



THE  
NATIONAL  
CAMPAIGN TO  
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY  
TEENPREGNANCY.ORG

# *With One Voice 2004*

## America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy

**An Annual National Survey**

**By Bill Albert**

**December 2004**

**[www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)**



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Special thanks again this year to Melissa Herrmann and A.J. Jennings at International Communications Research (ICR) for their guidance with this project. We truly appreciate the guidance Melissa and her team has provided the National Campaign with all of our survey research.

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## Note to Reader

The charts in this publication provide not only the answers to our survey questions, but also the exact wording of the questions asked. Some of the charts present data from previous National Campaign surveys while some only present data from 2004. This simply reflects whether or not a particular question was asked in one or more of these four years. As a general matter, survey results are reported for adults aged 20 and over and teens aged 12-19 (teens all). When subgroup differences seem important, responses are presented in more refined categories, such as parents of teens, younger teens (aged 12-14), and older teens (aged 15-19). Survey responses by gender, age, and race/ethnicity are also noted when subgroup differences appear interesting. Some of the responses to various questions do not quite total

100 percent. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, we chose not to display the percentages of respondents who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer altogether, unless such numbers seemed important.

We encourage all those interested in reviewing previous National Campaign surveys to visit: [www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/polling.asp](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/polling.asp). In particular, we hope that those concerned with preventing adolescent pregnancy will use these data in various ways to advance their important work.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Albert is the National Campaign’s Senior Director of Communications, Publications, and Technology.





## Methodology

Data presented in *With One Voice 2004: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*, are drawn from two national surveys, one of young people aged 12-19 and the other of adults aged 20 and over. Of the young people interviewed, 51% were boys and 49% were girls, 61% were aged 15-19 and 39% were aged 12-14. Of the adults interviewed, 79% were parents. The National Campaign designed the survey with assistance from International Communications Research (ICR).

The teen survey is weighted to provide a nationally representative estimate of young people aged 12-19. Field work for this survey was conducted between September 8 and September 27, 2004. Telephone interviews were conducted by ICR with 1,000 young people. The sample for this study was drawn using two different methods. The first sample source used random digit dialing (RDD). RDD numbers are drawn from telephone households throughout the continental United States. As a second

sample source, a database of households with teenagers 12-19 year old was tapped. All interviews were conducted using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The CATI system ensures that all questions are rotated and that when answer options are presented, they are also rotated. This rotating eliminates "question position" bias. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.45 percent.

The adult survey is also weighted to provide a nationally representative estimate of the adult population, aged 20 and older. Field work for this survey was conducted between September 8 and September 15, 2004. Telephone interviews were conducted by ICR with 1,014 adults. This survey was done as part of a national, twice-weekly telephone omnibus survey using a fully-replicated, stratified, single-stage RDD sample of telephone households. Sample telephone numbers are computer-generated. The margin of error for this survey is +/-3.96 percent.

## Headlines

### PARENTS

- ▶ When it comes to teens' decisions about sex, parents are more influential than they think they are.
- ▶ While most adults believe that talking to teens about sex, love, and relationships is important, most also report that they don't know what to say or when to say it.

### ABSTINENCE AND CONTRACEPTION

- ▶ Support for providing young people with a strong abstinence message remains overwhelming.
- ▶ Support for providing teens with information about contraception—and access to contraception for those teens who are sexually active—also remains strong.

### TEEN ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

- ▶ Teens continue to express cautious attitudes toward sex. For example, most sexually experienced teens wish they had waited longer to have intercourse, and nearly seven in ten teens do *not* think it is okay for high school age teens to have sexual intercourse.

### MORALS, VALUES, AND RELIGION

- ▶ When it comes to delaying sex and preventing teen pregnancy, teens say their own morals and values are as influential as health information and services are.
- ▶ Teens and adults want faith communities to do more to help prevent teen pregnancy.

### GENDER DIFFERENCES

- ▶ Adults and teens agree that teen girls are just as sexually aggressive as teen boys; that boys often receive the message that sex and teen pregnancy are no big deal; and that girls often receive the message that attracting boys and looking sexy is one of the most important things they can do.

### SEX EDUCATION

- ▶ Most teens give their school-based sex education and/or "family life" classes a passing grade.

### MEDIA

- ▶ Most recognize the influence of the media in setting the sexual "social script" for teens, but few seem able to harness that influence for good.

## Summary

### PARENTS

**Parents are more powerful than they think.** Over two decades of good social science research—and the National Campaign’s own polling over the years—make clear that when it comes to teens’ decisions about sex, parents are more influential than they think. Our survey findings this year continue to underscore an important disconnect between parents and teens. Simply put, teens say their parents (37%) influence their decisions about sex more than other likely suspects, including friends (33%), the media (5%), or siblings (6%). Parents, however, underestimate their own influence (only 28% said that parents most influence their teens’ decisions about sex) and overestimate the importance of such influences as peers (47%) and the media (12%).

**The sex talk.** Nearly all teens (87%) and adults (91%) agree that it would be easier for teens to delay sex and prevent teen pregnancy if teens were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. However, nearly four in ten teens (37%) report that they have *not* had such a conversation with their parents.

**Parents need help.** One explanation for why conversations between parents and teens are not taking place is that parents don’t know what to say. Nine in ten adults surveyed agree that parents should talk to their kids about sex but often don’t know what to say, how to say it, or when to start the conversation.

### TEEN ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

**Cautious attitudes.** Media stories and anecdotal reports from many of those who work directly with teens have painted a rather bleak picture concerning teens and sex. Tales of a teen “hook-up” culture—where sex is casual and often traded like a commodity—are legion. These stories stand in stark contrast with data

indicating that sexual activity among high school students is on the decline and that teen pregnancy and birth rates have dropped nearly one-third since the early 1990s. This dichotomy leads many observers to wonder exactly what *is* going on in teen culture. Our survey results indicate that teens continue to take a more cautious attitude toward casual sex than perhaps media headlines would have us believe. For example:

- **Sex can wait.** Nearly seven in ten teens do *not* think it’s okay for high school teens to have sexual intercourse (this includes 59% of older teens aged 15-19).
- **Most sexually experienced teens wish they had waited longer.** Two-thirds of all sexually experienced teens (63% of boys and 69% of girls) said they wish they had waited longer to have sex.
- **The magic number is zero.** When asked about an appropriate number of sexual partners for teens to have, the clear majority of adolescents surveyed (56%) said “none.”
- **Relationships and sex.** Fully 85% of teens surveyed said that sex should only occur in a long-term, committed relationship. Support for this position was consistent across the board—boys (83%), girls (88%) teens aged 15-19 (83%), and teens aged 12-14 (89%) all agreed that sex should only happen within long-term relationships.

### ABSTINENCE AND CONTRACEPTION

**Support for strong abstinence messages is overwhelming.** Nearly all teens (94%) and adults (91%) believe that teens should be given a strong message from society that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school. Support for providing teens with a strong abstinence message has remained rock

solid (90% or better) in every National Campaign survey conducted since 1997.

**Support for providing adolescents with information about contraception—and access to contraception for those teens who are sexually active—also remains strong and consistent.** Most adults (75%) and teens (81%) wish young people were getting more information about abstinence *and* contraception. Very few (only 1% of adults and 2% of teens) believe teens are getting enough information on these topics. Most adults (86%) and teens (81%) believe that teens should not have sex. (see chart 6). Only 12% of adults and 18% of teens think it is okay for teens to have sex as long as they have access to contraception. The clear middle ground position for most of those surveyed (67% of adults and 57% of teens) is that teens should not have sex, but those who do should have access to contraception.

**What mixed message?** Some adults remain concerned that encouraging teens to abstain from sex while also providing them with information about contraception sends young people a confusing, mixed message that might inadvertently give teens tacit approval to have sex. About half of adults (51%) and two thirds of teens (68%) do not believe that providing adolescents with such a message encourages them to have sex. Still, a significant minority of adults (41%) thinks that such a message does encourage teens to have sex.

## **Morals, values, and the role of religion**

**The role of morals and values.** Teen pregnancy prevention is often seen as a reproductive health issue—a problem solved with some combination of information and health services for teens. Our survey results suggest that while health information and services are an important influence on teens' decisions about sex and preventing teen pregnancy, young people's own morals and values are equally—if not more-influential. Six out of ten teens (64%) say morals and values are

equally as important as health information and services in influencing teen sexual behavior and preventing teen pregnancy, while nearly one-quarter of teens (23%) say that morals and values are more influential than health information and services. By contrast, 9% of teens believe that health information and services are *more* influential. Interestingly, older teens (28%) are *more* likely than younger adolescents (15%) to say morals and values are most influential.

**Teens and adults want religious leaders and groups to do more.** Strong majorities of teens (71%) and adults (65%) agree that religious leaders and groups should be doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy. Support is strong among whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics, and in all regions of the country, for greater involvement of faith communities in preventing teen pregnancy.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES**

**Making the move.** Visitors to the National Campaign's website, past and present members of our own Youth Leadership Team, interactions with teens nationwide, and research from other organizations, including MEE Productions (see *This is My Reality* at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)) have all suggested that teen girls “pursue” as much as they are “pursued.” Our survey lends support to this notion—over half of teens (57% of boys and 51% of girls) believe that teen girls are as sexually aggressive as teen boys. Another one in ten characterize teen girls as more sexually aggressive than boys.

**It's a guy thing.** The majority of adults (64%) and teens (70% of girls and 53% of boys) believe that teen boys often receive the message that sex and pregnancy are not a “big deal.”

**As for the girls...** Most adults (a sobering 79%) and teens overall (63% of boys and 67% of girls) agree that teen girls often receive the message that attracting boys and looking sexy is one of the most important things teenage girls can do. Over half of young teen girls (56% of

those aged 12-14) and seven in ten older girls (74% of those aged 15-19) agreed.

## Media

**Media is influential—often in surprising ways.** Recent research conducted by the RAND Corporation and published in the journal *Pediatrics* (Volume 114, number 3, September 2004, [www.pediatrics.org](http://www.pediatrics.org)) underscores what common sense suggests: What teens see, hear, and read in the media influences their sexual behavior. The RAND study concludes that adolescents who watch significant amounts of sexual content on television are twice as likely as those who watch a limited amount of sexual material to begin having sexual intercourse in the ensuing year. The report also notes, however, that television can play a positive role by showing the risks and consequences of sexual activity and by providing parents with an opportunity to express their own views about what the media portrays.

Adults and teens in our survey seem to recognize the power of the media and view the media as an effective way to start conversations between parents and teens; yet few parents of teens actually use the media as a way to discuss sex, love, and relationships with their teens. In our survey, we note the following:

- ▶ Eight in ten adults (84%) and teens (82%) wish the media showed more/talked more about the consequences of sex.
- ▶ Half of adults (49%) and two-thirds of teens (68%) agree that teen pregnancy rates in the United States have declined due, in part, to increased media attention to the issue.
- ▶ Nearly equal percentages of parents of teens (72%) and teens (76%) agree that TV shows and other media are a good way to start conversations between parents and their children about sex, love, and relationships. Yet only 22% of parents of teens said that something in the media in the past year sparked a conversation between them and their children about the consequences of sex.

