

## Chapter 5. Teen Sexuality

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The number of teens reporting having sexual intercourse has dropped over the past decade; however the United States still has one of the highest birth rates in the World.<sup>1</sup> Nationwide, over half of the teens report having had sex by the time they are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade (61.6%). Of those, just over 7% had sex before the age of 13.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, teens that delay their first sexual experience and use contraception were influenced heavily by their family's values through talking with their parents.<sup>3</sup> Research suggests that many discussions happen with adolescents about sex only when the youth's behavior has gotten them into some trouble forcing a discussion. This may be too late to influence the behavior so it is important that parents talk to their children early in their life as a preventative manner for them to understand the risks and the importance for delaying sexual intercourse.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of many surveys and research is directed on the number of youth having sexual intercourse, which places emphasis and education on the risks of vaginal sex and creates a narrow focus on oral sex causing many to perceive this act as more acceptable and less risky. This perception of oral sex as less risky has led to youth having more oral sex without using any protection. In a recent survey of ninth graders, more youth reported having had oral sex (19.6%) than sexual intercourse (13.5%) and reported they planned to have oral sex in the next six months (31.5%) than sexual intercourse (26.3%). Although oral sex may carry a lower risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STDs/STIs), it is still risky and has led to tragic consequences.<sup>5</sup>

Risky sexual behavior may lead to unwanted pregnancy or STDs/STIs (i.e. HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, etc.). Nationwide, 14.4 percent (14.4%) of sexually active teens have had sexual intercourse with 4 or more partners. Among the 34.3% of currently sexually active high school students (9-12), 63% reported using condoms, 17% reported using birth control and 25.4% reported having drunk alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual encounter.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter highlights the findings regarding teen sexuality. More specifically, the following questions are examined:

- What are teen perceptions of appropriate behavior?
- What percentage of teens report being sexually active?
- What percentage of sexually active teens consistently uses some form of contraception and how many partners have they had?
- What role do parents play in teen sexual behavior?

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<sup>1</sup> King, Dale (2005). Teenage Birth Rates. *Journal of Child Birth Education*, 20(2), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control. (2005) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States.

<sup>3</sup> Dykeman, Mary & Andy Grey (2005). Zero Adolescent Pregnancy: A Prevention Program at Work that Works. *Journal of Child Birth Education*, 20,(2), 33-35.

<sup>4</sup> Lederman, Regina, Wenyaw Cham & Cynthia Roberts-Gray. (2004) Survey Comparisons of Parent-Teen Prevention and Control Groups. *Behavioral Medicine* 29 (4), 155-63.

<sup>5</sup> Halpern-Felsher, Bonnie L, Jodi L. Cornell, Rhonda Y Knapp & Jeanne Tschann. (2005). Oral Versus Vaginal Sex Among Adolescents: Perceptions, Attitudes and Behaviors. *Pediatrics*, 115 (4), 845-51.

## SEXUAL BEHAVIORS TEENS THINK ARE OKAY

Teen responses to the statement, “I think it’s okay for teens my age to engage in the following”:

Percent of all teens	Teen Behavior
10%	Holding hands
30%	Holding hands/kissing
19%	Holding hands/kissing/fondling
8%	Holding hands/kissing/fondling/oral sex
4%	Holding hands/kissing/fondling/sexual intercourse
26%	Holding hands/kissing/fondling/sexual intercourse/oral sex
3%	None of the above

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### Key Finding:

Overall, 62% of teens selected behaviors that are “low risk” or “no-risk” (defined as not including sexual intercourse or oral sex) for sexually transmitted disease/infection.

Almost four out of every ten teens (38%) believe that it is okay for teens their age to engage in oral sex and/or sexual intercourse.

### Other Notable Findings:

Ninety-three percent (93%) of all 7<sup>th</sup> graders report “low risk/no risk” sexual activity is appropriate for peers their age. In 2001, this number was 85% of all 7<sup>th</sup> graders.

