



Family Ties

Family and Consumer Science

Human Development

The Teen Birth Rate in the US Rose in 2006 for the First Time since 1991

The teen birth rate in the United States rose in 2006 for the first time since 1991, and unmarried childbearing also rose significantly, according to preliminary birth statistics released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The report shows that between 2005 and 2006, the birth rate for teenagers 15-19 years rose 3 percent, from 40.5 live births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 years in 2005 to 41.9 births per 1,000 in 2006. This follows a 14-year downward trend in which the teen birth rate fell by 34 percent from its recent peak of 61.8 births per 1,000 in 1991.



The largest increases were reported for non-Hispanic black teens, whose overall rate rose 5 percent in 2006. The rate rose 2 percent for Hispanic teens, 3 percent for non-Hispanic white teens, and 4 percent for American Indian or Alaska Native teens.

The study also shows unmarried childbearing reached a new record high in 2006. The total number of births to unmarried mothers rose nearly 8 percent to 1,641,700 in 2006. This represents a 20 percent increase from 2002, when the recent upswing in nonmarital births began. The biggest jump was among unmarried women aged 25-29, among whom there was a 10 percent increase between 2005 and 2006.

In addition, the nonmarital birth rate also rose sharply, from 47.5 births per 1,000 unmarried females in 2005 to 50.6 per 1,000 in 2006 -- a 7-percent 1-year increase and a 16 percent increase since 2002.

The study also revealed that the percentage of all U.S. births to unmarried mothers increased to 38.5 percent, up from 36.9 percent in 2005.

The report contains other significant findings:

- * The preliminary estimate of total births in the U.S. for 2006 was 4,265,996, a 3 percent increase -- or 127,647 more births than in 2005.
- * Birth rates increased for women in their twenties, thirties and early forties between 2005 and 2006, as well as for teenagers.
- * The preterm birth rate rose slightly between 2005 and 2006, from 12.7 percent to 12.8 percent of all births. The percentage of births delivered before 37 weeks of gestation has risen 21 percent since 1990.
- * The low birthweight rate also rose slightly in 2006, from 8.2 percent in 2005 to 8.3 percent in 2006, a 19 percent jump since 1990.

Source: Center for Disease Control

Cyber BULLYing

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Most of the time, it is repeated over and over again. In the past, bullying has involved actions such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying), teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying), or intimidation through gestures or social exclusion. In recent years, technology has given children and youth a new means of bullying each other.



Cyber bullying, which is sometimes referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying, can involve:

- Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images;
- Posting sensitive, private information about another person;
- Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad;
- Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.

Children and youth can cyber bully each other through:

- E-mails,
- Instant messaging,
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones,
- Web pages,
- Web logs (blogs),
- Chat rooms or discussion groups, and
- Other information communication technologies.



Being a victim of cyber bullying can be a painful experience. Some youth who cyber bully. . .

- Pretend they are other people online to trick others
- Spread lies and rumors about victims
- Trick people into revealing personal information
- Send or forward mean text messages
- Post pictures of victims without their consent

When teens were asked why they think others cyber bully, 81 percent said that cyber bullies think it's funny. Other teens believe that youth who cyber bully . . .

- Don't think it's a big deal
- Don't think about the consequences
- Are encouraged by friends
- Think everybody cyberbullies
- Think they won't get caught

Source: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use

By: Judy Berryhill, MS

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Statistics About Cyber Bullying

Although little research has been conducted on cyber bullying, recent studies have found that:

18% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had been cyberbullied** at least once in the last couple of months; and 6% said it had happened to them 2 or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005).

11% of students in grades 6-8 said they **had cyberbullied** another person at least once in the last couple of months, and 2% said they had done it two or more times (Kowalski et al., 2005.)

19% of regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 reported being involved in online aggression; 15% had been aggressors, and 7% had been targets (3% were both aggressors and targets) (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

17% of 6-11 year-olds and 36% of 12-17-year-olds reported that someone said threatening or embarrassing things about them through e-mail, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006).

Cyber bullying has increased in recent years. In nationally representative surveys of 10-17 year-olds, twice as many children and youth indicated that they had been victims and perpetrators of online harassment in 2005 compared with 1999/2000 (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).

Who are the victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying?

In a recent study of students in grades 6-8 (Kowalski et al., 2005):

Girls were about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyber bullying.

Of those students who had been cyberbullied relatively frequently (at least twice in the last couple of months):

62% said that they had been cyberbullied by another student at school, and 46% had been cyberbullied by a friend.