## SUPERVISION

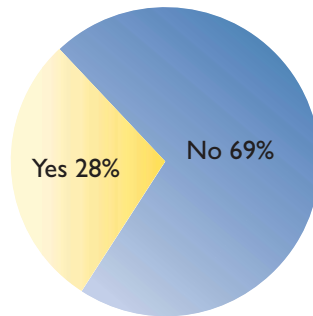
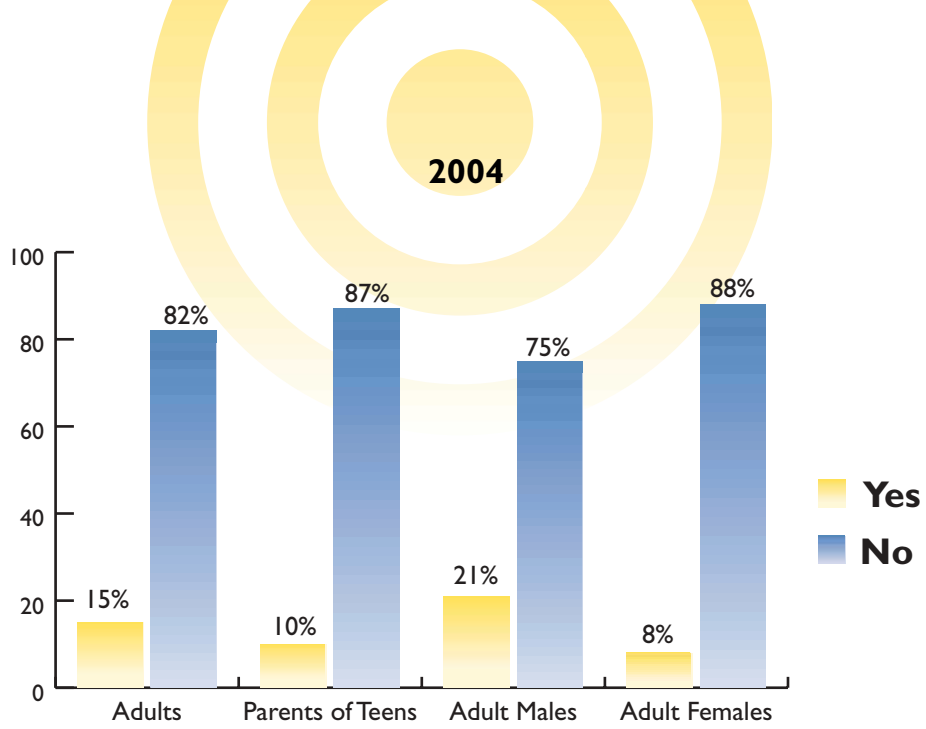
**Where are the adults?** About four in ten (41%) of those surveyed in grades 9-12 report that they have been at an evening or late night party in the past six months where there were no adults in the house. One reason that this finding is of some concern is because two-thirds of teens report that they first had sex in their own home or the home of a friend (see *Science Says: Where and When Teens First Have Sex* at [www.teenpregnancy.org/works](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works)).

## SEX EDUCATION

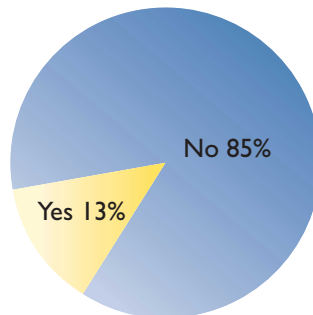
**A passing grade.** Parents of teens are much more critical of sex education than teens themselves. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school-based sex education or “family life” classes their children receive, only one quarter of adults (26%) gave the class an A or a B while 16% rated the classes below average or failing. By contrast, 59% of teens gave their sex-ed classes an A or B and only 12% said the classes were below average or failing.

**Marriage matters.** Most adults (83%) and teens (85%) believe that teen pregnancy prevention programs should teach young people to be married before they have a child.

**CHART 1**  
**Question:**  
*Do you think it's okay for high school teens to have sexual intercourse?*

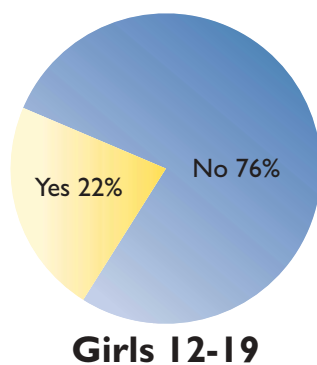
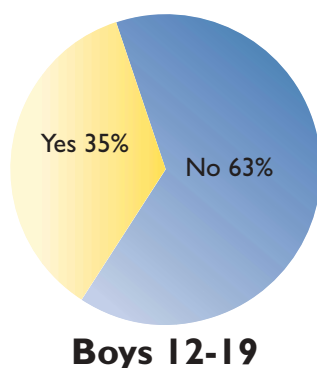
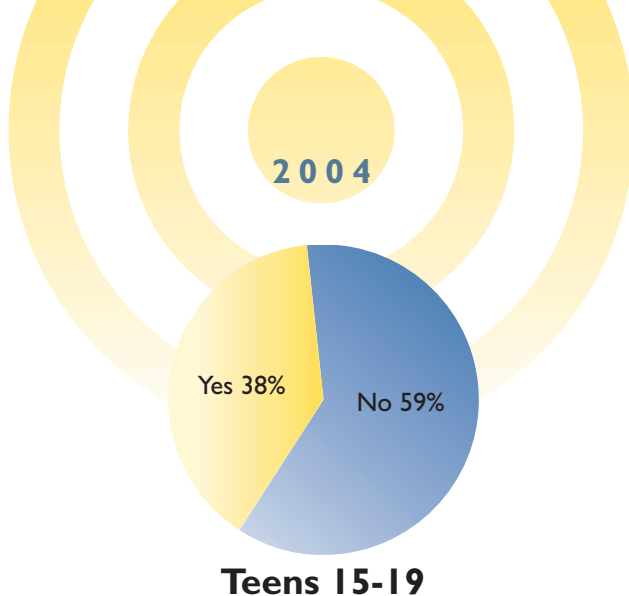


**Teens (All)**



**Teens 12-14**

CHART I  
(continued)

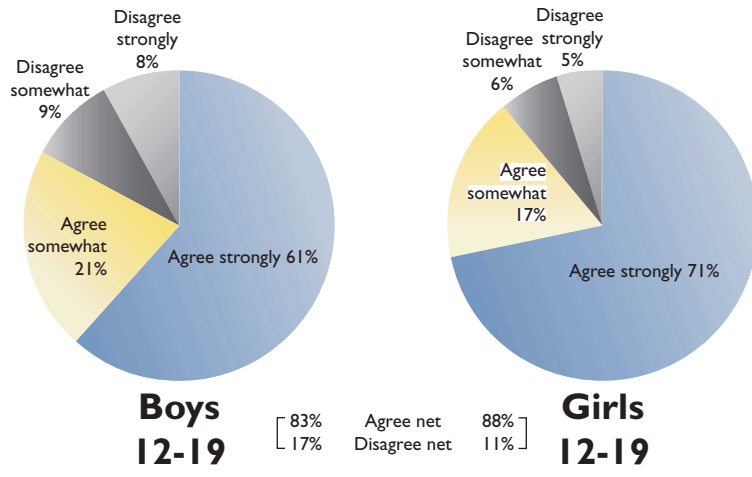
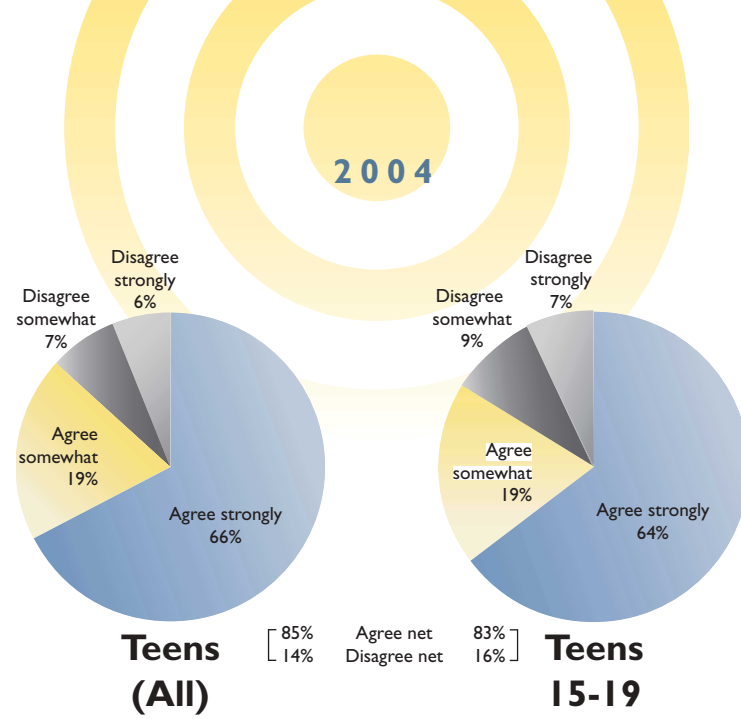


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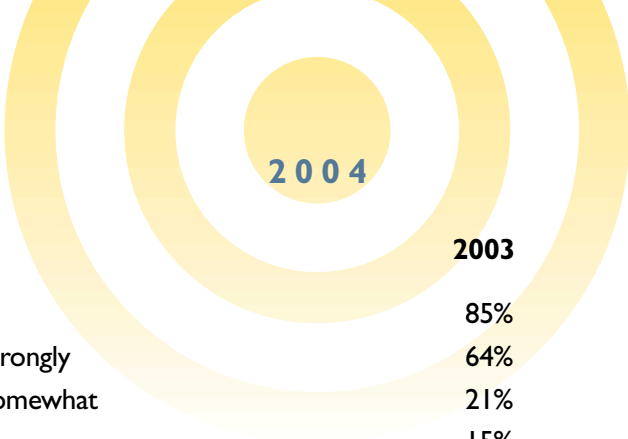
#### CONTEXT AND COMMENT

It may come as a surprise to many that a clear majority of adolescents (69%) say they do not think it is appropriate for high school teens to have sexual intercourse. Perhaps even more surprising is that this view is shared by clear majorities of *both* boys and girls and by both younger *and* older teens. For example, nearly six in ten teens (59%) aged 15-19 do not think it is okay for high school teens to have sexual intercourse. Not surprisingly, parents of teens are more disapproving of high school teens having sex than are adults generally (57% vs 82%).

**Chart 2**  
**Question:**  
*Personally, I believe that sex should only occur in a long-term, committed relationship.*







**CHART 2**  
*(continued)*

<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	85%	82%
Agree strongly	64%	62%
Agree somewhat	21%	20%
Disagree net	15%	16%
Disagree somewhat	8%	10%
Disagree strongly	7%	7%

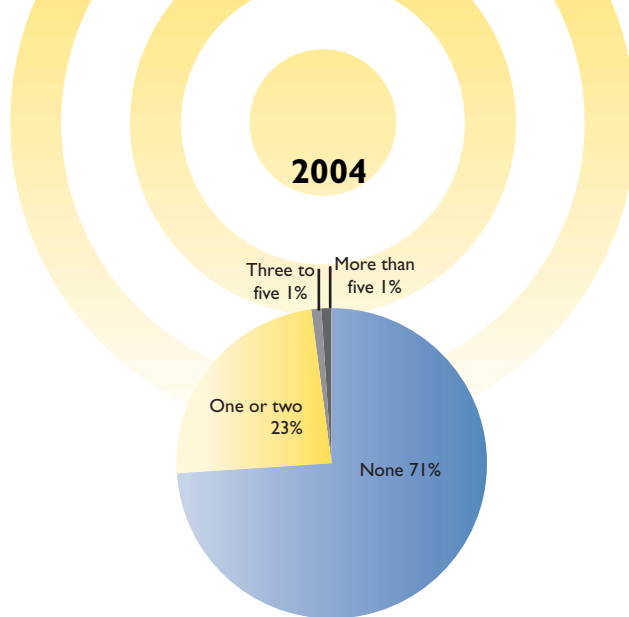
<b>Teen Boys</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	85%	81%
Disagree net	15%	17%

<b>Teen Girls</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	85%	84%
Disagree net	15%	15%

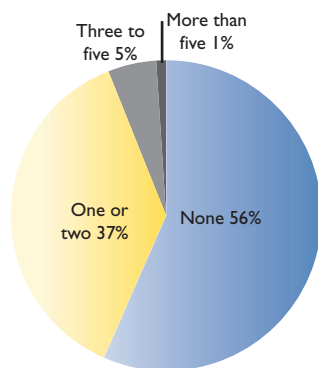
**CHART 3**

**Question:**

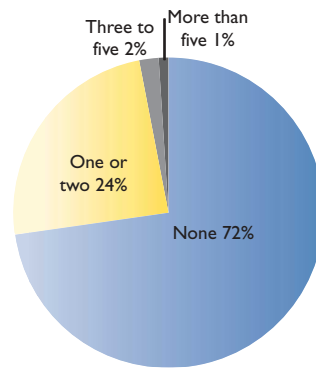
**What do you think is an okay number of sexual partners for teens to have?**