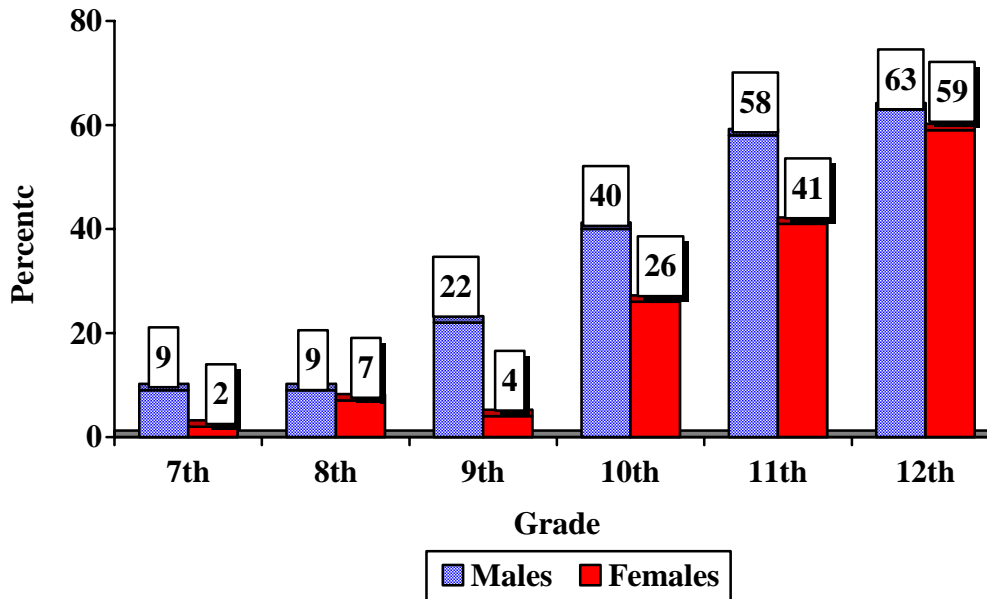
By 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the 56% of teens report “low risk/no risk” sexual activity.

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of all 12<sup>th</sup> graders indicated “low risk/no risk” sexual activity is appropriate for peers their age.

Overall, 59% of teens “strongly agree” or “agree” that it is against their values to have sex while they are a teenager.

## SEXUAL BEHAVIORS TEENS THINK ARE OKAY

Teens who think it is okay to have sexual intercourse at their age:



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### Key Findings:

Two percent (2%) of 7<sup>th</sup> grade females and 7% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade females think it is okay for teens their age to have sexual intercourse.

Nine percent (9%) of 8<sup>th</sup> grade males believe it is okay for teens their age to have sexual intercourse. By the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the number rises to 63%.

Over four out of every ten (41%) females in 11<sup>th</sup> grade think it is okay for teens their age to engage in sexual intercourse. At the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, this number rises to 59%, or nearly three out of every five females.

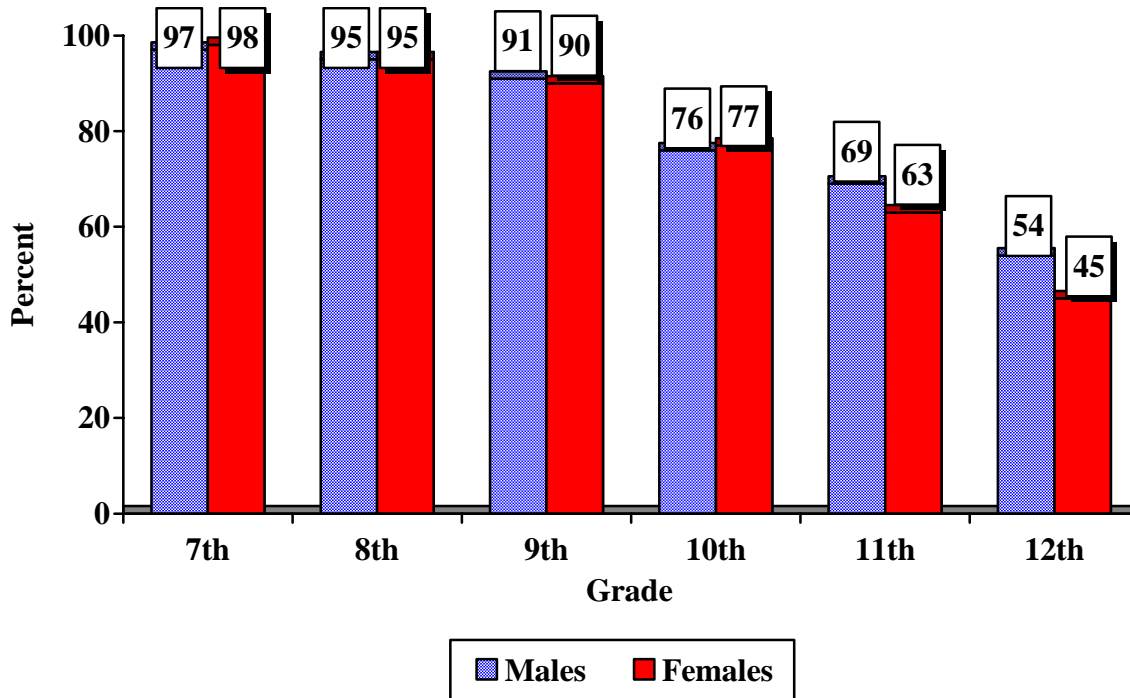
### Other Notable Findings:

Overall, 7 in every 10 teens, or 70%, think it is NOT okay for teens their age to engage in sexual intercourse.

Overall, 8% of males and females think oral sex without sexual intercourse is appropriate for teens their age.

## TEENS WHO HAVE NOT HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Teens who respond “no” to the question, “Have you had sexual intercourse?”



### Key Findings:

Nearly ninety-eight percent (98%) of 7<sup>th</sup> grade females and 97% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade males report they have not had sexual intercourse.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, nearly 46% of males and 55% of females report they have had sexual intercourse.

### Other Notable Findings:

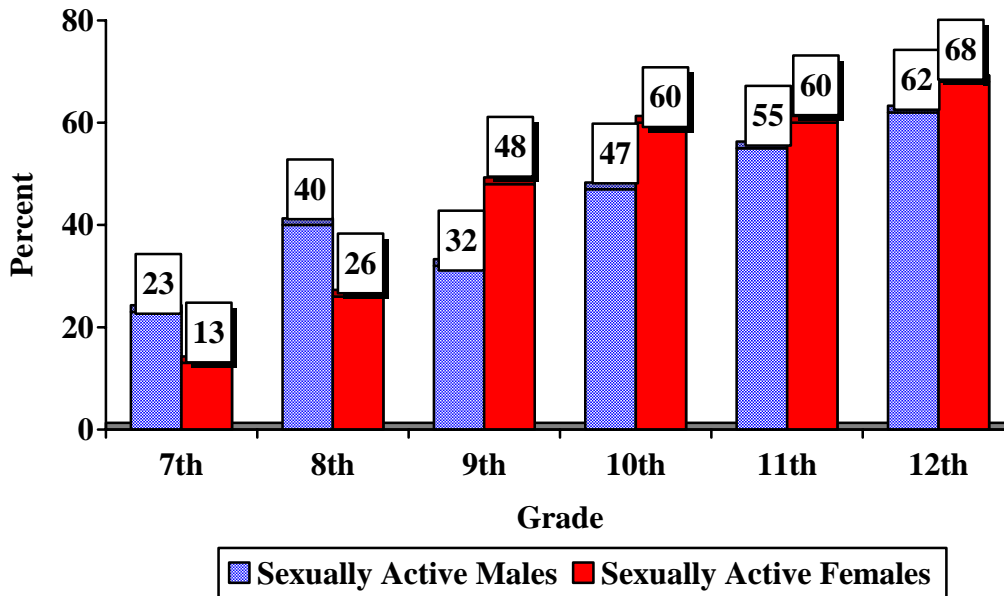
Almost 4 out of every 5 teens (79%) from grades 7-12 report **not** having had sexual intercourse. Overall, 77% of all female teens stated that they had not had sexual intercourse, while 80% of the males stated no.

Of the teens that reported **not** being sexually active, 74% reported significant parental monitoring and 1% reported very low parental monitoring. (Youth who are not having sex are more likely to be from a family that monitors their behaviors.)

Sixty-two percent (62%) of teens that report very low levels of parental monitoring have engaged in high-risk sexual behavior, while 24% of teens with significant parental monitoring have engaged in high-risk sexual behavior.

## BIRTH CONTROL

Sexually active teens that respond “always” when asked, “How often do you and/or your partner use some form of birth control?”



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### Key Findings:

Sixty-two percent (62%) of sexually active 12<sup>th</sup> grade males and 68% of sexually active 12<sup>th</sup> grade females say they “always” use birth control.

Younger teens that are sexually active are far **less** likely to report they “always” use birth control.

