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## **Bridging the Divide: Involving the Faith Community in Teen Pregnancy Prevention**

### **Why Care About Preventing Teen Pregnancy?**

- Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues—including welfare dependency, poverty, and overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, responsible fatherhood, and workforce development.
- Less than half (40%) of teen mothers ever finish high school. Children of teen mothers are twice as likely to be abused and neglected. Girls born to teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers, and sons of teen mothers are 2.2 times more likely to end up in jail.
- Although teen pregnancy rates are declining, the U.S. still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth in the industrialized world. Teen childbearing cost taxpayers \$9.1 billion in 2004.
- In the U.S., nearly one in three girls gets pregnant at least once by age 20—nearly 750,000 girls each year.

### **Why Should Faith Leaders Play a Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy?**

Faith leaders and religious organizations are in a unique position to make a difference in preventing teen pregnancy:

- Research and survey data both show that religious faith and a strong moral sense play important roles in protecting young people from too-early sexual activity, teen pregnancy and other risky behaviors.
- Research finds that teens whose parents hold strong religious beliefs or attend religious services frequently are less likely to have sex before age 18 than their peers whose parents have religious beliefs that are not as strong or do not attend religious services as frequently. Similarly, teens who report that their peers attend religious services regularly are less likely to have sex before age 18 than teens whose peers do not.
- In a nationally representative survey, sixty-four percent of teens report morals and values are equally important as health information and services in influencing teen sexual behavior, while nearly one-quarter of teens (23%) say that morals and values are more influential.
- When asked *who* most influences teens' sexual decisions, however, only 7 percent of teens (and 1 percent of adults) said ministers, rabbis, or other religious leaders.
- This disconnect does not suggest that teens and their parents do not want faith leaders to be involved on this issue — in fact, just the opposite is true. The overwhelming majority of teens (76%) and adults (64%) want more involvement from churches and other houses of worship in teen pregnancy prevention, according to National Campaign polling. In the same nationally representative survey that over-sampled Latino teens and adults, the overwhelming majority of Latino teens (82%) wish faith leaders and religious communities were doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy.
- A federal survey found that for the increasing proportion of teens who report not being sexually active, the most common reason teens gave for delaying sex was because it was against their religion or moral values (38% of girls and 31% of boys) – more important than not wanting to get pregnant, get a disease and other reasons.
- And, when the National Campaign asked a teen survey question on its website about which types of things would best help parents discuss sex, love and relationships with their children, the (non-scientific) response that got the overwhelming majority of votes was “religious leaders” (65% responded this way, compared to no more than 11% for any of the other answers).

## **What Can You Do?**

There are a number of ways faith leaders and religious organizations can help prevent teen pregnancy in their community. They can address issues of sex and relationships in the context of their faith. They can also help young people develop morally and spiritually by engaging them in activities that protect them, give them a sense of purpose, and hope for the future. That is, doing more of the things they are already doing to help strengthen families and encourage the healthy development of young people. Some examples include: community service programs, youth groups, faith-based abstinence and sex education curricula, parent support groups, marriage and relationship education, health services, and others. Research suggests that a number of these efforts offer the kinds of support that make a difference in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and promoting healthy adolescent development more broadly.

## **Resources Available from the National Campaign**

- *Faith, Hope & Love: How Latino Faith Communities Can Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy (also available in Spanish)*
- *The Association between Parent, Family, and Peer Religiosity and Teenagers' Sexual Experience and Contraceptive Use (Science Says Brief #20)*
- *Nine Tips to Help Faith Leaders and Their Communities Address Teen Pregnancy*
- *Faith Matters: How African American Faith Communities Can Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy*
- *Keeping the Faith: The Role of Religion and Faith Communities in Preventing Teen Pregnancy*
- *Snapshots from the Front Line III: Lessons from Faith-Based Efforts to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*
- *Starting The Conversation: Resources For Faith Leaders & Religious Organizations*
- *Involving the Faith Community in Teen Pregnancy Prevention, a chapter in Get Organized: A Guide to Preventing Teen Pregnancy*
- *With One Voice 2007: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*
- *Parent Power: What Parents Need to Know and Do to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy*
- *Thinking About the Right-Now: What Teens Want Other Teens to Know About Preventing Pregnancy*
- *Talking Back: Ten Things Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy*
- *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing*
- *Voices Heard: Latino Adults and Teens Speak Up About Teen Pregnancy*
- *American Opinion on Teen Pregnancy and Related Issues 2007 (Science Says Brief #31)*

Most of these materials can be viewed—and all can be ordered-- from our website at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org).

## **About the Campaign**

The National Campaign is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established in 1996 (as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy) whose mission is to promote values, behavior, and policies that prevent both teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancies among single, young adults. Through these efforts, more children will be born to stable, two-parent families who are committed to the demanding task of raising the next generation. Both poverty and stress on families will be reduced; overall societal well-being will be improved; and there will be far less need for abortion. To accomplish this mission, we support a combination of responsible behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

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