55% didn't know who had cyberbullied them.

Of those students who admitted cyber bullying others relatively frequently:

60% had cyberbullied another student at school, and 56% had cyberbullied a friend.

What are the most common methods of cyber bullying?

In recent studies of middle and high school students, (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006; Kowalski et al., 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006) the most common way that children and youth reported being cyberbullied was through instant messaging. Somewhat less common ways involved the use of chat rooms, e-mails, and messages posted on web sites. A study of younger children (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006) showed that they were most often bullied through e-mail, comments on a web site, or in a chat room.

Source: <http://www.connectforkids.org>



Tips for Parents Dealing with Cyber Bullying

Because cyber bullying can range from rude comments to lies, impersonations, and threats, your responses may depend on the nature and severity of the cyber bullying.

Tips to help prevent cyber bullying:

- * Keep your home computer(s) in easily viewable places, such as a family room or kitchen.
- * Talk regularly with your child about on-line activities he or she is involved in.
- * Talk specifically about cyber bullying and encourage your child to tell you immediately if he or she is the victim of cyber bullying, cyber stalking, or other illegal or troublesome on-line behavior.
- * Encourage your child to tell you if he or she is aware of others who may be the victims of such behavior.
- * Explain that cyber bullying is harmful and unacceptable behavior. Outline your expectations for responsible online behavior and make it clear that there will be consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- * Although adults must respect the privacy of children and youth, concerns for your child's safety may sometimes override these privacy concerns. Tell your child that you may review his or her on-line communications if you think there is reason for concern.
- * Consider installing parental control filtering software and/or tracking programs, but don't rely solely on these tools.

Here are some actions that you may want to take after-the-fact.

- * Strongly encourage your child not to respond to the cyber bullying.
- * Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save these as evidence.
- * Try to identify the individual doing the cyber bullying. Even if the cyber bully is anonymous (e.g., is using a fake name or someone else's identity) there may be a way to track them through your Internet Service Provider. If the cyber bullying is criminal (or if you suspect that it may be), contact the police and ask them to do the tracking.
- * Sending inappropriate language may violate the "Terms and Conditions" of e-mail services, Internet Service Providers, web sites, and cell phone companies. Consider contacting these providers and filing a complaint.
- * If the cyber bullying is coming through e-mail or a cell phone, it may be possible to block future contact from the cyber bully. Of course, the cyber bully may assume a different identity and continue the bullying.
- * Contact your school. If the cyber bullying is occurring through your school district's Internet system, school administrators have an obligation to intervene. Even if the cyber bullying is occurring off campus, make your school administrators aware of the problem. They may be able to help you resolve the cyber bullying or be watchful for face-to-face bullying.
- * Consider contacting the cyber bully's parents. These parents may be very concerned to learn that their child has been cyber bullying others, and they may effectively put a stop to the bullying. On the other hand, these parents may react very badly to your contacting them. So, proceed cautiously. If you decide to contact a cyber bully's parents, communicate with them in writing — not face-to-face. Present proof of the cyber bullying (e.g., copies of an e-mail message) and ask them to make sure the cyber bullying stops.

By: Judy Berryhill, MS
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Source: Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use

Suggestions for Educators Dealing with Cyber Bullying



- * Educate your students, teachers, and other staff members about cyber bullying, its dangers, and what to do if someone is cyber bullied.
- * Be sure that your school's anti-bullying rules and policies address cyber bullying.
- * Closely monitor students' use of computers at school.
- * Use filtering and tracking software on all computers, but don't rely solely on this software to screen out cyber bullying and other problematic on-line behavior.
- * Investigate reports of cyber bullying immediately. If cyber bullying occurs through the school district's Internet system, you are obligated to take action. If the cyber bullying occurs off-campus, *consider what actions you might take* to help address the bullying:

- Notify parents of victims and parents of cyber bullies of known or suspected cyber bullying.
- Notify the police if the known or suspected cyber bullying involves a threat.
- Closely monitor the behavior of the affected students at school for possible bullying.
- Talk with all students about the harms caused by cyber bullying.

Remember — cyber bullying that occurs off-campus can travel like wildfire among your students and can affect how they behave and relate to each other at school.