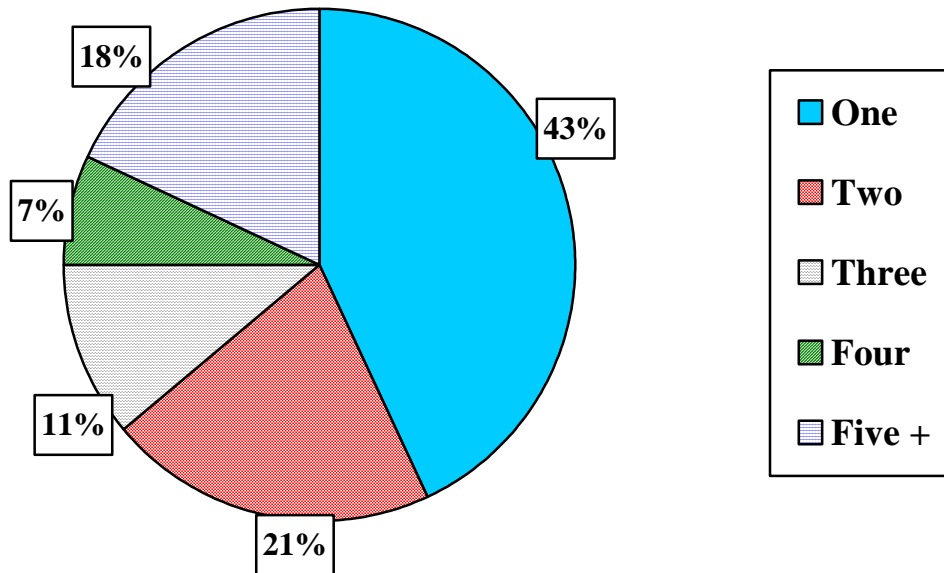
### Other Notable Findings:

Sexually active teens that report having “significant parental monitoring” are more likely to say they “always” use birth control.

Sexually active teens who report they “generally” use birth control are more likely to “strongly agree” their family loves them and gives them support when they need it (85%) compared to those who report they “rarely” use birth control (76%).

## MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

Response by sexually active teens to the question, “If you have had sexual intercourse, how many different sexual partners have you had?”



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### Key Findings:

Forty-three percent (43%) of sexually active teens report they have had one sexual partner.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of sexually active teens report they have had two or more sexual partners.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of sexually active teens report they have had four or more sexual partners.

### Other Notable Findings:

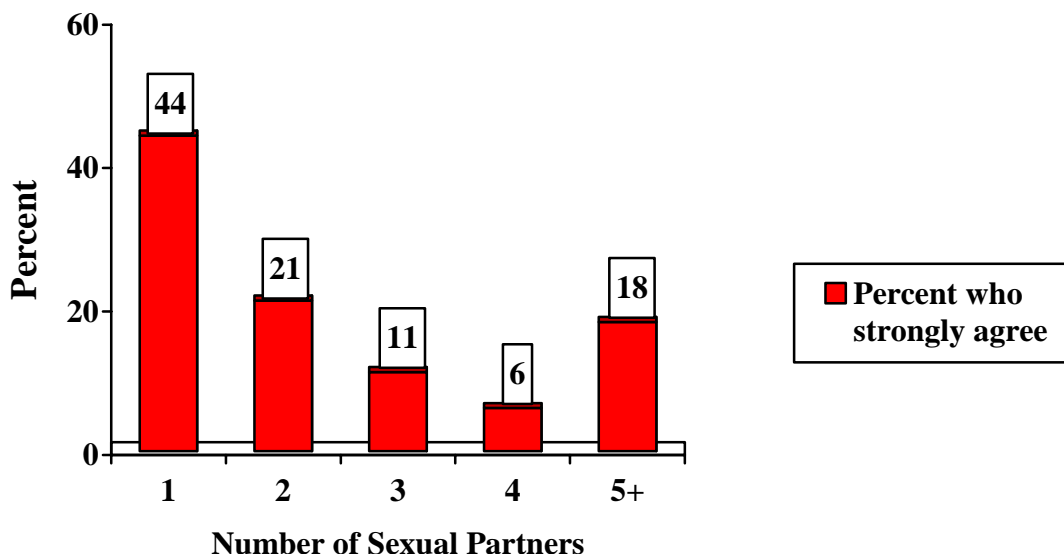
Thirty-five percent (35%) of sexually active males and 37% of sexually active females report having had three or more sexual partners.

