

Teen Birth Rates Decline¹

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Figure 1.
Credits: Hemera

Parents and others who are concerned about teenagers having babies have reason to celebrate. According to the nonprofit research organization Child Trends, the teenage birth rate for 15-19 year olds is at the lowest point in over 40 years. This drop began in 1991 and has roceeded steadily so that it is now one-third lower than the 1991 peak¹ (Franzetta et al. 2006). The other good news is that it continues to fall.

Child Trends cautions that there are still a number of reasons to be concerned about teen sexual activity and childbearing. For example, birth rates for girls younger than 15 increased somewhat between 2003 and 2004, as did births to teens 18 and 19 years old. Researchers found that parent and family religious activity play a major role

in lower rates of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. In fact, they were more important than characteristics such as race or ethnicity, mother's education, and family structure. According to this research, "teenagers whose parents have strong religious beliefs," who go to religious services more often, and who participate in more family religious activities "are less likely to have sex before age 18" than teens without this level of involvement (Franzetta et al. 2006, p. 2). This positive effect is amplified when there is a strong, high-quality relationship between the mother and her teen.

These findings underscore the importance of family communication about sexual activity and family values during the tender teen years.

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¹In 2004, there were 41.2 births per 1,000 15-19-year-olds, a rate one-third lower than the 1991 rate of 61.8 births per

1. This document is FAR1208, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Broadcast as program 454. Broadcast June 2006. Published on EDIS July 2012. In the interest of time and/or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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1,000 15-19-year-olds, but only 1% lower than the 2003 rate of 41.6” (Franzetta et al. 2006, p. 1).

Reference

Franzetta, K., Ikramullah E., Manlove J., Moore K., & Cottingham S. (April 2006). Teen birth rate. *Facts at a Glance*. Publication #2006-03. Washington, DC: Child Trends.