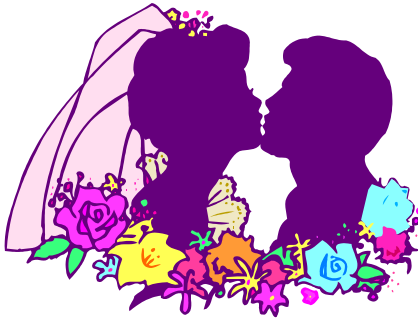
Investigate to see if the victim(s) of cyber bullying could use some support from a school counselor or school-based mental health professional.

Contact the police immediately if known or suspected cyber bullying involves acts such as:

- < Threats of violence
- < Extortion
- < Obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages
- < Harassment, stalking, or hate crimes
- < Child pornography

**For More Information Contact
Your Local Extension Office**

Why Does Marriage Matter?



February 7-14 is celebrated as National Marriage Week every year. Why do we have a week to celebrate marriage? Is marriage really all that important? Isn't having good relationships the real key to happy families, regardless of marital status?

In a publication from the Institute for American Values, *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, researchers have identified 26 reasons why marriage is important. Here are the reasons they identified:

1. Marriage increases the likelihood that fathers and mothers have good relationships with their children.
2. Cohabitation does not function as the equivalent of marriage.
3. Growing up outside an intact marriage increases the likelihood that children will themselves divorce or become unwed parents.
4. Marriage is a virtually universal human institution.
5. Marriages in which there are high levels of commitment to marriage, itself, foster high-quality relationships between adults, as well as between parents and children.
6. Marriage has important physical and social consequences for adults and children.
7. Divorce and unmarried childbearing increase poverty for both children and mothers.
8. Married couples seem to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples.
9. Marriage reduces poverty and material hardship for disadvantaged women and their children.
10. Minorities benefit economically from marriage.
11. Married men earn more money than do single men with similar education and job histories.
12. Parental divorce (or failure to marry) appears to increase children's risk of school failure.
13. Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high-status jobs.
14. Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than do children in other family forms.
15. Parental marriage is associated with a sharply lower risk of infant death.
16. Marriage is associated with reduced rates of alcohol and substance abuse for both adults and teens.
17. Married people, especially married men, have longer life expectancies than do otherwise similar singles.
18. Marriage is associated with better health and lower rates of injury, illness, and disability for both men and women.
19. Marriage seems to be associated with better health among minorities and the poor.
20. Children whose parents divorce have higher rates of psychological distress and mental illness.
21. Divorce appears to increase the risk for suicide significantly.
22. Married mothers have lower rates of depression than do single or cohabiting mothers.
23. Boys raised in single-parent families are more likely to engage in delinquent or criminal behavior.
24. Marriage appears to reduce the risk that adults will be either perpetrators or victims of crime.
25. Married women appear to have a lower risk of experiencing domestic violence than do cohabiting or dating women.
26. A child who is not living with his or her own two married parents is at greater risk for child abuse.

Given these facts, it seems wise to help couples to strive for healthy marriages for the benefit of themselves, their children, and society.

For more information, visit the Institute for American Values at www.americanvalues.org.

By: Denise J. Brandon, PhD
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Tips for Sharing Books With Babies And Toddlers

The first—and best—tip for sharing books with young children is to have fun together. If children are engaged and enjoying themselves, they are learning. When children have positive interactions with books, they are developing good feelings about reading, which will motivate them to continue seeking out books and other literacy materials as they grow.

Here are some other ideas for nurturing early literacy skills in your baby or toddler:

A Few Minutes at a Time is OK. And don't worry if you don't finish the story.

Young children can only sit for a few minutes for a story, but as they grow, they will be able to sit longer. Let your child decide how much (or how little) time you spend reading. And you don't need to read every page. You may find that your child has a favorite page or even a favorite picture. She may want to linger there for a while, and then switch books or activities. Babies may just want to mouth the book! That's okay. When you let your child explore books in the ways that interest her, the reading experience will be more meaningful.

Talk or Sing About the Pictures

You do not have to read the words to tell a story. Try "reading" the pictures in a book for your child sometime. When your child is old enough, ask him to read the pictures to you!

Let Children Turn the Pages

Babies cannot yet turn pages on their own, but an 18-month-old will want to give it a try, and a three-year-old can certainly do it alone. Remember, it's OK to skip pages!

Show Children the Cover Page

Explain what the story is about. If you have an older toddler, ask them to guess what the story might be about.

Show Children the Words

Run your finger along the words as you read them, from left to right.

Make the Story Come Alive

Create voices for the story characters and use your body to tell the story.

Make It Personal

Talk about your own family, pets, or community when you are reading about others in a story.

Ask Questions About the Story, and Let Children Ask Questions Too!