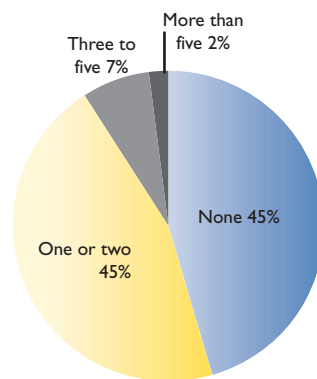
**Adults**



**Teens (All)**



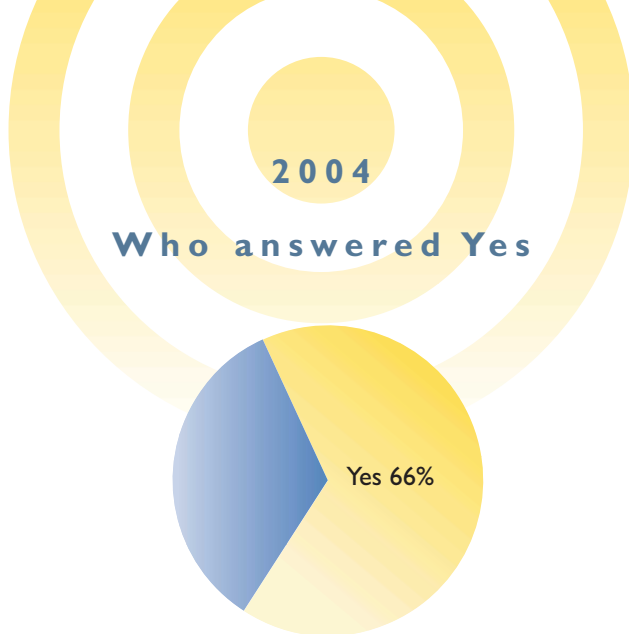
**Teens 12-14**



**Teens 15-19**

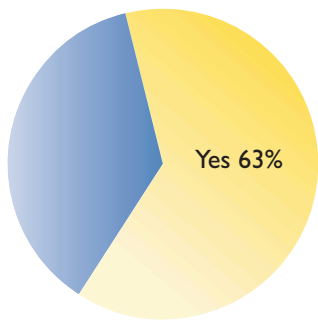
**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Often lost in the unproductive argument that pits abstinence versus contraception is the importance of encouraging sexually active teens to limit the *number* of sexual partners they have. Risk of pregnancy and STDs grows with the number of sexual partners a teen has. As our survey indicates, adults and teens disapprove of teens having several sexual partners—one or two seems to be the “maximum” number. Perhaps not surprisingly, older teens are most permissive on the appropriate number of sexual partners.

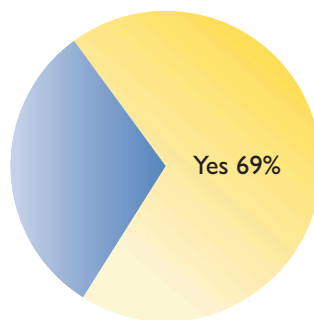


**All sexually experienced teens**

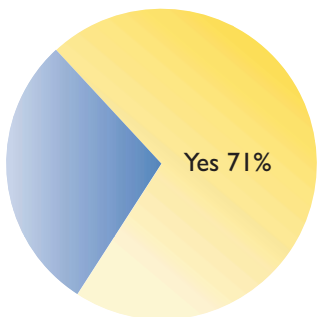
**CHART 4**  
**Question:**  
*If you have had sexual intercourse, do you wish you had waited longer?*



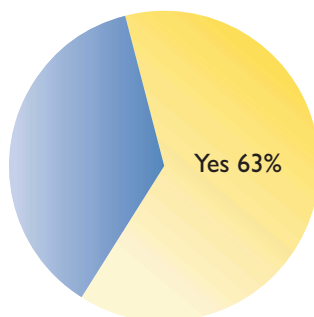
**Sexually experienced teen boys**



**Sexually experienced teen girls**




**Sexually experienced teens 12-14**



**Sexually experienced teens 15-19**

*Sex, Relationships, and Regret*

**CHART 4**  
(continued)



Teens Who Answered Yes	2003	2002
All sexually experienced teens	67%	63%
Sexually experienced teen boys	60%	55%
Sexually experienced teen girls	77%	70%
Sexually experienced teens 12-14	83%	81%
Sexually experienced teens 15-19	60%	55%

**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

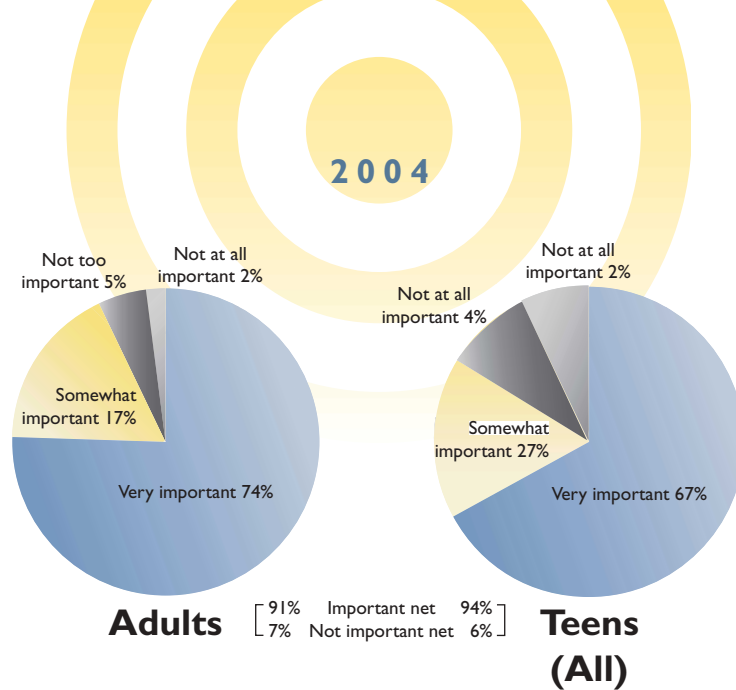
It is important to note that about half of the teens in this survey said they were *not* sexually experienced. However, of those who reported having sex, a clear majority (66%) said they wish they had waited—both boys and girls and both older and younger teens.

This particular finding and the three preceding charts in this report suggesting that teens have quite cautious attitudes toward casual sex might lead some to scratch their heads in confusion. Are we to believe that teens are willing participants in the hook-up, hang-out culture suggested by a May 30, 2004 *New York Times* magazine cover piece or are we to believe the headline from the *The New York Times* February 15, 2004 stating that: “Sex Doesn’t Sell: Miss Prim Is In.”

We have plenty of anecdotal information from teachers, youth-serving professionals, and teens themselves suggesting that relationships are out, oral sex is in, and sex has little meaning and even less romance. On the other hand, teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by nearly one-third since 1990, driven by both less sex and more contraception; the clear majority of sexually experienced teens say “they wish they had waited;” 90% of teens polled say society should provide them with a strong abstinence message; and most teens say sex should only occur in a long-term committed relationship.

What gives?

We suspect that the truth is both things are happening simultaneously—that the variety and diversity of teens’ sexual decisions do not easily lend themselves to a summary headline. Teens are learning to navigate a peer culture that has both sexual “players” *and* virginity pledgers.



**CHART 5**  
**Question:**  
*How important do you think it is for teens to be given a strong message from society that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school?*

<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
Important net	94%	94%	95%
Very important	79%	81%	78%
Somewhat important	15%	12%	17%
Not important net	5%	5%	5%
Not too important	3%	3%	2%
Not at all important	2%	2%	3%

<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
Important net	92%	93%	93%
Very important	66%	72%	66%
Somewhat important	25%	21%	27%
Not important net	8%	7%	7%
Not too important	5%	4%	5%
Not at all important	3%	3%	2%

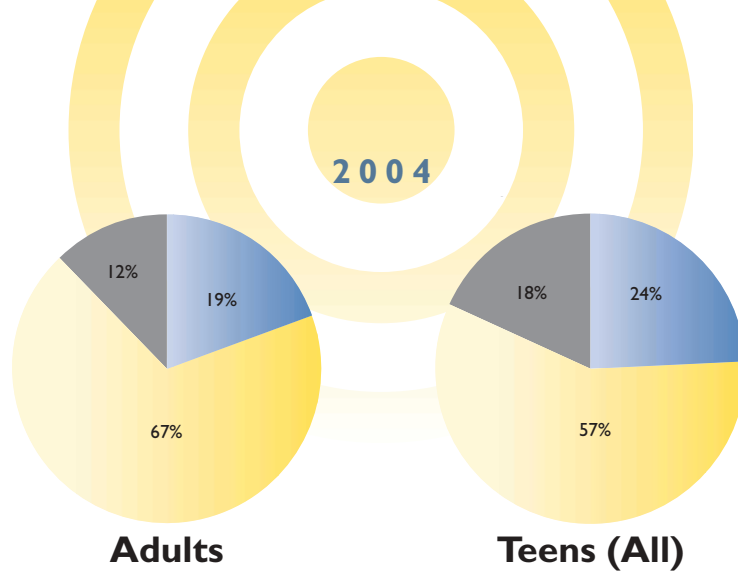
*Abstinence, Contraception,  
and Information*

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**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Support for providing teens a strong abstinence message has remained remarkably strong over the past eight years. We first posted this question in 1997 when 95% of adults and teens surveyed by the National Campaign said it was important for teens to be given a strong message from society they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. (Note, though, that only 12-17 year-olds were surveyed in 1997 compared to 12-19 year-olds in each of the past four years.)

Note though, that support for providing young people with a strong abstinence message is coupled with support for providing teens with information about contraception. That is, most Americans support an approach that strongly encourages teens not to have sex but that also recognizes that some young people will do so despite strong admonitions to the contrary. Adults and teens believe that abstinence is the first and best choice for young people (or, as a father once said at a National Campaign meeting, “abstinence is option 1, 2, and 3), and strongly support messages to that effect. At the same time—as some of the following charts make clear—adults and teens do *not* support efforts that provide teens with abstinence information exclusively.



**CHART 6**  
**Question:**  
*I'm going to read you three statements about teens and sex. Please tell me which one comes closest to your view:*

- Teens should not be sexually active and should not have access to birth control. (Adults=19%, Teens=24%)
- Teens should not be sexually active, but teens who are should have access to birth control. (Adults=67%, Teens=57%)
- It's okay for teens to be sexually active as long as they have access to birth control. (Adults=12%, Teens=18%)

1) Teens should not be sexually active and should not have access to birth control.

Adults	2003	2002	2001
	20%	23%	15%

Teens	2003	2002	2002
	23%	24%	18%

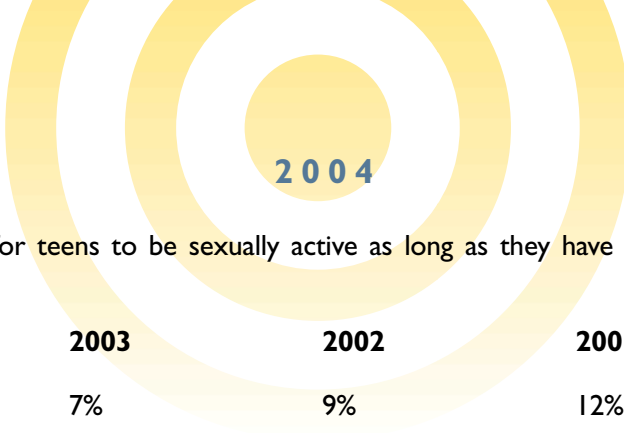
2) Teens should not be sexually active, but teens who are should have access to birth control.

Adults	2003	2002	2001
	71%	66%	73%

Teens	2003	2002	2002
	59%	56%	56%

Abstinence, Contraception,  
 and Information

**CHART 6**  
(continued)



3) It's okay for teens to be sexually active as long as they have access to birth control.

