

Briefly...

A Summary of Effective Interventions

After more than a decade of extraordinary success in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing, it now appears that progress may be reversing. The U.S. teen birth rate increased 3% between 2005 and 2006—the first increase in 15 years—and despite a 38% decline in teen pregnancy since the early 1990s, it is still the case that three in ten girls become pregnant by age 20. Investment in programs that have been proven effective in changing teen sexual behavior is now more important than ever if the nation's progress in reducing too-early pregnancy and parenthood is to be sustained.

Effective Intervention. There is now persuasive and growing evidence that a number of programs can:

- delay teen sexual activity,
- improve contraceptive use among sexually active teens, and/or
- prevent teen pregnancy.

At present, The National Campaign counts 21 programs that have relatively strong evidence of success—meaning that the programs were typically evaluated through randomized experimental studies—and an additional nine programs that are promising but whose evidence of success is not as strong. Most of the programs with the strongest evidence of success are those that encouraged abstinence as the safest choice for teens and also encouraged those who do have sex to use contraception. Most successful programs are curricula-based sex and STI/HIV education programs; some focus on youth development and community service; one is an abstinence-only program; a few successful interventions involve parents; still others take a very broad approach that includes healthcare, academic assistance, sex education, and other services. In short, because of the significant variety among these interventions, communities now have more choices and more opportunities than ever to find programs that suit local values, opportunities, and budgets.

Please see *What Works: Curriculum-Based Programs That Prevent Teen Pregnancy* and *Emerging Answers 2007* for more information

on effective interventions. Both of these publications are available for download at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org>.

At present, no abstinence-only programs have been shown through careful, randomized experimental evaluation to have *strong* evidence of success. However, one abstinence-only program has been shown through a less-rigorous evaluation to be successful in delaying sexual activity. The National Campaign believes that abstinence should be strongly stressed as the best choice for teens because delaying sex is the most effective way for teens to avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood as well as sexually transmitted infections. A strong message of delay is also consistent with the beliefs of adults and teens. In addition to encouraging teens to delay sexual activity, The National Campaign—along with the majority of the American public—also supports efforts to provide full and accurate information to teens about contraception in order to help those who are sexually active avoid pregnancy and disease. Abstinence and contraception are not *competing* strategies, but rather *complimentary* ones.

A Note of Caution About Effective Programs. Even those programs that have been shown to be effective in changing teen sexual behavior may have relatively modest results. There may also be programs, already in existence or newly emerging, that may be effective in helping young people avoid risky sexual behavior but have simply not yet been carefully evaluated. The nation's roster of effective programs using a variety of approaches is likely to grow as more evaluation results become available.

A Final Thought. Since teen pregnancy is rooted partly in popular culture and social values, it is unreasonable to expect that programs alone can change such large forces. Reducing teen pregnancy requires a combination of community programs *and* broader efforts to influence social norms, values, and popular culture by parents, families, faith communities, and the media.