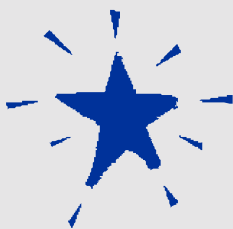


**Are peers
getting a bad
rap?
a 1999 poll**

Teens and parents of
teens tell us what they
really think of peer
influence.



Released April 29, 1999 by the
National Campaign to Prevent
Teen Pregnancy

Table of Contents

Summary of Findings.....	1-2
Survey Questions and Responses.....	3-4
Demographics.....	5-6
Top Lines from Previous Campaign Surveys.....	7-9

A Summary of Findings from a National Representative Survey

**Conducted for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
by International Communications Research**

Embargoed for print and broadcast media dated April 29, 1999

1

When it comes to decisions about sex, do parents and teens think peer influence is positive or negative?

Despite conventional wisdom about "peer pressure," the consensus among parents and teens is that peers exert a *positive* influence when it comes to decisions about sex.

- Nearly six of ten parents and teens (59%) describe peer influence as either very positive or somewhat positive.
- Only one-quarter of teens (26%) and parents (24%) characterize peer influence as negative.
- Only 10 percent of teens and 5 percent of parents say that peers have no influence at all.

2

When it comes to decisions about sex, who influences teens more, parents or peers?

Contrary to recent reports, parents and teens both say parents are more influential than peers and other possible influences like TV, teachers, or siblings.

- 38 percent of teens and 55 percent of parents say that parents influence teens the most, while 25 percent of teens and only 14 percent of parents say that peers exert the most influence.
- 14 percent of teens and 13 percent of parents cite religion as the most important influence on sexual decision-making.
- Younger adolescents, aged 12-14, are more likely to cite parents as the most influential than are older teens, 15-17 (43% v. 33%).

3

When it comes to decisions about sex, which peers influence teens the most: Best friends, their immediate circle of friends, or the popular crowd at school?

Parents and teens disagree about the influence of best friends.

- 47 percent of teens say their best friend is the most influential peer, while only 32 percent of parents say their child's best friend is the most influential peer.
- Parents believe it is their child's immediate circle of friends (44%) that hold the most influence, while only 25 percent of teens feel their immediate circle of friends holds the most influence.
- More female teens (54%) name best friends as the most influential peers than do male teens (41%).
- Only 10 percent of teens and 6 percent of parents say the popular crowd at school wields the most influence.

A Note About the Survey

This report summarizes the findings from an omnibus survey of parents of teens and teens aged 12 to 17. This nationally representative survey was conducted by International Communications Research – on behalf of the National Campaign – in March, 1999. The teen survey was conducted March 3-7, and the parent survey was conducted March 17-24. The goal of the survey was to ascertain attitudes about the nature and scope of peer influence. The actual polling questions and respondent demographic information follow. The surveys are weighted to provide nationally representative and projectable estimates of parents of teens, 18 and older, and teens, ages 12-17. The survey questioned 303 parents of teens and 513 teens. Adult responses have a margin of error of plus or minus 5.6 percentage points. Teen responses have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

The Survey Questions and Responses

1a When it comes to decisions about sex, what influence do teens have on each other?

	Parents of Teens
Very positive	20.2 %
Somewhat positive	38.5
No influence at all	5.2
Somewhat negative	16.0
Very negative	7.9
Don't know	10.3
Refused to answer	1.8

1b When it comes to decisions about sex, what influence do teens have on each other?

	Teens	Teen Boys	Teen Girls
Very positive	13.5 %	14.5 %	12.4 %
Somewhat positive	45.4	43.6	47.4
No influence at all	9.7	10.7	8.6
Somewhat negative	21.8	20.6	23.0
Very negative	3.8	5.0	2.5
Don't know	5.3	5.3	5.3
Refused to answer	0.6	0.4	0.8

2a When it comes to decisions about sex, who or what influences your teen child or children the most, aside from their boyfriend or girlfriend?

	Parents of Teens
Parents or Guardians	55.4 %
Peers	13.8
Religion	13.1
T.V., movies, musicians	10.9
Teachers	0.3
Siblings	0.3
Refused to Answer	1.5

2b

When it comes to decisions about sex, who or what influences you the most, aside from your boyfriend or girl friend?

	Teens	Teens 12-14	Teens 15-17
Parents or Guardians	38.0 %	42.9 %	32.9 %
Peers	25.1	21.7	28.6
Religion	13.6	10.3	17.0
T.V., movies, musicians	7.9	8.3	7.5
My own opinion	3.9	1.6	6.2
Siblings	2.2	2.9	1.5
Teachers	1.7	1.6	1.9
Someone Else	0.3	0.4	0.3
Don't Know	6.3	9.1	3.3
Refused to Answer	0.9	1.1	0.7

3a

When it comes to decisions about sex, aside from their boyfriend or girl friend, who influences your teen the most among their friends and acquaintances?

	Parents of Teens
Their immediate circle of friends	43.8 %
Their best friend	31.5
The popular crowd at school	5.8
Friends of the opposite sex	2.6
Don't know	12.7
Refused to Answer	3.6

3b

When it comes to decisions about sex, who influences you the most among your friends and acquaintances, aside from your boyfriend or girl friend?