Use the story to have a back-and-forth conversation with your child. Talk about familiar activities and objects you see in the illustrations or read about in the story.

Let Children Tell The Story

Children as young as three years old can memorize a story, and many children love to be creative through storytelling.

Create Books Together

Make photo books of family members. Cut pictures out of magazines or catalogs to make word books. Make a color book by having fun with crayons, markers, and paints. As your child gets older, have him or her dictate a story to you and then draw pictures to go with the words.

Make Books a Part of Your Daily Routine

The more that books are woven into children's everyday lives, the more likely they will be to see reading as a pleasure and a gift.

- **At Meal Times**
Sing or read a story during a moment of quiet nursing or to gather the kids around the noisy breakfast table.
- **In the Car or On the Bus**
Keep a few books in the car or in your diaper bag to keep your little ones quiet and busy.
- **At Child Care Drop Off**
Calm a crying child at good-bye time with a favorite story or lullaby. Leave a photo book with pictures of loved family members at child care so your child can flip through it when she is missing you.
- **At the Doctor's Office**
Read or tell a soothing story to your little one in the waiting room and sing or talk through the scary parts of the visit. Before the visit, read books about going to the doctor so your child knows what to expect.
- **At the Grocery Store**
Put a few board books in the shopping cart or tie a cloth book to the shopping cart so you're not cleaning up books from the floor as you go!
- **At Nap Time**
Familiar routines always help babies calm down. Use books and stories to quietly ease your baby to sleep.
- **At Day's End**
You are exhausted, the baby is fussy. Lie down on the floor surrounded by books. Play a book on tape for your baby. Sing a song together while you all try to relax a bit.
- **At Bath Time**
Plastic bath time books are great fun and may help a fussy baby enjoy the tub a little more.
- **At Bed Time**
Soothing books and stories can work magic with babies who fight sleep!

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D
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Communication Skills



The capacity to communicate is the ability and desire to connect with others by exchanging ideas and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally. Most children learn to communicate to get a need met or to establish and maintain interaction with a loved adult.

Babies communicate from birth, through sounds (crying, cooing, squealing), facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, grimacing) and gestures/body movements (moving legs in excitement or distress, and later, gestures like pointing.) Babies continue to develop communication skills when adults respond to their efforts to “tell” others about what they need or want.

Children’s communication skills grow by leaps and bounds across the first few years of life:

- A newborn nuzzles at her mother’s breast. Her mother says, “Oh, you must be hungry. Here you go.” This baby is learning that her loved ones will respond to her signals and communications.
- A 9-month-old starts messing with the food on his high chair, as if wiping it clean with his hands. His father notices, saying: “Hey buddy, looks like you’re telling me you are all done. How about I take you out of there and we can head to the park.” This baby is learning that he is an effective communicator.
- A 28-month-old is at the park. She is pointing urgently at something and saying to her grandfather, “Der! Der! Der!” He says, “I’m sorry, sweetie, I don’t understand. Could you say it again?” She continues to point, and repeats herself a number of times. Finally, her grandfather says, “Oh, the squirrel. Yes, I see him up there in the tree!” This toddler is learning that her loved ones will “hang in there” and work hard to understand her attempts to communicate.
- A 3-year-old chats with his mother on the way home from preschool. He tells her he liked the songs and snack, but didn’t like how the sand felt on his hands. His mother listens, and asks him questions. This toddler is learning that what he has to say is important to the people who love him, and that he is a good communicator.

Following are some ideas for supporting the development of communication skills in your baby or toddler:

Respond to your baby’s gestures, looks and sounds. When he puts his arms out to you, pick him up, kiss him and use simple words. “You want up.” When he coos, coo back. When he gazes at you, make eye contact and talk with him. These immediate and attuned responses tell your baby that his communications are important and effective. This will encourage him to continue to develop these skills.

Talk with and listen to your child. When you talk with her, give her time to respond. Make eye contact on her level. This will communicate your desire to hear what she has to say. Ask open-ended questions: “What do you think about today’s rainy weather?” “Where do you think the rain goes?” “How do you think the rain helps flowers grow?” “Why is the sky so gray?” Talking with your child helps her see herself as a good communicator and motivate her to keep developing these skills.

Help children build on their language skills. “So you are pretending to be a hungry caterpillar who wants to eat some food? What kind of food? Let’s name all the things you want to eat.”

Teach your child about non-verbal communication. “Luis, do you see how Andi is holding her hands up to cover her face? She doesn’t like it when you throw the ball so hard. I know you can throw it softer so she will want to keep playing catch with you.”