<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
	7%	9%	12%
<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2002</b>
	18%	19%	25%

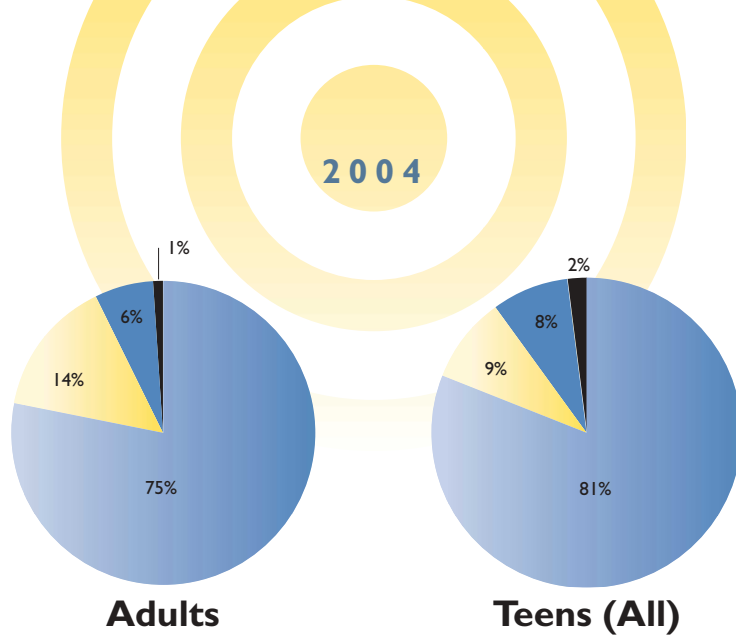
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**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Careful examination of these figures makes clear that 86% of adults (67% plus 19%) and 81% of teens (57% plus 24%) do not think teens should have sex. However, as noted previously, most adults (67%) and teens (57%) also hold the practical, middle ground view that while teens should not be sexually active, those who are should have access to contraception.

As has been the case in years past, younger adolescents (37% of those aged 12-14) are far more likely than older adolescents (15% of those aged 15-19) to believe that teens should *not* be sexually active and should *not* have access to contraception (not shown). This finding suggests that that abstinence messages may be particularly well received among this younger age group.





- More information about both (Adults=75%,Teens=81%)
- More information about abstinence (Adults=14%,Teens=9%)
- More information about birth control/protection (Adults=6%,Teens=8%)
- Teens get enough information about *both* abstinence and birth control/protection (Adults=1%,Teens=2%)

**CHART 7**  
**Question:**  
*Do you wish teens were getting more information about abstinence, more information about birth control or protection, or more information about both?*

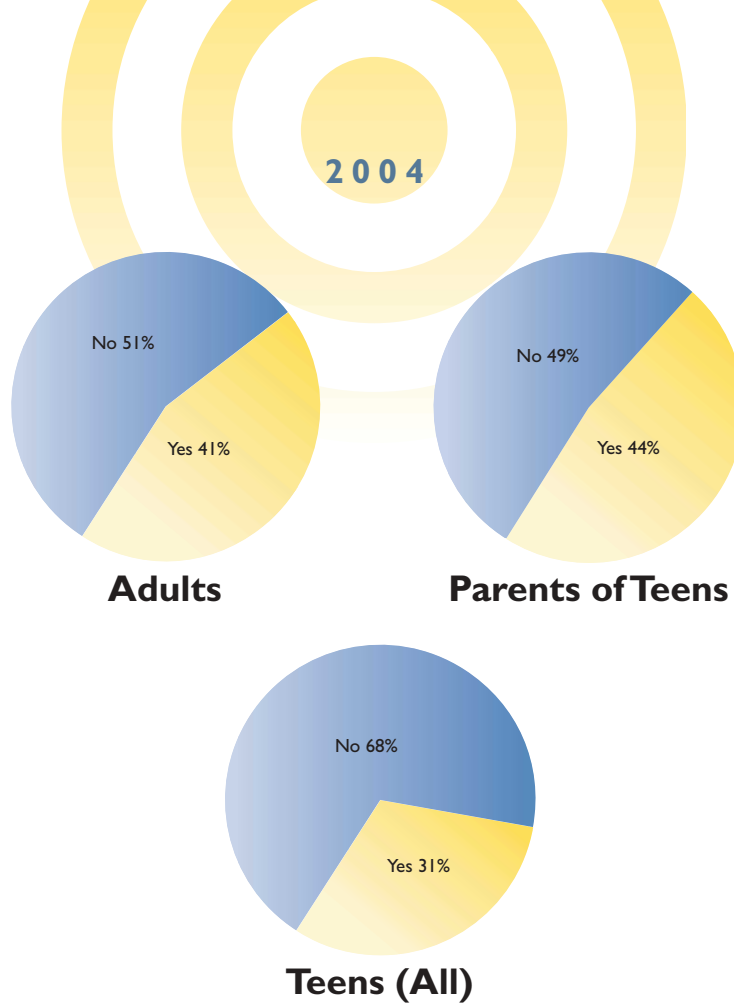
<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
More information about both	74%	76%
More information about abstinence	18%	16%
More information about birth control/protection	5%	4%
Teens get enough information about <i>both</i> abstinence and birth control/protection	1%	NA

<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
More information about both	60%	64%
More information about abstinence	9%	10%
More information about birth control/protection	11%	12%
Teens get enough information about <i>both</i> abstinence and birth control/protection	13%	NA
Don't know/refused	7%	15%

Abstinence, Contraception,  
 and Information

CONTEXT AND COMMENT

Communities nationwide report that their efforts to prevent teen pregnancy are often hampered by debates over such things as funding for abstinence programs and the appropriateness of providing contraceptive information to teens. The results noted here and in several other charts in this publication suggest that this is an argument that the vast majority of Americans are simply not having. Note, in particular, that the percentage of teens who say they want more information about abstinence and contraception has increased dramatically since last year (60% to 81%). Might it be that the polarization over abstinence and contraception exists mainly among advocacy groups and a handful of passionate advocates?



**CHART 8**  
**Question:**  
*Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teen (you) the following: “Don’t have sex but if you do you should use birth control or protection.” Do you think this is a message that encourages teens (you) to have sex?*

In previous years, the National Campaign posed a similar question to adults and teens: “Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teenager the following: ‘I feel very strongly that not having sex at all during your middle and high school years is your best option and the right thing to do. I also think it is important for you to receive information about birth control or protection. But again, I think not having sex is your best option.’ Do you think this is a clear and specific message or do you think it is a confusing or mixed message?”

<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
Clear and specific message	68%	66%	71%
Confusing or mixed message	30%	32%	28%

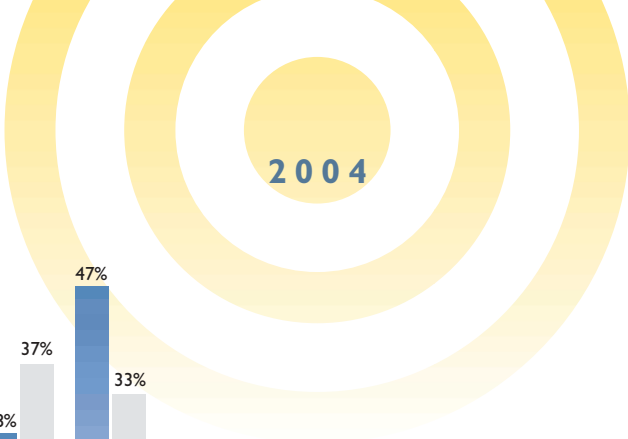
<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
Clear and specific message	77%	72%	75%
Confusing or mixed message	23%	27%	24%

*Abstinence, Contraception,  
and Information*

#### CONTEXT AND COMMENT

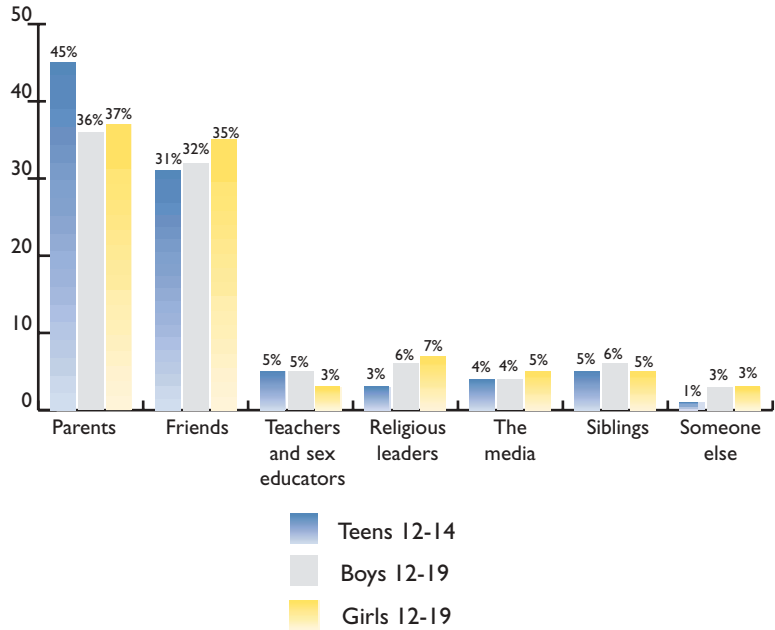
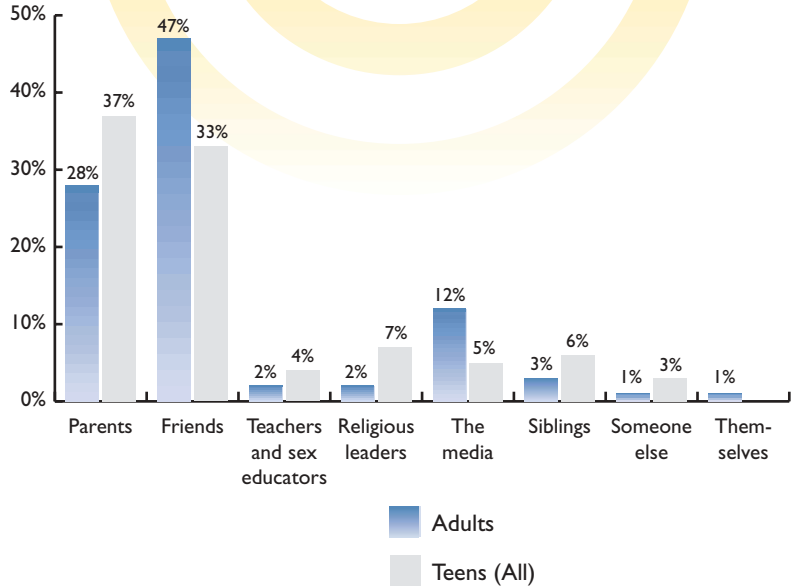
Some parents worry that stressing abstinence to teens while also providing them with information about contraception sends teens a confusing, “mixed message” that might inadvertently encourage teens to have sex. The results presented here from two different survey questions posed over the past several years suggest a different conclusion. About half of adults generally (51%), parents of teens (49%), and, importantly, two thirds of teens, do *not* believe that such a message encourages teens to have sex. It should be noted, however, that far more adults believe that such a message is “clear and specific” (68% in 2003) than agree that such a message does not give tacit approval for teens to have sex (51%) and that 44% of parents of teens *do* think that the two-pronged message gives tacit approval. Parents concerned with sending young people mixed messages about sex can also take comfort in the growing body of rigorous social science research that makes that clear that sex education programs that discuss both abstinence and contraception *do not* hasten the onset of sex, increase the frequency of sex, nor increase the number of sexual partners (see *Emerging Answers* at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)).

Readers may wonder why a different “mixed message” question was posed this year than in years past. Some who have paid careful attention to previous National Campaign surveys have suggested that the real issue is *not* whether encouraging teens to delay having sex while also giving them guidance on contraception is a “clear and specific” message, but rather that such a message provides young people with at least tacit approval to have sex. Fair enough. The question posed to adults and teens this time around is our attempt to address this concern and more directly answer the “tacit approval” criticism.



