

Forbes

Celebrate Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month By Testing Your Swiping Skills

Despite decades of decline, teen birth rates in the U.S. remain the highest in the industrialized world, creating enormous costs for young parents and the nation as a whole. As part of their work to bring rates even lower, the [National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#) has dedicated a whole month to focusing on the issue, and has rolled out some materials to help make sexual education a lot more fun than it was in high school (and less embarrassing).

Throughout May, the National Campaign and other advocacy groups will be honoring [National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month](#) with campaigns across social media, and with tools designed to help keep teens on track toward a healthy adulthood. In addition to its [National Day Quiz](#), which has already tested millions of teens (and adults) on how to handle risky situations, the National Campaign has launched a new interactive game for mobile and desktop that lets players swipe and click their way through the challenges of teen life and love in animated form.

Called "[Level Up: An Epic Swiping Adventure](#)," the game lets users customize avatars to represent themselves and their "crush" before setting out on a series of quests designed to reflect the highs and lows of teen culture. "To take it to the next level in your relationship, you're going to have to be prepared," the site explains, so the game lets players explore several scenarios designed to help teens face such choices--and, above all, to help teens "avoid making risky decisions."

Divided into school grade-based levels that will unlock throughout the month, the game starts players out as lowly freshpersons at a summer outdoor concert, where sticky social situations abound. By swiping different shapes onto risk-representing icons that float across the screen, players must confront the subjects of peer pressure often faced by teens, including substances and sexual advances.

In order to "stay true" to their values, players must swipe through encroaching bubbles representing things like cannabis and alcohol, which many kids first encounter in high school while their brains (and self-assuredness) are still developing. At the end of the Freshman level, players will also find themselves backstage at the concert with their crush, and confronted with the fact that weed or booze is making them come on too strong.

And while the idea of teens fending off liquored advances by the objects of their affection may give adult users a twinge of sadness, or quite possibly bring back memories, the point is fairly made: teens will



face these situations in high school or later on, and need to know how to protect themselves sooner rather than later.

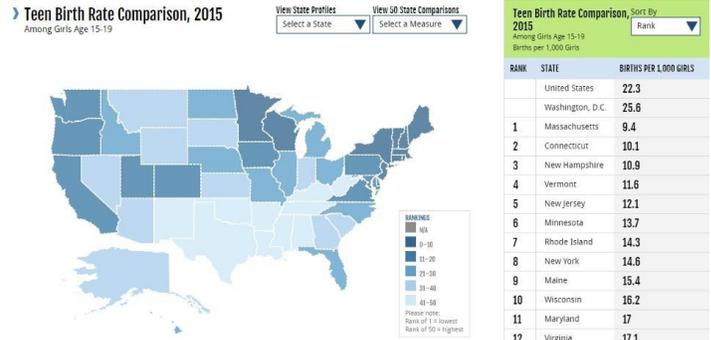
Between peer pressure, under-education, and under-use of birth control methods, many of the reasons for our country's comparatively high teen birth rate are well known, but the task of bringing that rate down remains difficult, according to the National Campaign. While teen birth and pregnancy rates have declined by 64% and 55% since hitting their peaks about 25 years ago, for example, the organization points out that nearly a quarter of teens will still become pregnant at least once by the age of 20, while those that do give birth will cost U.S. taxpayers upwards of \$9.4 billion a year.



According to the National Campaign, too, Americans are overwhelmingly on board with efforts to bring down rates of teen parenthood. New polling released by the group this week suggests that 73% of U.S. adults believe that "more efforts should be made to prevent teen pregnancy in their communities."

Considering the hard work that lies ahead, however, dedicated efforts will be required from parents, legislators, and the U.S. population at large in order to help teens practice safe family planning from the get-go. In a release, National Campaign CEO Ginny Ehrlich stressed that support for health

education everywhere, and for teens living in chronically under-served communities, will be



vital to the cause.

“Despite extraordinary declines in teen pregnancy and childbearing, nearly one in four teens still get pregnant by age 20 and the progress we have made remains uneven. Teens living in poverty are disproportionately more likely to experience an unplanned pregnancy, as are African-American and Latina teens,” she said.

Nevertheless, she said, “The National Campaign stands ready to take on the challenges and is committed to ensuring that young people have the support they need to determine if, when, and under what circumstances to get pregnant.”

Nothing is more American, after all, than being able to choose the path that one's own life takes--except perhaps mobile gaming.