Of the sexually active teens, 43% of males and females report having had just one sexual partner.

Seven percent (7%) of all 12<sup>th</sup> grade males and 10% of all 12<sup>th</sup> grade females report having had five or more sexual partners.

## MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

Percent of sexually active teens who “strongly agree” to the statement, “my family loves and gives me support when I need it,” compared to their number of sexual partners:



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### Key Findings:

Of the sexually active teens reporting they “strongly agree” with the statement, “My family loves me and gives me support when I need it,” 44% report that they have only had one sexual partner.

Of the sexually active teens reporting they “strongly agree” with the statement, “My family loves me and gives me support when I need it,” 18% have reported having five or more sexual partners.

### Other Notable Findings:

Sexually active teens who “agree” or “strongly agree” that their family loves them and gives them support when they need it are less likely to have multiple sexual partners than teens who “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statement.

Nineteen percent (19%) of sexually active teens reporting five or more sexual partners are “highly dissatisfied” with school. Nine percent (9%) of sexually active teens that reportedly had five or more sexual partners are “highly satisfied” with school.

Teens who report having had five or more partners are much more likely to say they “rarely” have conversations with their mother (28%) than those who report that they have “many” conversations with their mother (19%).

## MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

### Multiple Sexual Partners and Self-Esteem

Number of sexual partners compared to reported levels of self-esteem:

	Reported Self-Esteem			
	Highest	Moderately High	Moderately Low	Lowest
No partner	81%	76%	70%	60%
One sexual partner	9%	11%	11%	8%
More than one	10%	13%	19%	32%

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### Key Findings:

Teens who report the lowest self-esteem are 3 (three) times more likely to report more than one partner, than teens who report the highest self-esteem.

Of the total number of teens that report having the highest self-esteem, 81% have not had sex, 9% have had one sexual partner, and 10% have had more than one sexual partner.

The higher the level of self-esteem, the less likely teens are to report having had sexual intercourse.

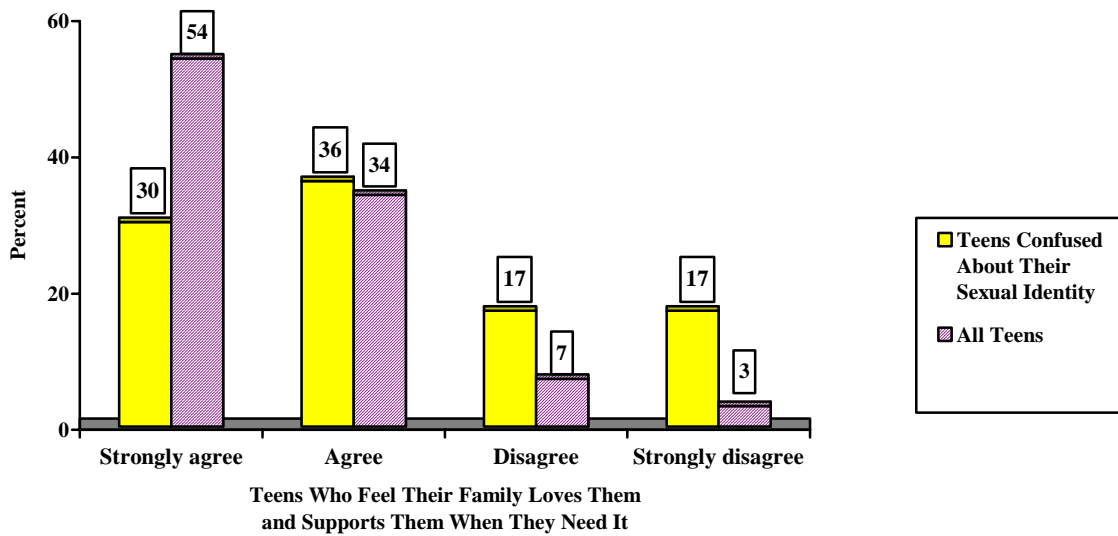
### Other Notable Finding:

Of the sexually active teens that are reporting five or more sexual partners, 34% do not eat any dinners with their families during the week and 34% eat with their families three or more nights a week. Of the teens that have not had sex, 18% do not have any dinners with their families, while 54% eat three or more dinners with their families per week.