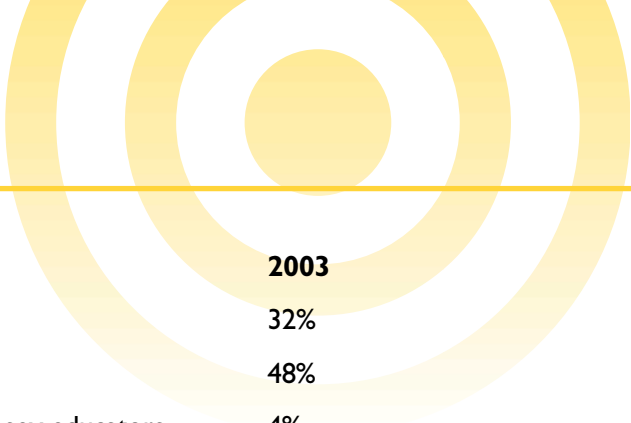
2004

**CHART 9**  
**Question:**  
**When it comes to**  
**teens' / your**  
**decisions about**  
**sex, who is most**  
**influential?**



Parents and Other Adults

**CHART 9**  
(continued)



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<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>
Parents	32%
Friends	48%
Teachers and sex educators	4%
Religious leaders	3%
The media	11%
Siblings	N/A
Someone else	1%
Themselves	N/A

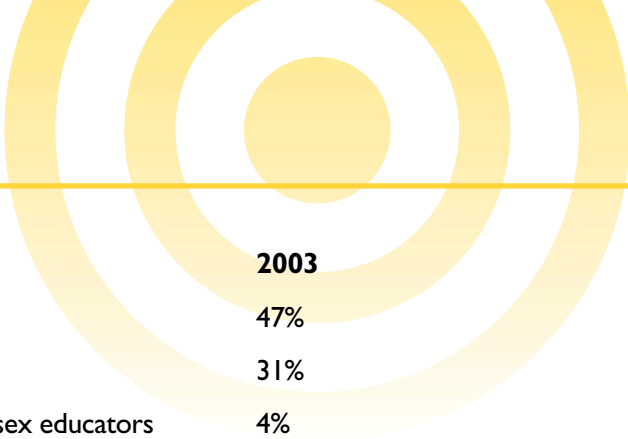
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<b>Teens (All)</b>	<b>2003</b>
Parents	45%
Friends	31%
Teachers and sex educators	6%
Religious leaders	7%
The media	4%
Siblings	1%
Someone else	1%

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<b>Boys 12-19</b>	<b>2003</b>
Parents	44%
Friends	32%
Teachers and sex educators	7%
Religious leaders	6%
The media	6%
Siblings	1%
Someone else	1%

**CHART 9**  
**(continued)**



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<b>Girls 12-19</b>	<b>2003</b>
Parents	47%
Friends	31%
Teachers and sex educators	4%
Religious leaders	8%
The media	3%
Siblings	1%
Someone else	1%

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<b>Teens 12-14</b>	<b>2004</b>
Parents	45%
Friends	31%
Teachers and sex educators	5%
Religious leaders	3%
The media	4%
Siblings	5%
Someone else	1%

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#### **CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

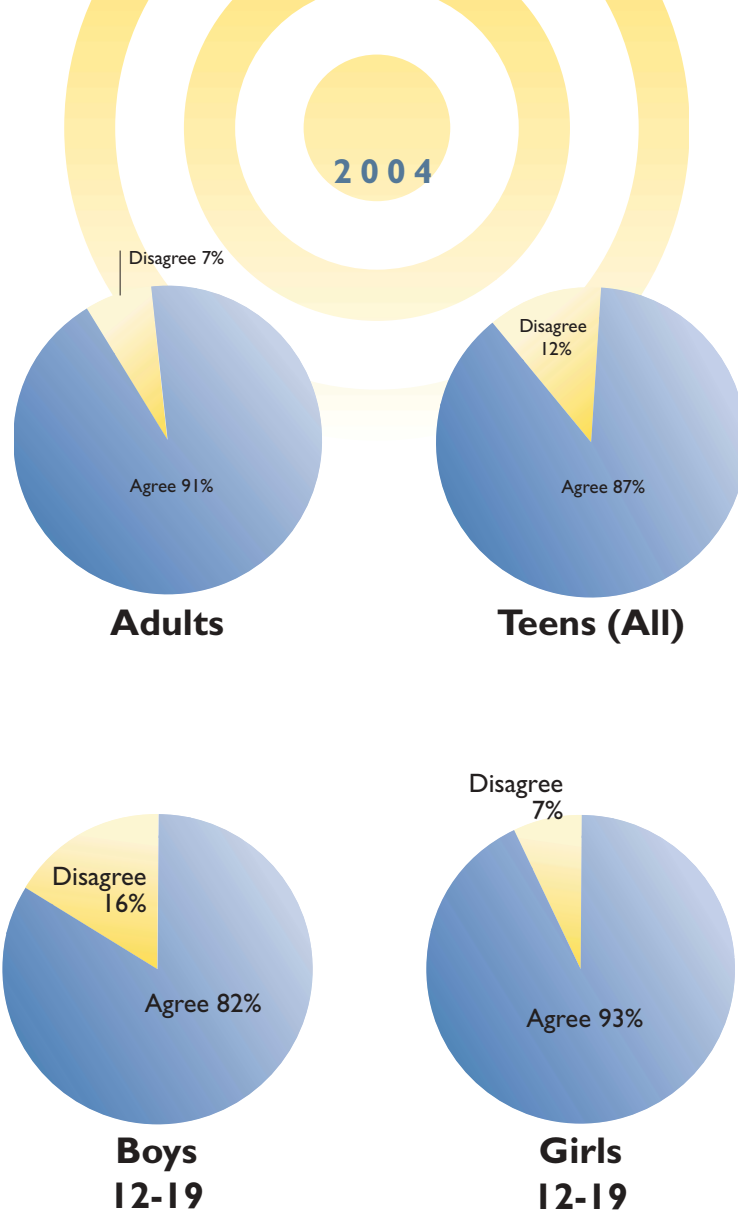
Over the years, the National Campaign has asked many questions about who and what influences teens' decisions about sex. While the wording of the questions has varied slightly, a common theme has emerged: Parents are more influential than they believe. Teens—both boys and girls—say parents *most* influence their decisions about sex, but parents continue to underestimate their own influence and overestimate the influence of friends and the media.

This year's survey results also suggest two rather disheartening conclusions: First, parents' crisis of confidence seems to be growing—the percentage of adults who believe parents most influence teens' decisions about sex *declined* from 32% in 2003 to 28% this year. Second, teens apparently agree that parental influence has declined—teens in general (45% in 2003 to 37% in 2004), and teen girls in particular (47% in 2003 to 37% in 2004), were far less likely this year to report that parents most influence their decisions about sex.

**Chart 10**

**Question:**

*It would be much easier for teens to postpone sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents?*



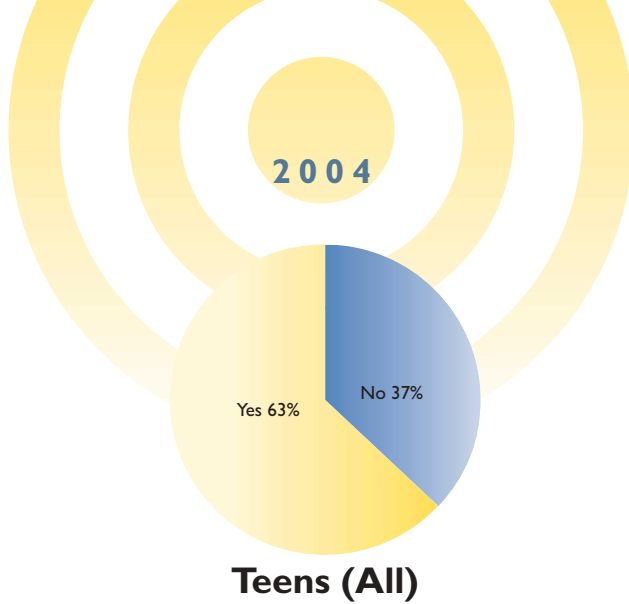

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<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree	92%	92%
Disagree	7%	6%

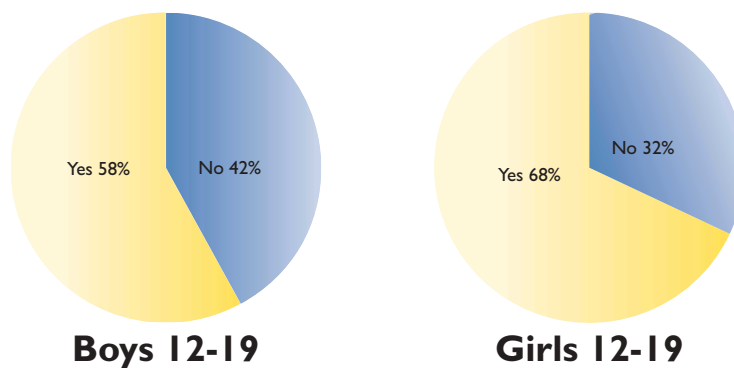
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<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree	88%	69%
Disagree	12%	29%





**CHART 11**  
**Question:**  
*Have you had an open, honest conversation with your parents about delaying sex and avoiding teen pregnancy?*



**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

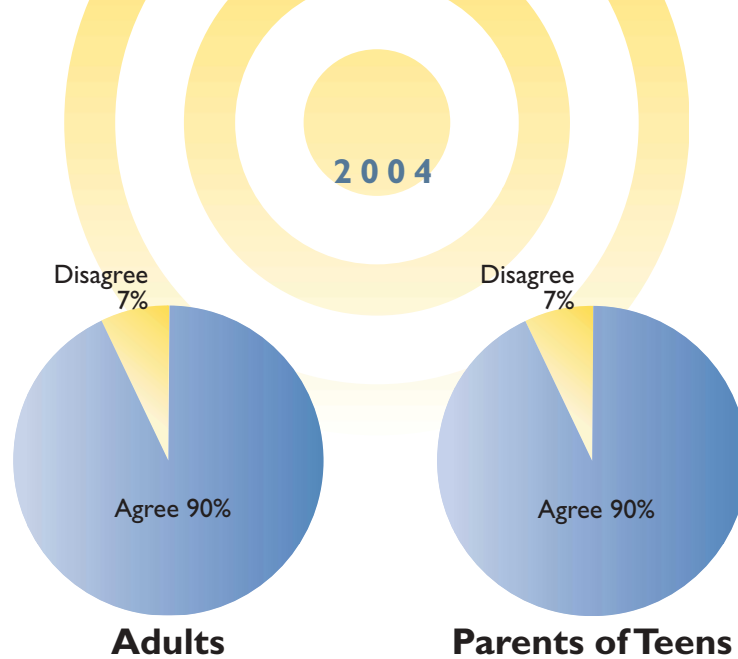
As these results make clear, a significant minority of teens (nearly four in ten) said that they have *not* had an open, honest conversation with their parents about sex and delaying teen pregnancy. This may reflect adults’ general unease about this topic (see chart 12) and/or their tendency to underestimate the influence they have over teens’ decisions about sex (see chart 9).

These results also suggest that a double standard may be in play—fewer boys than girls reported discussing sex and related topics with their parents. Teens often tell us that girls are told by parents to “say no” to sex while boys are generally told to “be careful.”

A final observation about these particular survey results: Nearly equal percentages of young teens (60%) and older teens (65%) said they have talked to their parents about sex and pregnancy. This may be because parents understand that a significant minority of teens has sex at an early age (one in five teens have had sex by age 15—see *14 and Younger: The Sexual Behavior of Young Adolescents* at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)). It may also be that parents do not discuss sex and pregnancy with older adolescents out of concern that they are “too late” or that their older teens know enough (perhaps even more than the parents!).

**CHART 12**

**Question:**  
*Parents believe they should talk to their kids about sex but often don't know what to say, how to say it, or when to start.*



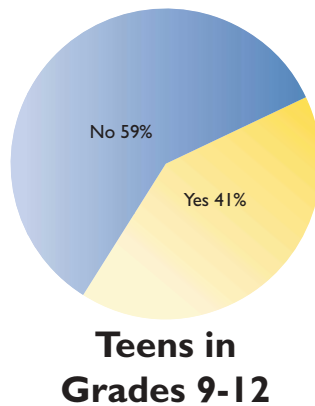
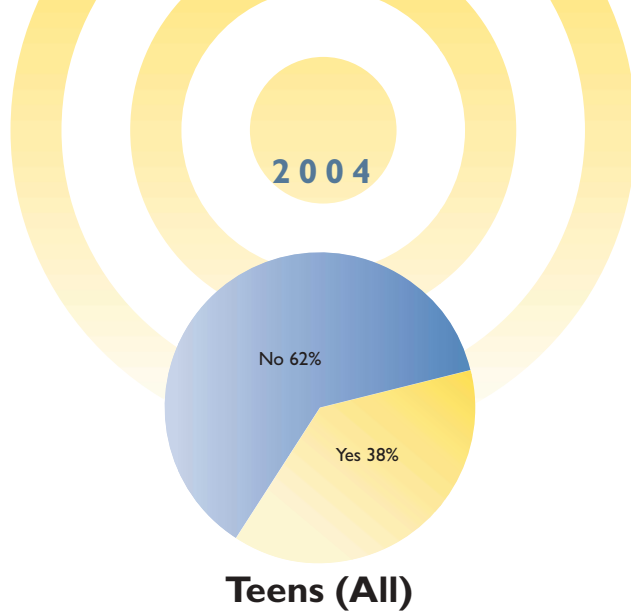

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Adults	2001
Agree	88%
Disagree	11%

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**CONTEXT AND COMMENT:**

If the previous charts on parents are considered together, a mottled picture of parents emerges. First, the not-so-good news: Parents underestimate the influence they have over teens' decisions about sex and overestimate the influence of peers and popular culture. And a significant minority of teens (nearly four in ten) says they have yet to have an open, honest conversation with their parents about delaying sex and avoiding teen pregnancy. On the other hand, nearly all parents *believe* that discussing these issues with their children is important and would help their children avoid too-early sex and pregnancy. The results noted above also suggest that many more parents would engage their children on the important topics of sex, love, and relationships if they only knew what to say and how to say it.

