

# NATIONAL EDITION Deseret News

## The Factors That Drive or Deter Teen Sex

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Parents worry about peer pressure and teen sexual activity. But while it's been shown to influence whether kids smoke or drink, it's not as clear how it impacts sexual behavior in teenagers.

Dr. Benjamin Le, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Haverford College and cofounder of the ScienceofRelationships.com, has looked at several key possibilities to see how they stack up, including peer pressure, thinking peers approve and the notion that "everyone's doing it."

He calls thinking friends approve an "injunctive norm," and thinking they are having sexual relationships a "descriptive norm."

"Of the three types of social influence, descriptive norms had the largest association with adolescent sexual behavior. Injunctive norms were the next best predictor of teenage sex, and peer pressure was the weakest," he writes. "In short, although parents may be worried about the effects of peer pressure on their teenage children, simply knowing about their friends' and classmates' own sexual behavior is likely a much more powerful force for adolescents."

It's not always easy to say exactly how rampant teen sexual activity is, but some of the results have been trending downward. "Positive peer influence and better decisions are among the key factors in why fewer teens are giving birth, having abortions or getting pregnant in the first place," according to an article in the Deseret News.

"The credit goes to the teens themselves, who are clearly making better choices," Bill Albert, spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, said for that story. "Hyperbole aside, the progress the nation has made in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing is surely one of the nation's great success stories in the past two decades."