	Teens	Teen Boys	Teen Girls
Your best friend	47.2 %	40.6 %	54.1 %
Immediate Circle of friends	25.0	25.4	24.5
Friends of the opposite sex	6.9	8.3	5.5
Popular crowd at school	10.4	12.9	7.8
Don't know	9.5	12.4	6.6
Refused to answer	0.9	0.4	1.5

Adult Demographics

Own or rent home

Own	80.3 %
Rent	19.2
Don't Know	0.6

Marital status

Single	3.0 %
Single, living with a partner	4.9
Married	80.2
Separated	0.9
Widowed	1.5
Divorced	9.5

Employment status

Full-time	66.7 %
Part-time	11.9
Retired	5.7
Housewife	7.1
Student	0.4
Temporarily unemployed	4.5
Disabled/handicapped	3.1
Other	0.5

Total number living in household

Two	5.1 %
Three	20.6
Four	36.9
Five	18.0
Six	14.1
Seven	1.6
Eight or more	3.8
Mean	4.35

Total number of adults 18 or older living in household

One	12.6 %
Two	61.0
Three	19.9
Four	6.5
Mean	2.20

Age of respondent

18-20	0.1 %
21-24	0.3
25-29	0.8
30-34	5.3
35-39	29.6
40-44	21.4
45-49	26.4
50-54	7.1
55-59	4.1
60-64	0.8
65-70	0.2
Refused	3.8
Mean	42.81

Level of education

Less than high school graduate	18.8 %
High school graduate	25.5
Some college	22.0
Graduated college	21.8
Postgraduate school or more	9.1
Technical school/other	1.8
Refused to answer	1.0

Total annual household income

Under \$10,000	4.6 %
\$10,000-14,999	5.3
\$15,000-19,999	7.5
\$20,000-24,999	3.3
Under \$25,000 (unspecified)	2.0
Over \$25,000 (unspecified)	3.6
\$25,000-29,999	8.0
\$30,000-39,999	8.8
\$40,000-49,999	13.6
\$50,000-74,999	19.5
\$75,000-99,999	10.7
\$100,000 or more	7.9
Don't know	0.6
Refused	4.6
mean	\$51,180

Race of Respondent

White non-Hispanic	73.4 %
White Hispanic	5.8
Black non-Hispanic	11.7
Black Hispanic	0.5
Hispanic unspecified	1.1
Other Race	4.9
Refused	2.5

Adult Demographics, cont.

Political party affiliation

Republican	25.9%
Democrat	31.6
Independent	36.9
Other	1.3
Don't know	2.6
Refused	1.7

Sex of respondent

Female	53.8%
Male	46.2

Teen Demographics

Age of respondent

Age 12	15.4%
13	17.8
14	17.8
15	19.6
16	17.1
17	12.3
Mean	14.42

Total annual household income

Under \$10,000	4.8%
\$10,000 - 14,999	4.0
\$15,000 - 19,999	4.6
\$20,000 - 24,999	7.2
Under \$25,000 (unspecified)	0.4
Over \$25,000 (unspecified)	4.3
\$25,000 - 29,999	6.9
\$30,000 - 39,999	14.4
\$40,000 - 49,999	11.0
\$50,000 - 74,999	22.6
\$75,000 - 99,999	7.0
\$100,000 or more	5.0
Don't know	1.9
Refused	5.9
mean	\$47,100

Sex of Respondent

Male	51.0
Female	49.0

SOME TOP LINES FROM PREVIOUS NATIONAL CAMPAIGN SURVEYS

The following polling questions and results are from a May 1997 national omnibus survey about teen pregnancy conducted for the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy by Princeton Survey Research Associates

Question: Some people think it is basically acceptable for high school teenagers to be sexually active, as long as they take steps to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS. Others do not think it is acceptable for high school teenagers to be sexually active whether they take precautions or not. Which comes closer to your view, the first statement or the second one?

Adult	Teen	
35	45	Teen sexual activity acceptable as long as teens take precautions
63	54	Teen sexual activity not acceptable even if they take precautions
2	1	Don't know/refused
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100	100	

Question: How important do you think it is for teens to be given a strong message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Adult	Teen	
79	68	Very important
16	27	Somewhat important
2	2	Not too important
2	3	Not at all important
1	0	Don't know
<hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/>		
100	100	

Question: I'm going to read you three statements about teens and sex. Please tell me which one comes closest to your view:

- a. Teens should NOT be sexually active and should not have access to birth control ;
- b. Teens should NOT be sexually active, but teens who ARE should have access to birth control , OR
- c. It's OKAY for teens to be sexually active, AS LONG AS they have access to birth control .
- d. Don't know/refused

Adult

- 22 Teens should NOT be sexually active and should not have access to birth control
- 59 Teens should NOT be sexually active, but teens who ARE should have access to birth control
- 14 It's OKAY for teens to be sexually active, AS LONG AS they have access to birth control
- 5 Don't Know/Refused

100

The following polling question and results are from an April 1998 national omnibus survey about teen pregnancy conducted for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy by International Communications Research

Question: Which one of the following do you think is the biggest barrier to effective communication between parents and teens on sex and relationships?

	Parents of teens			
23.6			Parents are not comfortable talking to their kids about sex	
30.0			Teens are not comfortable hearing from their parents about sex	
0.2			Talking to kids about sex encourages them to have sex	
31.6			Most teens think they know it all already	
8.7			Parents don't know what to say	
5.8			Don't know	
0.2			Refused	
All Teens	Male	Female		
16.9	13.2	20.7	Parents are not comfortable talking to their kids about sex	
38.7	42.5	34.7	Teens are not comfortable hearing from their parents about sex	
19.1	21.0	17.2	Teens don't want to hear from their parents about sex	
6.3	6.4	6.3	Teens know as much or more than parents about sex and relationships	
14.0	12.3	15.7	Parents are too judgmental	
4.8	4.6	5.1	Don't know	
0.2	0.4	--	Refused	