Respect and recognize your child’s feelings. Children are far more likely to share their ideas and feelings if they know they won’t be judged, teased, or criticized. You can empathize with a child’s experience, yet disagree with his behavior. For example, “I know you’re scared to sleep alone, but you need to stay in bed. Would you like some quiet music on?” Or, “I know you’re angry but you can’t throw the blocks. Here’s a pillow you can punch instead.”

Help your child develop a "feelings" vocabulary. Provide the words for her experience. “You’re sad because Daddy left for his trip.” Keep in mind that feelings are not good or bad, they just *are*. Sometimes parents are afraid that talking about an intense feeling will escalate it; but many times the opposite happens: When children feel that their feelings and experiences are respected, they are often able to move on more easily.

Read together. Cuddle together for quiet times with a book. Encourage your older baby to turn the pages and to point to what she sees. Ask your older toddler how the characters might be feeling and wonder together what will happen next. Let your child choose the books. The more interest she has in the book, the more attentive and enjoyable your time together will be. And reading with your child teaches more than literacy and language skills. She is learning that you value her interests and choices, and that you love her and enjoy being close to her. Studies show that lifelong readers are those who, as children, simply found reading a pleasurable experience (what was read didn’t seem to matter as much as how children felt about the activity).

Narrate what you do as you go through your daily routines. This helps your child connect words with objects and actions. “I’m washing the dishes. I’m squeezing the yellow dish soap into the warm water.” Talk about what you’re doing as you care for your child. “Here we go into the bathtub. You’re arms, legs and tummy are getting all wet. Rubber Ducky is having a bath too.” Talk as you play together: “You’re brushing your dolly’s hair. She has long hair. Are there any tangles?” With verbal toddlers, you can create a tradition where each family member shares something about his day. Ask your child questions about her day. Once she can speak, encourage her to ask you things too.

Encourage pretend play. Children often express themselves more freely when they’re pretending. It may feel safer to talk about how Teddy Bear is afraid of the dark, than how the child is. Pretend play is also a chance to take on different roles and to act out what different people might say, think or do. This develops language as well as social skills like empathy.

Make your requests clear, simple, and appropriate for your child’s age and ability. For a one-year-old, you can give one step directions like, “Go get the ball.” For an 18-month-old, you can give two-step commands like, “Please go to your room and get your shoes.” Be sure you have your child’s attention first, by calling his name or gently touching him and looking directly at him at his eye level. You can ask an older child to repeat the request to make sure he heard and understood the communication.

Be a good role model. Your child is watching you very carefully. If you talk to others with kindness and respect, he will likely follow your lead and take on your manner and tone as he becomes more verbal. And, when you expect this kind of respectful communication from others, you are modeling how he should expect to be treated by others as well.

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D

Extension Specialist - Child Development

Are You an Overindulgent Parent?

At a recent conference I attended, one of the major topics that was explored was overindulgence of children. The conference presenters were David Bredehoff and Jean Illsley Clarke, two researchers who devote much of their research to parenting issues. They define overindulgence as giving children “too much of what looks good, too soon, too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult’s needs, not the child’s.”



The result of overindulgence can be that children do not accomplish their developmental tasks and do not learn appropriate life skills that can help them become successful adults. In a small research study, the more overindulged adults reported themselves to have been as children, the less they saw themselves as effective, the more self-righteous they believed themselves to be, and they held more dysfunctional attitudes.

Also, these participants reported that overindulgence was associated with

- Lack of chores;
- Too many toys;
- Too many clothes;
- Too much freedom;
- Parents being over-loving and providing too much attention;
- Lack of rules;
- Not enforcing rules; and
- Parents providing too much entertainment.

This field of research is new, so there is a lot that we don’t know about overindulgence. However, it appears that overindulgence is not limited to one type of family or one level of income. It appears to occur in some families at all income levels and in two-parent, single-parent, and other types of families.

If you want to avoid being an overindulgent parent, here are some things you can do:

- Establish how you expect your children to behave before they take part in an activities;
- Give reasons why you have rules;
- Help your children understand how their behavior affects others;
- Talk and reason with your children when they misbehave;
- Avoid giving in to all of your children’s wishes—allow them to earn items they want or to make choices between items that they would like to have;
- Give your children responsibilities at home; and
- Avoid doing things for your children that they can do for themselves.

For more information on this topic, visit <http://www.overindulgence.info/>.

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