The more community attachment teens feel, the **less** likely they are to engage in sexual intercourse and if they engage in sexual intercourse they are **less** likely to have multiple partners.

## SEXUAL ATTRACTION

Teens who report that they are confused about their sexual attraction compared with the statement: “My family loves me and gives me support when I need it”:



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### Key Finding:

Teens who report confusion over their sexual attraction are **less** likely to “agree” or “strongly agree” that their family loves them and gives them support when they need it.

### Other Notable Findings:

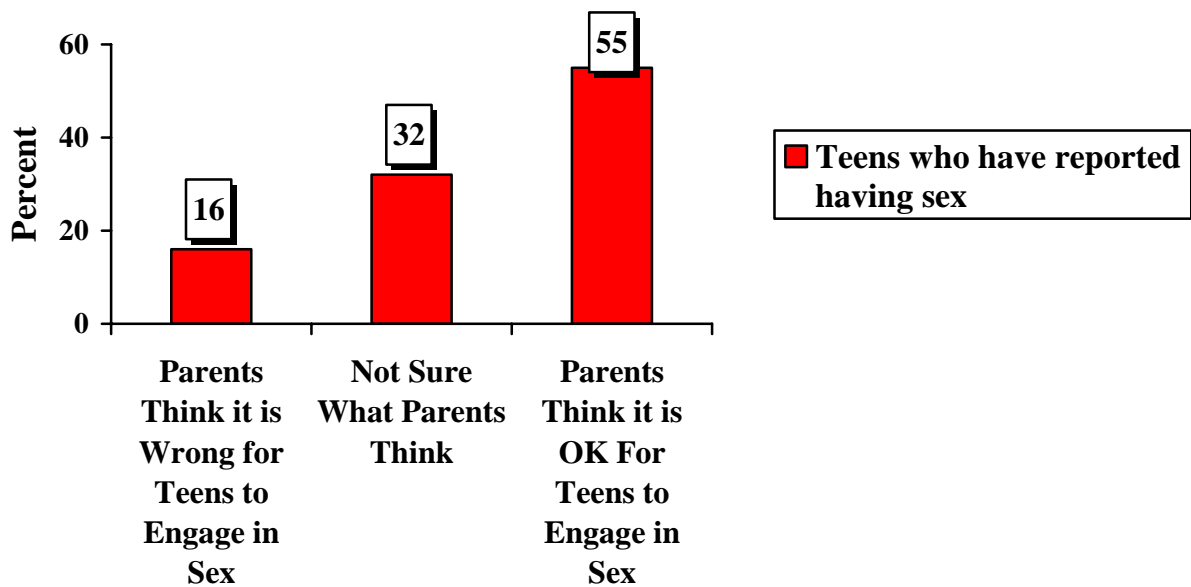
Two percent (2%) of all surveyed report being attracted to both sexes.

One percent (1%) of all surveyed report being confused their sexual attraction.

Nearly half (47%) of all teens surveyed report they think gay/lesbian/bisexual behavior is wrong. Twenty-two percent (22%) report they treat gay/lesbian/bisexual people differently and another 6% say they should be punished because their behavior is wrong. In 2001, 19% of the teens reported that they treated gay/lesbian/bisexual people differently, and 6% of the teens reported that the gay/lesbian/bisexual population should be punished.

## FAMILY INFLUENCES ON TEEN SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

### Teen sexual behavior and perceived parental attitudes toward teen sexual behavior:



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### Key Finding:

Teens are more likely to abstain from sex if they believe their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to have sex.

### Other Notable Findings:

Fifty-four percent (54%) of teens that report **very low** parental monitoring have engaged in sexual intercourse. Conversely, 17% of teens who report **very high** levels of parental monitoring report having had sexual intercourse.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of teens that report **not** being sexually active have dinner with the family four or more nights per week. This compares to 24% of teens that report being sexually active.

Teens who report parents have clear rules with consequences that are consistently enforced are **less** likely to report having had sexual intercourse than those who report having inconsistent consequences and enforcement of family rules (17% vs. 36%).

Teens who report that their parent(s) would report a school code violation are **less** likely to report having had sexual intercourse than those who believe their parent(s) would not report a school code violation (15% vs. 28%).

*For more information on parents' roles see the chapter on family relationships.*