy, more teens said parents than friends or the media.
- When asked who is most responsible for fixing the problem of teen pregnancy, some 85 percent of adults and 63 percent of teens surveyed agree that parents are most responsible for solving this problem.

What About Teen Boys?

- Almost half (49%) of male high school students in the U.S. have had sex, and male students (49%) are more likely than female students (43%) to have sex.
- Overall, 14% of sexually experienced males, aged 15-19 reported that they had gotten a partner pregnant, and four out of ten boys aged 15-19 agree that getting a girl pregnant will make you feel like a real man.
- However, about half (51%) of boys agree with the statement, "I have never really thought about what my life would be like if I got pregnant/got someone pregnant as a teen."

Dads Have a Special Role

- Teen girls raised by both parents are less likely to have sex or become teen mothers than are teens who grow up under any other family structure.
- Of course, the nearly 750,000 teen girls who get pregnant each year didn't do it alone.

- Parents — especially dads — need to convince their sons about the importance of delaying fatherhood and avoiding teen pregnancy. As one teen plainly told us, “Having sex doesn’t make you a man; waiting until you are ready and responsible does.”

What Should I Do As a Parent?

- If you want to talk to your children about sex but don’t know what to say, how to say it, or when to start, you are not alone. Close to nine out of ten adults surveyed said they feel the same way. For advice on how to talk to your kids about sex, please visit www.TheNationalCampaign.org.
- In addition to talking to your kids about sex, love, and relationships, there are other things parents can do to help to make a difference in the lives of their teens:
 - Spend time with your children and teens. Shared experiences build a bank account of affection and trust that forms the basis for future communication.
 - Help teens gain a sense of self-confidence. Self-confidence is earned, not given. Give kids opportunities to learn skills and gain confidence. Offer praise for jobs well done, accentuate the positive, emphasize the things your children do right. If they fall short, suggest ways to improve; don’t criticize.
 - Encourage your teens to get involved in fun, safe, fulfilling activities.
 - Help your children to identify their strengths, talents, and interests and to find opportunities in which these assets can be developed.
 - Help your teenagers set goals and understand that they have options for the future. Teens with long-term goals for education or work will be less likely to compromise their futures by engaging in risky behavior.
 - Let your kids know that you value education highly. School failure is often a warning sign of other problems. Stay involved in your children’s education and let them know it is important to you. Parents are often very connected to their children’s elementary schools but disengage as the kids get older. Try to stay involved right through high school.
 - Know where your kids are and what they’re doing. Get to know your children’s friends and their families. Set clear rules for your kids about what they may do and with whom they may spend time, and talk to them about why these rules are important.

- Pay attention to kids before they get into trouble. Let your kids know you are proud of them for doing the right thing — even when it seems like no big thing. Watch for signs that your teenager needs help.

A Note on Sources

This fact sheet is based on information contained in four publications published by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy; Families Matter: A Research Synthesis of Family Influences on Adolescent Pregnancy, Halfway There: A Prescription for Continued Progress in Preventing Teen Pregnancy, With One Voice: America’s Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy, Not Just for Girls: The Roles of Boys and Men in Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Teen Pregnancy – So What?, Parents Matter: Tips for Raising Teenagers, and Science Says: The Sexual Attitudes and Behavior of Male Teens.