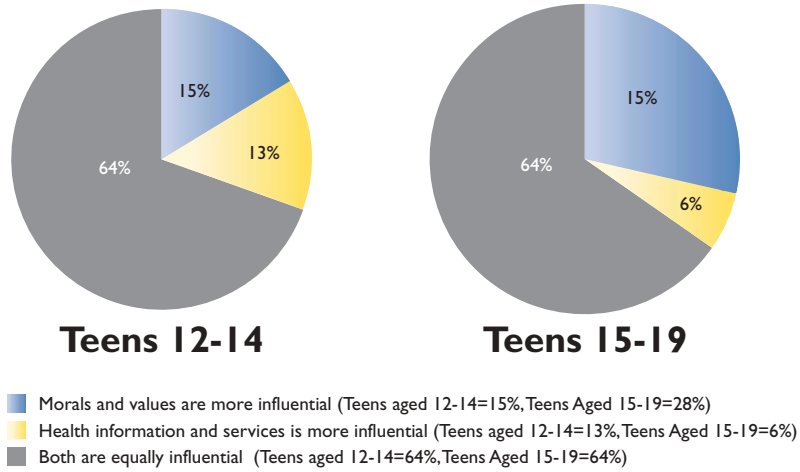
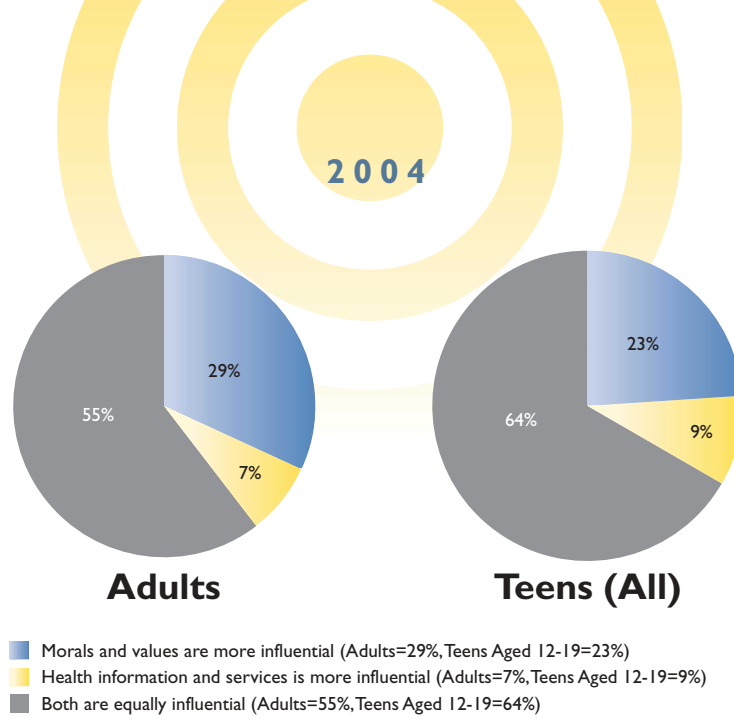


**CHART 13**  
**Question:**  
*In the past six months have you been at an evening or late night party with boys and girls where there are no adults in the house?*

**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

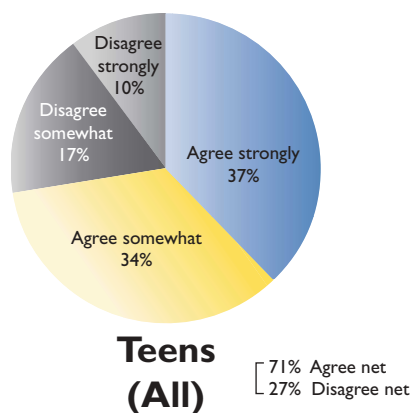
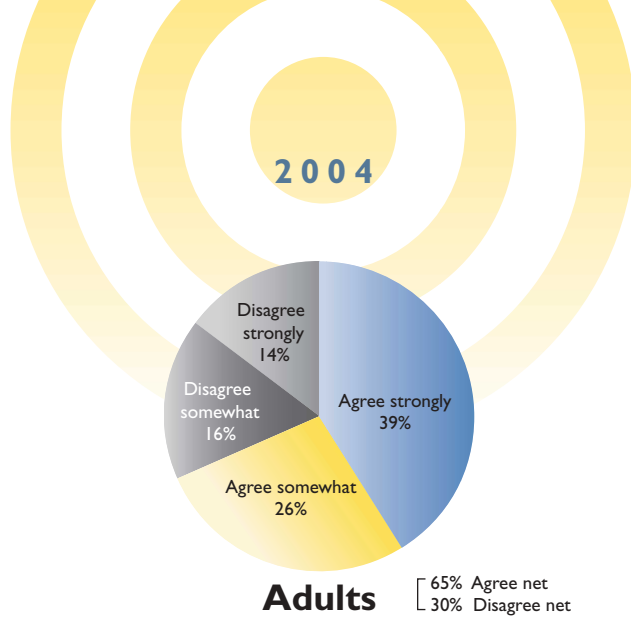
Four in ten high school teens (41% of those in grades 9-12) say they have been at an evening party where there are no adults in the house. Research supports the common sense belief that supervising the social behavior of young people—knowing where they are and what they’re doing—remains an important adult task. For example, two-thirds (68%) of 16-18 year olds report that they first had sexual intercourse in the family home, their partner’s family home, or a friend’s house. (See the research brief, *Science Says: Where and When Teens First Have Sex*—available at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)—for more information.)

**Chart 14**  
**Question:**  
**What most influences teen pregnancy and sexual activity: morals and values, health information and services, or are morals and values and health information and services equally influential?**



**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Equal proportions of older and younger teens (64%) cite morals and values as well as health information and services as equally influential when they make decisions about sex. Note that older teens (28%) seem to place a higher premium on morals and values than younger teens (15%). These findings suggest that efforts to prevent teen pregnancy need to address social norms, values, and morals directly—that is they need to discuss what is right as well as what is safe.



**Chart 15**  
**Question:**  
*Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Religious leaders and groups should be doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy.*

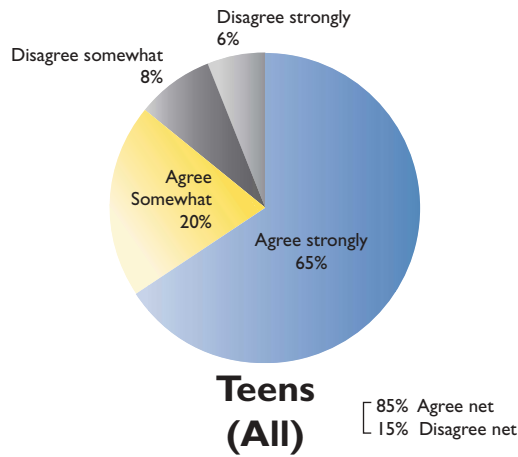
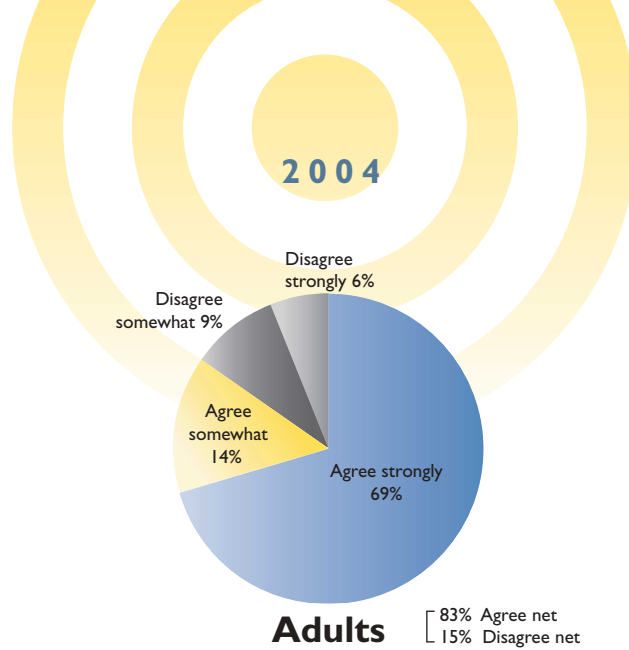
**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

These results, coupled with the findings in the previous chart and previous National Campaign surveys (see *With One Voice 2003* and *Faithful Nation, 2001*, both available at [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)) show that teens’ own morals, values, and religious beliefs play an important role in shaping their decisions about sex. The results also suggest that both adults and teens view teen pregnancy prevention as more than simply a reproductive health issue. Teens, like adults, make decisions about sexual behavior based in part on individual values about what is right and wrong, what is moral and what is not.

Support for more involvement from faith communities in preventing teen pregnancy is quite robust. Survey results (not shown) indicate strong support from all regions in the country. For example, 71% of adults in the south, 59% of adults in the northeast, and 66% of adults in the north and central parts of the country want faith communities to do more. There is also wide support among all racial and ethnic groups; 71% of white teens, 70% of African American teens, and 77% of Hispanic teens want religious leaders and groups to do more to help prevent teen pregnancy.

**CHART 16**

**Question:**  
*Do you agree or disagree with this statement:*  
**“Teen pregnancy prevention programs should teach young people to be married before they have a child?”**



<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	85%	86%
Agree strongly	72%	73%
Agree somewhat	13%	13%
Disagree net	14%	13%
Disagree somewhat	10%	7%
Disagree strongly	5%	6%



**CHART 16**  
*(continued)*

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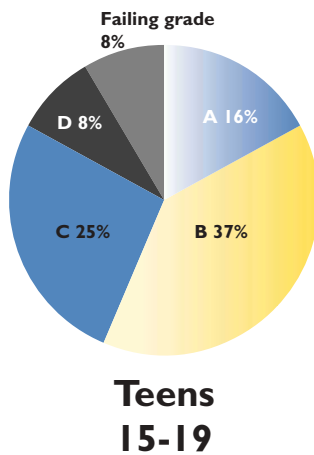
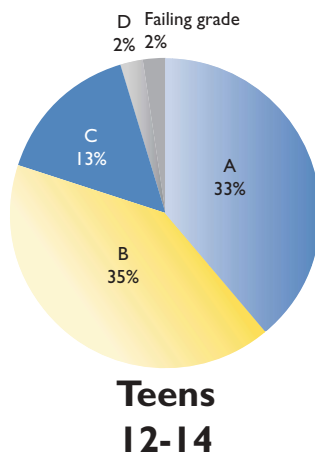
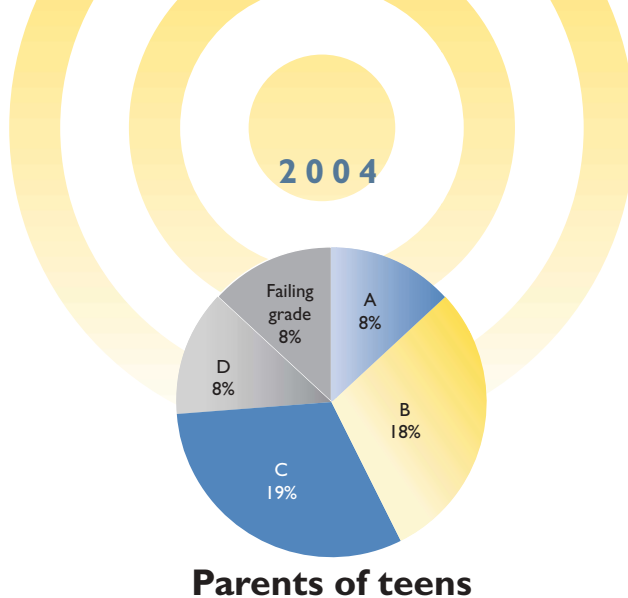
<b>Teens</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	84%	84%
Agree strongly	62%	63%
Agree somewhat	21%	21%
Disagree net	16%	16%
Disagree somewhat	10%	10%
Disagree strongly	6%	6%

