



The Media Project

A Program of Advocates for Youth

Why Teens Are (or Aren't) Doing "It"

DEVELOPMENT

About half of American high school students have done "it" – they've had sex. Even more college students – about eight out of ten – have had sex. But, what do young people define as abstinence and what do they define as sex? The answer to these questions arrived shortly after the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal hit the news. Adults were surprised to hear that about 40% of young people think that abstinence includes oral sex. And, about one out of four think that abstinence includes anal sex.

PRE-PRODUCTION: WHEN TEENS SAY, "MAKE IT REAL!" RESPOND WITH STORIES ABOUT ...

- How to talk about sex with parents, boyfriends/girlfriends, doctors, and other important people in their lives
- How to make the decision to have sex or to remain abstinent
- How and where to get birth control
- How and where to get emergency contraception (a backup birth control method)
- How to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS
- How to avoid or get away from uncomfortable sexual situations.

PRODUCTION

Many factors influence teens' decision to have sex or to remain abstinent (however they define it!) including: parents, peers, sports participation, academic performance and goals, religiosity, and a history of sexual abuse.

Parents' Influence

- Teens who are close to their parents are 2.7 times LESS likely to engage in sex than teens who are not close to parents.
- 71% of teens who don't feel close to a mom or dad have sex by ages 17 to 19 compared to the 58% of teens who feel close to mom or dad.
- Among seventh grade African American and Latino males, good grades and living with both parents are associated with delaying sex.

Sports' Influence

- 54% of women athletes in grades nine through 12 reported never having had sex compared to 41% of non-athletes.

Religion's Influence

- Sexually active college students with high levels of religious identification were LESS LIKELY to use a condom than those with less religious involvement.

Alcohol and Drugs' Influence

- 17% of teens ages 13 to 18 who have had sex say they have done something while under the influence of drugs or alcohol that they might not have done while sober.
- Among seventh grade African American and Latino males, good grades and living with both parents are associated with delaying sex.

- Smoking was the best predictor of sixth graders' engaging in sexual intercourse.

Impact of Sexual Abuse

- 30% of high school females and 9% of males reported a history of sexual abuse.
- Abused males were 4 to 5 times as likely as non-abused males to report multiple partners, substance use at last sex, and involvement in a pregnancy.
- Abused females were twice as likely as non-abused females to report early coitus, multiple partners, and a past pregnancy.

SOME SEXUAL SCENARIOS

“My mother is so embarrassing ... the other day she talked with me about ‘heavy petting.’”

Discussions about sex between parents and teens make teens more likely to use protection. Specifically, when mothers discuss condom use before teens start having sex, teens are three times more likely to use condoms when they have sex.

“I just smoked pot ... it isn't like it affected my head.”

Teens who become intimate while under the influence of alcohol or drugs may do things that they wouldn't otherwise do.

24% of teen girls describe their first time as "voluntary but unwanted."

“You don't go to church. You're immoral and a sinner.”

Teens who rarely attend religious services still say that "morals, values, and/or religious beliefs" is the factor that most affected their decisions about whether to have sex.

THE WRAP

- The reality is that, by the time young people graduate from college, most have had sex. Their decision to have sex – or not have sex – is influenced by demographic, socioeconomic, and psychological factors.
- Good parent-child relationships, academic goals, and sports participation can help teens make healthy decisions about sex.
- Religious involvement and beliefs influence sexual behavior.
- Risk behaviors, such as alcohol or drug use, are related to sexual risk-taking.
- Adults, and television, must address teen sexuality realistically and responsibility while treating teens with respect.

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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