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Teens still have lessons to learn about sex

By Jeneé Osterheldt

Everybody does it. That's pretty much the thinking when it comes to the sins of high school — drugs, sex and alcohol.

Despite the Hollywood portrayal of hypersexual, high-fashion, party-animal teens, we all know that isn't the rule.

Unfortunately, many of us don't find that out until much later because the adolescent brain believes everyone's doing it. I mean look at "Gossip Girl" and "Juno" and "90210." Teen sex seems common.

Back in the day, it was the boys who told girls that everybody's doing it. It's true that girls are getting more aggressive, but Seventeen magazine — in the March issue, out next week — busts the myths and explores just how much hooking up isn't happening.

The teen mag teamed up with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and commissioned a survey to find out the truth about teen males and sex.

The online survey questioned 1,200 teens and young adults between the ages of 15-22 and found out that 45 percent were virgins and 60 percent had lied about something sex-related.

With all this lying, you would think we could give a big collective sigh of relief. Not so. Despite many teens being all talk and no action, teen pregnancy is on the rise. The decade of decline is over.

The Guttmacher Institute, a nonprofit that studies reproductive and sexual health, has issued a report showing that teen pregnancies rose 3 percent in 2006, the first increase in more than a decade.

I'm not surprised. Not only are teens portrayed as sexually driven on TV and in movies, they aren't as educated as they were a decade ago, during the decline.

In a lot of schools, sex education has gone the way of abstinence-only programs. The government may have cut funding for those types of programs in favor of comprehensive sex education, but people are still pushing promise rings and chastity pledges.

For the record, I think it's important that teens are taught to cherish their virginity and wait to have sex. However, I feel you can teach both. Sex education in its entirety is vital.

In that same Seventeen survey, 57 percent of sexually active boys said they had engaged in unprotected sex. That's scary. Teen pregnancy isn't the only result of unprotected sex. These kids could die.

Yes, abstinence is the safest route. Most kids will take it or at least wait until adulthood. But not all of them will.

A Bristol-and-Levi is bound to happen in most high schools. Sure, the Palin daughter is preaching abstinence now, after she has had a baby. That's too often how sexually active teens learn: when they're already the statistic.

Some teens simply believe the hype. They think they're ready. They think their friends are doing it. There will always be a few who want to live like the climbers and glitzoids on "Gossip Girl."

So what do we do? We teach them better.

Condoms, birth control — those aren't dirty words. Abstinence, it's great. Let's teach it. But just remember, not everybody's practicing it.