



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Sexuality

February 2003

The transition from childhood to adulthood begins most visibly with the onset of puberty. During puberty, the body develops and teens begin to experience sexual attraction and sexual arousal. Despite feeling physically ready for sex, they most likely are not ready for the responsibility or the range of emotions that come with being sexually active.

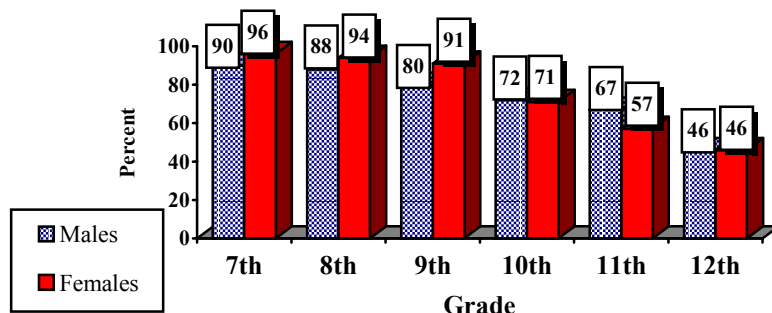
While most teens learn about human growth and development in school, our society looks to families to instill morals and values. By taking an active role in the sexual education of teens, parents not only make sure their teens get the information they need but parents also show teens they care about how they behave sexually.

How do I teach my teen about sex?

- Clarify what values you want to pass on to your teen concerning sex.
- Review what your teens are learning at school so you can discuss this at home.
- Answer your teens' questions and share your views honestly and non-judgmentally, giving them the opportunity to share what they think with you.
- Don't worry about not having all the answers. Your family physician, the school nurse, public health nurses, reproductive health clinics, libraries, reputable health related websites, and places of worship can all be good sources of information.

The majority of 7th through 12th graders in Southwest Wisconsin have **not** engaged in sexual intercourse according to the recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) which surveyed 5,704 7th through 12th graders in 19 of the 31 school districts in southwest Wisconsin (Figure 1).

Percent of Teens Who Have Not Had Sex (Figure 1)

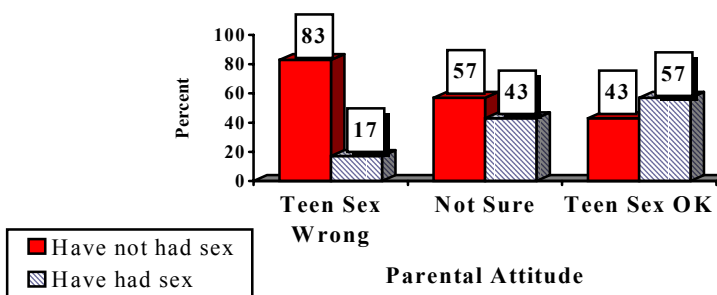


Overall, 75% of students surveyed report they have **not** engaged in sexual intercourse and 5% report having been sexually active in the past, but not currently. Figure 1 shows that younger teens are much more likely to say they have **not** had sex than older teens. By 12th grade 54% of males and females have had intercourse. Of sexually active teens, 44% report having only one partner and 24% report having four or more partners. Teens with greater numbers of sexual partners are more likely to report that they do not feel love and support from their families and are more likely to report feeling depressed.

Parents Make a Difference!

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of teens say their parents think it is wrong for teens their age to have sex, while 11% of teens say their parents think it is OK for teens their age to have sex. Unfortunately, 22% are unsure what their parents' values are regarding the appropriateness of sexual intercourse for teens their age. Figure 2 shows only 17% of the teens who say their parents think it is wrong for them to have sexual intercourse have had sex, while 57% of those who say their parents think sexual intercourse is OK for teens their age have had sex. Nearly half of the teens who were unsure of their parents' attitudes on this issue have had sexual intercourse.

Parental Attitude vs. Teen Sexual Behavior (Figure 2)



Teens' Perceptions and Attitudes about Homosexuality

When teens begin to experience sexual attraction, some may also experience confusion about their sexuality or have peers who are experiencing some confusion.

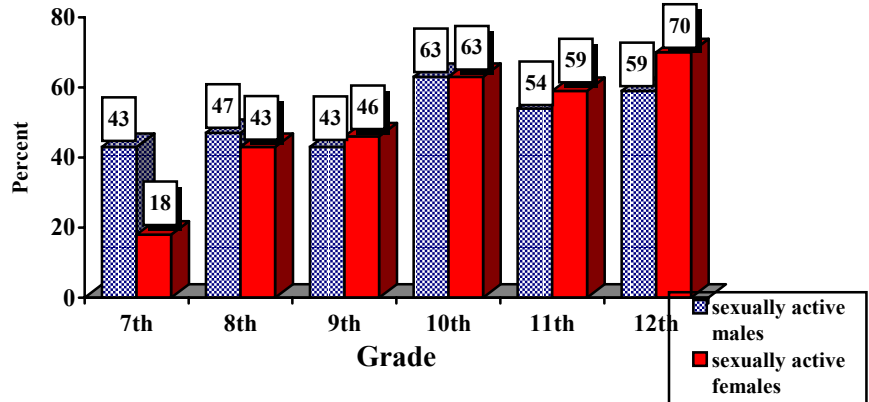
- 7% of teens report worrying at least a little about being straight or gay
- 47% of teens believe gay, lesbian, and bisexual behaviors are wrong but would treat people who engage in these behaviors just like anyone else
- 19% of teens believe gay, lesbian, and bisexual behaviors are wrong and would treat people who engage in these activities differently
- 6% of teens believe gay, lesbian, and bisexual behaviors are wrong and that people who engage in these behaviors should be punished
- Teens who worry about being confused about their sexual orientation are much more likely to report suicidal feelings.

The only 100% sure way to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease is to not have sex.

Teen Pregnancy and Birth Control

Three percent (3%) of all teens surveyed reported having been pregnant or making someone pregnant. This survey found that younger teens that are sexually active are far less likely to report that they *"always"* use birth control than older sexually active teens (Figure 3).

Sexually Active Teens Who "Always" Use Birth Control (Figure 3)



Twelve percent (12%) of sexually active males and 10% of sexually active females report that they *"never"* use birth control. Of note, sexually active teens who report that they *"often"* talk to their parents about sex, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases are more likely to say they *"always"* use birth control. Sexually active teens who say they *"never"* talk to their parents about these issues are more likely to say they *"never"* use birth control.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Four percent (4%) of teens who have had sex report that they have had a sexually transmitted disease (STD) in the past. Awareness of STDs increases sharply between 7th and 8th grades, but one-third of all teens surveyed report either being unaware of STDs or wanting more information. Six percent (6%) of sexually active teens report they are not aware of STDs. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of sexually active teens report usually using condoms, either alone or in combination with another form of birth control.

Adolescence is a time of rapid change for teens and parents play a critical role in helping their child make informed decisions about sexual behavior. Talking to your child, letting your child know your values, and providing accurate information to your child can make a difference in your teen's sexual behavior. **Remember: Parents make a difference!**

"Parents Make a Difference" is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?..Our Kids!" series. This issue was written by Christina Kenney, UW-Extension Grant County, and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey UW-Extension Iowa County, and Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391.

Visit us on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/2001/2001surveyresults.html>.

