

Teen Relationships, Pregnancy, and Marriage

Despite a nearly one-third decline over the past decade in teen pregnancy and birth rates in the United States:

- One in three girls still becomes pregnant by age 20.
- Half of all first out-of-wedlock births are to teenagers.
- Still high rates of teen pregnancy and birth contribute to maternal and child poverty, father absence, diminished life prospects for children born to teens, and often result in unstable relationships and marriages.

Low-conflict, long-lasting marriages benefit families in a number of ways:

- On average, married people are happier, healthier, and wealthier and are better equipped to cope with major life crises.
- Compared to children in other family arrangements, children in married parent households have fewer behavioral problems and higher education attainment.

Teen parenthood means fewer children grow up in stable two-parent families:

- Teen mothers are unlikely to marry the biological fathers of their children. For example, within one year of their child's birth, fewer than 8% of unmarried teen mothers actually marry the baby's father.
- Young unwed mothers dramatically reduce their chances of ever marrying (40% lower for those who have a first child outside of marriage and 51% lower for women who do not marry the biological father of their child within six months of the birth).
- Only 30% of unwed teen mothers who get married are still in their first marriages at age 40.
- Teens who marry are two to three times more likely to divorce than people who marry in their twenties.

Teens have high aspirations for relationships and marriage...

- The vast majority of high school seniors believe that marriage is extremely important and that they will marry in the future.
- 85% of teens believe that sex should only occur in a long-term, committed relationship and that teen pregnancy prevention programs should teach young people to be married before having children.

...they also approve of cohabitation and unwed childbearing

- Marriage and birth patterns among teens have changed over time, shifting from a general trend of marrying *before* pregnancy, to marrying as a *result* of pregnancy, to becoming pregnant and *not* marrying.
- Two-thirds of teens think it is okay to have sex with someone they have strong affection for and to live with someone outside of marriage.
- Nearly 60% of girls aged 15-17 and 73% of those aged 18-19 approve of unwed childbearing.

The success sequence:

- A child born to an unmarried teen mother who has not finished high school is nine times more likely to be poor than a child born to an adult parent who is married and has graduated from high school.

Making a Love Connection

Making a Love Connection: Teen Relationships, Pregnancy, and Marriage—authored by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and Marline Pearson and made possible by funding from the Achelis Foundation—makes a compelling case for decreasing teen pregnancy as one means to increase the proportion of children who grow up in healthy, married families. The authors discuss the increasingly prolonged passage from adolescence to adulthood and the extent to which young people are bombarded by sexual messages. They note that many young people are in the dark about the economic and social benefits of a low-conflict and long lasting marriage for men, women, and children. They also describe what they call the “success sequence”—the optimal timing of sex, marriage, and parenthood. The authors also outline ways to help teens develop positive expectations for their current and future relationships and for family life.

Visit www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/reading/marriage.asp for information about how to purchase or download copies of *Making a Love Connection*, along with related materials from the National Campaign.

Funding Opportunity

Approximately \$100 million a year (FY 2006-FY 2010) is now available to promote healthy marriages. This federal funding, included in the reauthorization of welfare reform, can be used to support education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting.

To Read or Order Making a Love Connection and Related Resources

To download or order *Making a Love Connection*, or to view related materials from the National Campaign, please visit www.teenpregnancy.org/reading/resources/marriage.asp Citations for this fact sheet can also be found there.

About the Authors

Award-winning journalist and social historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has written extensively about marriage, adolescence and young adult relationships, and teen pregnancy. She is currently the Co-Director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Marline Pearson has taught social science and criminology for 25 years and is currently is a social science instructor at the Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wisconsin. Her long-standing interest in high-risk kids led Pearson to develop two curricula, including *Love U2: Getting Smarter About Relationships, Sex, Babies, and Marriage*.

About the National Campaign

Founded in 1996, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported mainly by private donations. The Campaign’s mission is to improve the well being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. Our goal is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

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