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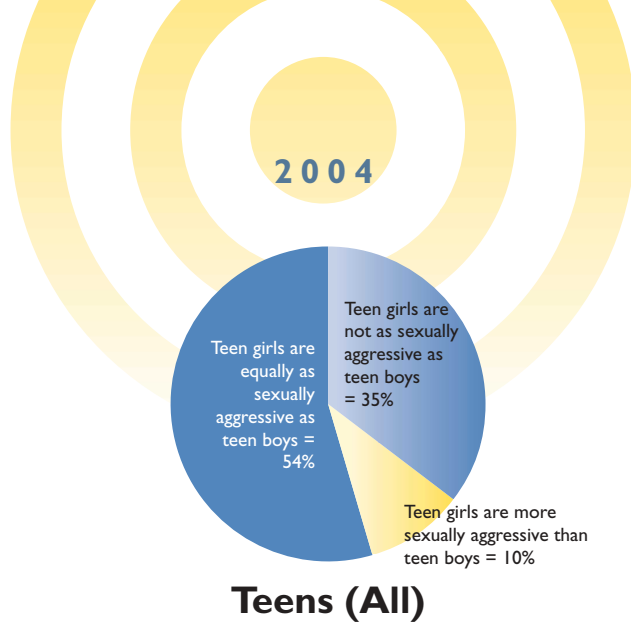
### CONTEXT AND COMMENT

We note again this year that the overwhelming support expressed in our surveys among teens for having children within marriage is in stark contrast to findings from other surveys. For example, a 2004 report from the National Marriage Project indicates that over half of high school seniors (56%) believe “having a child without being married is experimenting with a worthwhile lifestyle or not affecting anyone else.” (See [www.marriage.Rutgers.edu](http://www.marriage.Rutgers.edu).) In a similar vein, recent work done by Child Trends on teens and marriage has noted that marriage and birth patterns among teens have changed over time, shifting from a general trend of marrying *before* pregnancy, to marrying *as a result* of pregnancy, to becoming pregnant and not marrying.” (See *Science Says: Teens and Marriage* at [www.teenpregnancy.org/works](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works).)

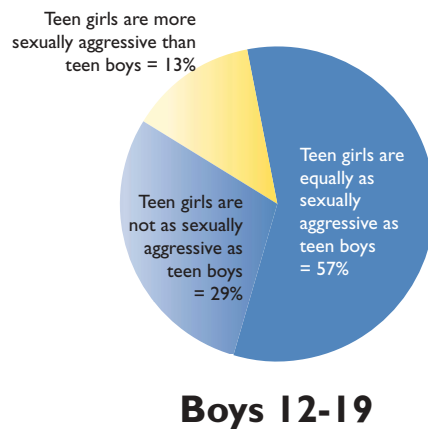
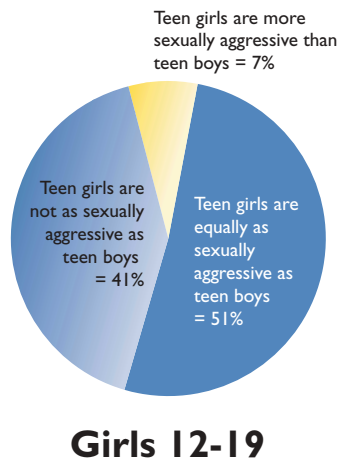
**CHART 17**  
**Question:**  
*What letter grade would you give the sex education or family life classes your children/you have received in school?*







**CHART 18**  
**Question:**  
**Which of the following three statements comes closest to your view?**



**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

While not shown above, older teens (58% of those aged 15-19) are more likely than younger teens (49% of those aged 12-14) to believe that boys and girls are equally sexually aggressive.

**Chart 19**  
**Question:**  
*Teen boys often receive the message that sex and pregnancy are not a big deal.*

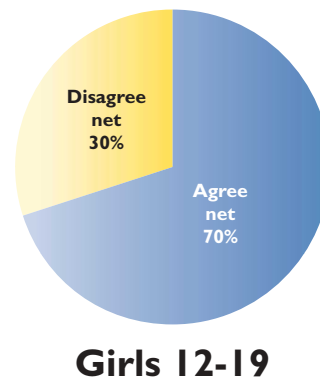
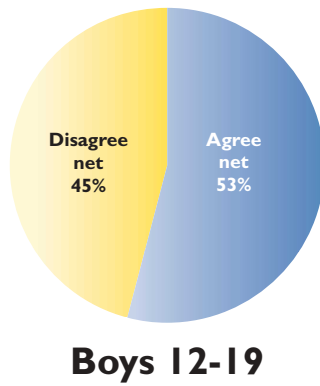
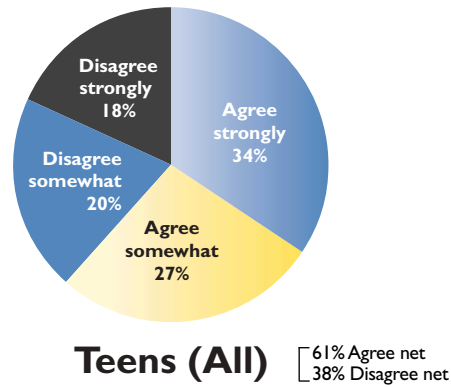
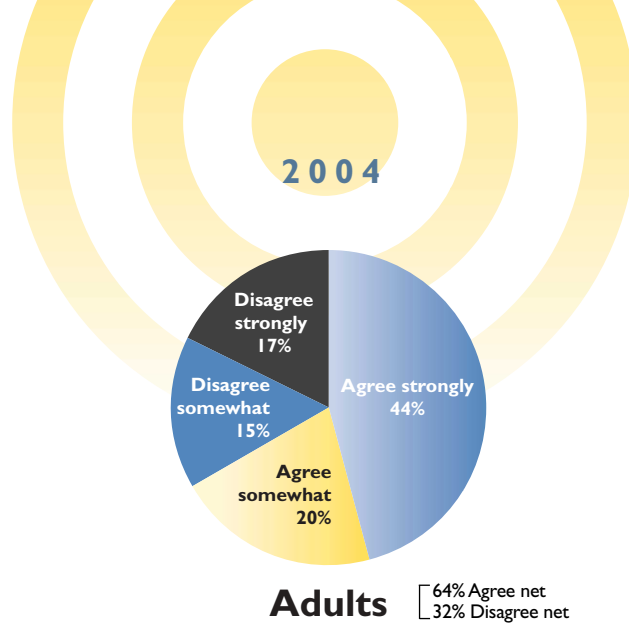


Chart 19  
(continued)

<b>Adults</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	66%	66%
Agree strongly	40%	45%
Agree somewhat	26%	21%
Disagree net	29%	29%
Disagree somewhat	14%	10%
Disagree strongly	15%	20%

<b>Teens (All)</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	59%	59%
Agree strongly	27%	33%
Agree somewhat	32%	26%
Disagree net	38%	39%
Disagree somewhat	17%	17%
Disagree strongly	21%	22%

<b>Teen Boys</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	49%	51%
Disagree net	49%	48%

<b>Teen Girls</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
Agree net	70%	68%
Disagree net	27%	30%

#### CONTEXT AND COMMENT

As we noted in this space last year, and earlier in this report, these findings show that a “double standard”—one encouraging teen girls to abstain from sex while offering teen boys a wink and a nod—is alive and well. Note, for example, that teen girls (70%) are far more likely than teen boys (53%) to say that teen boys often receive the message that sex and pregnancy are not a big deal. For too long, this country has relied on classes, lectures, and pamphlets targeted primarily to girls as a means for reducing teen pregnancy. Happily, this is changing as increased attention is being paid to the responsibilities of boys and young men in preventing teen pregnancy and the critical role that fathers play in the lives of their children. These data, however, suggest that more work needs to be done.

**Chart 20**  
**Question:**  
*Teen girls often receive the message that attracting boys and looking sexy is one of the most important things they can do.*

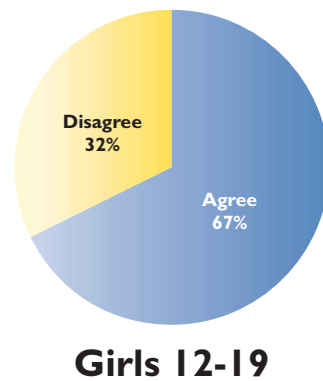
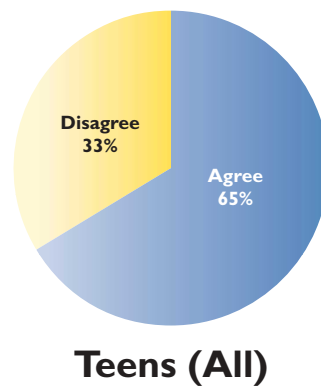
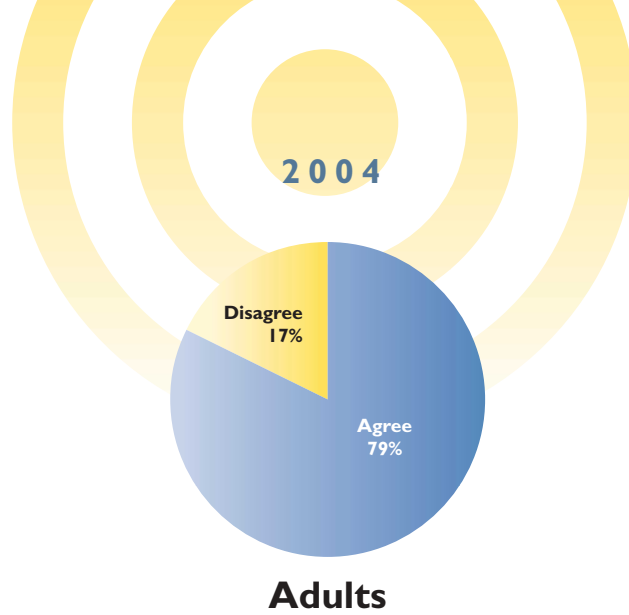
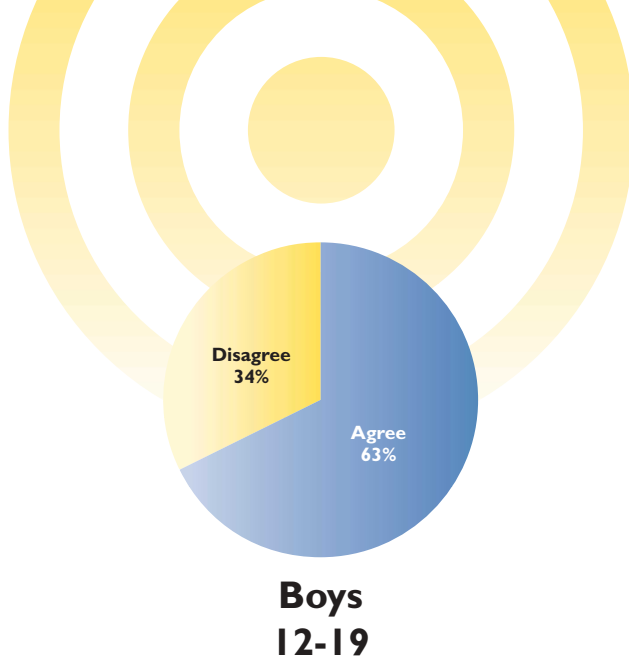
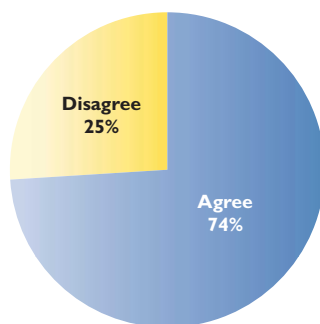


Chart 20  
(continued)



**Boys  
12-19**

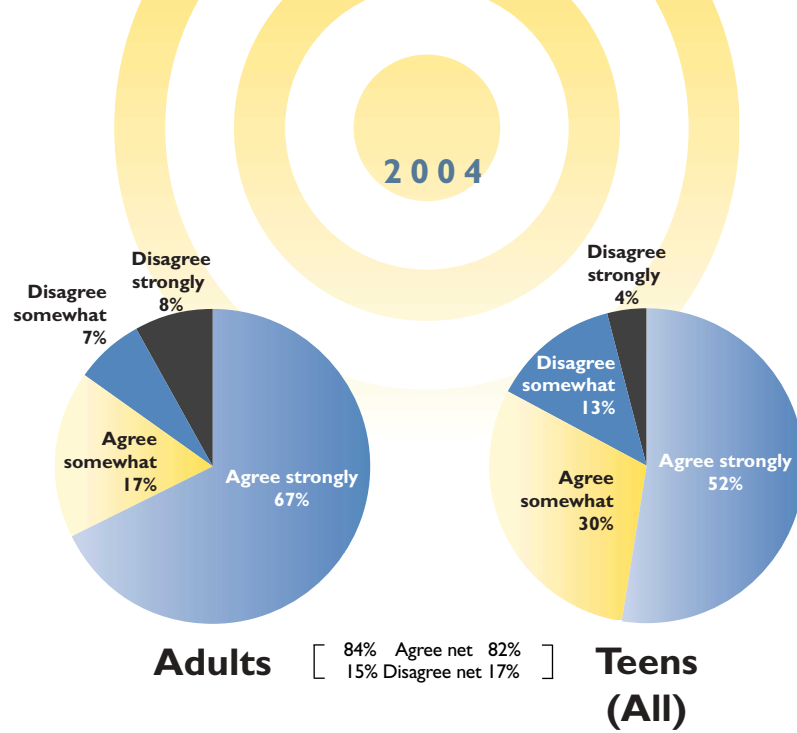


**Girls  
15-19**

#### CONTEXT AND COMMENT

Quite a bit of research on factors associated with teen pregnancy can be seen as an indictment of our current culture—trends toward earlier sexualization of girls in advertising and the entertainment media, the high proportion of sex among younger girls that is unwanted, the notion that many young teen girls remain “targets of opportunity” for older guys, to name just a few. Given all this, and given the sobering data reported here, social commentator Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has stated—“girlhood, as a life stage offering sanctuary from the responsibilities of adult sexuality, is slipping away from many girls today.” Note that a full three-quarters of teen girls aged 15-19—and 70% of parents of teens—agree that society tells girls that attracting boys and acting sexy is one of the most important things girls can do. Clearly we have more work to do on behalf of teens and young women.

**Chart 21**  
**Question:**  
*I wish the media showed more or talked more about the consequences of sex, including teen pregnancy*

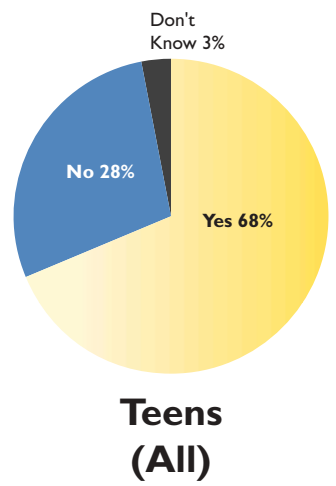
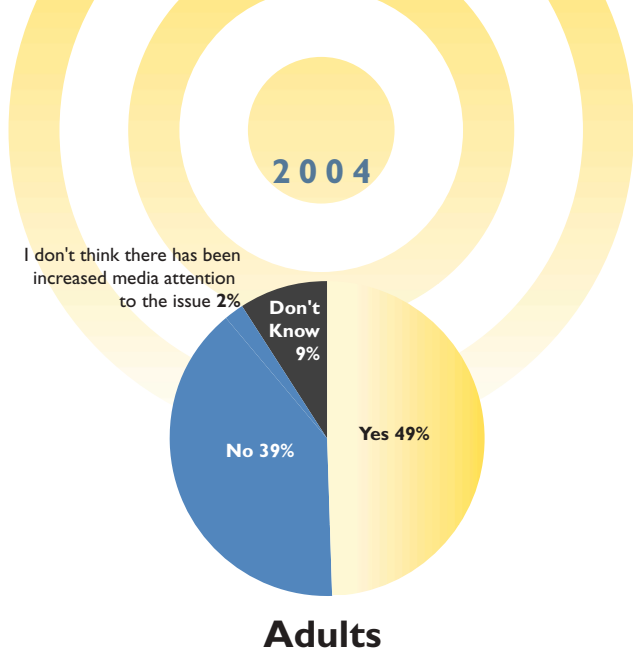


Adults	2003	2002
Agree net	87%	88%
Agree strongly	68%	71%
Agree somewhat	19%	18%
Disagree net	12%	10%
Disagree somewhat	7%	5%
Disagree strongly	5%	5%

Teens	2003	2002
Agree net	88%	83%
Agree strongly	55%	53%
Agree somewhat	33%	30%
Disagree net	11%	16%
Disagree somewhat	9%	11%
Disagree strongly	2%	4%

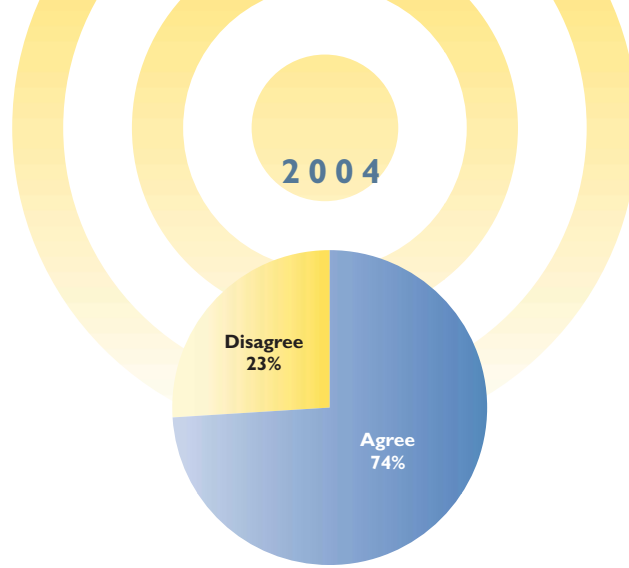
**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Message to Hollywood: Your audience wants to see more consequences.

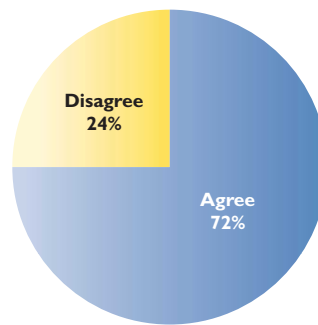


**CHART 22**  
**Question:**  
*The teen pregnancy rate in the United States has declined over the past ten years. Do you believe this decline is due in part to increased media attention to the issue?*

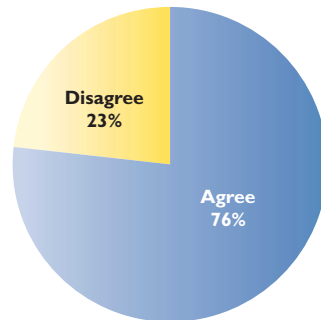
**CHART 23**  
**Question:**  
*Do you agree or disagree with this statement: TV shows and other media are a good way to start conversations with teens/your parents about sex, love, and relationships?*



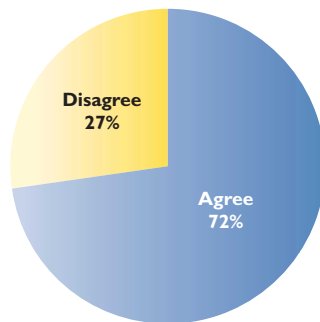
**Adults**



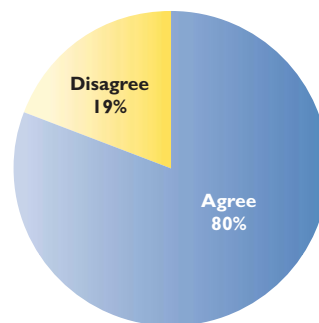
**Parents of teens**



**Teens (All)**

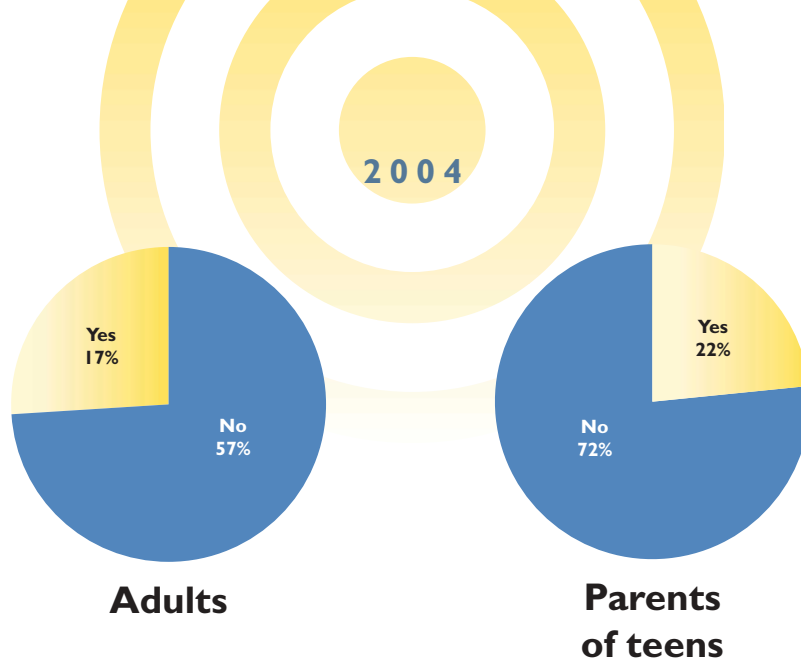


**Boys 12-19**



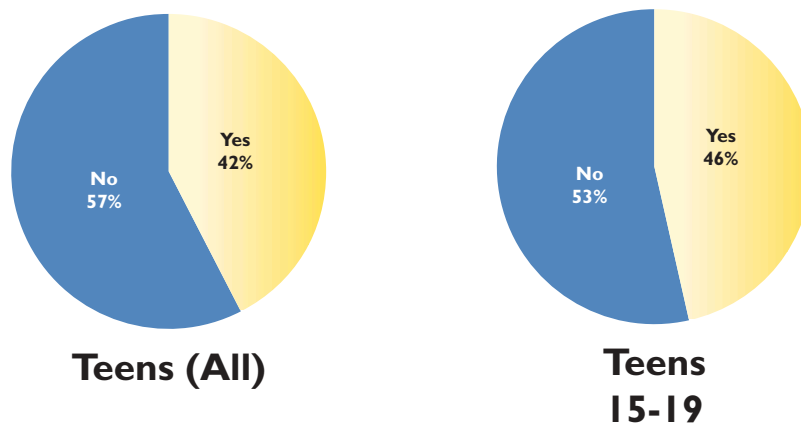
**Girls 12-19**





**CHART 24**  
**Question:**  
*Thinking about the past year or so, did something in the media start a conversation between you and your children or friends about the consequences of sex?*

*Question: Thinking about the past year or so, did something in the media start a conversation between you and your friends or parents about the consequences of sex?*



**CONTEXT AND COMMENT**

Answers to survey questions about media influence clearly show that the media can be a powerful tool to begin discussions about sexual behavior, values, and relationships—albeit an underutilized tool for parents. While nearly half (46%) of older teens say the media has sparked a recent conversation with friends or parents about the consequences of sex, only 22% of parents of teens say they have used something they saw or heard in the media to help discuss sex and consequences with their children. This is particularly surprising given that nearly all adults believe discussing these issues with adolescents would help young people avoid early sex and pregnancy (see chart 10) and given that adults readily admit that parents should talk to their kids about sex but often don't know what to say, how to say it, or when to start (see chart 12).

**CHART 24**  
**(continued)**

At the very least, parents should not be surprised about the *quantity* of sexual content on in the media. The RAND study estimates that two-thirds of TV programs contain sexual content. Case in point: The general cluelessness of adults about just how sexualized today's teen culture is came into sharp relief over the antics of Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake at the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show. Adults generally reacted with shock and disapproval while the nation's adolescents greeted the "wardrobe malfunction" with a collective yawn. For a generation accustomed to this sort of thing—access to hundreds of television channels, the internet, instant messaging, email, and all the rest—Janet and Justin's show barely registered on the radar screen.

