

Facts About America's Youth

Helping America's Youth
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HELPING AMERICA'S YOUTH





Facts about America's Youth

In 2003, there were 73 million children under age 18 in the United States, 700,000 more than in 2000. This number is projected to increase to 80 million in 2020.ⁱ

The Impact of Caring Adults in Families

Parents and family are the most important influence in every child's life, providing a foundation of love and support.

- Teens who have involved and satisfying relationships with their parents are more likely to do well in school, be academically motivated and engaged, have better social skills, and have lower rates of risky behavior than their peers.ⁱⁱ
- Teens who believed that their parents cared about and supported them were less likely to be exposed to weapon violence or to commit violence with a weapon.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Youth who have positive relationships with their parents, meaning they perceive their parents as caring, value their parent's opinions about serious decisions, feel that they can talk to their parents about problems, are less likely to use alcohol or drugs, attempt suicide, have low self-esteem, or use unhealthy strategies to control their weight.^{iv}
- Teens whose parents demonstrate positive behaviors on a number of fronts are more likely to engage in those positive behaviors themselves.^v For example, teens of parents who are highly involved in community activities are themselves more likely to be involved in community activities such as leadership roles, sports, or other extra-curricular or community service activities.^{vi}
- Parents who know about their children's activities, friends, and behaviors, and monitor them in age-appropriate ways, have teens with lower rates of risky physical and sexual behaviors, as well as lower rates of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use than their peers. Teens who perceive that their parents have this monitoring role are more likely to do well academically and socially.^{vii}
- Research has shown that father involvement and support is also linked with more positive outcomes for children even after taking into account the support children receive from mothers.^{viii}

Key Statistics on Youth and Families

- Children who grow up in households with their married mother and father do better on a wide range of economic, social, educational, and emotional measures than do children in other kinds of family arrangements.^{ix, x}
- Children raised in married-parent homes are less likely to experience mental health, behavioral, or health problems, achieve higher levels of education, and are less likely to become teen parents.^{xi, xii}
- The percentage of children younger than 18 living with two married parents has remained stable at approximately 68% between 1996 and 2004, after a 26-year period of decline starting in 1970, when 85% of children lived with two married parents.^{xiii}
- Committed and responsible fathering during infancy and early childhood contributes to the development of emotional security,^{xiv} curiosity,^{xv} and math and verbal skills.^{xvi}

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- The percentage of children who grow up in single-parent homes has increased dramatically over the past four decades. In 1960, only 9% of children lived in single-parent families; by 2005, that number had increased to 28%.^{xvii}
- The percentage of babies born out-of-wedlock has increased more than sixfold since 1960. More than a third of all births, and more than two-thirds of all births to African American parents in 2004 were out-of-wedlock.^{xviii}
- An analysis of 67 studies indicated that, compared to children who have experienced a divorce, children who live with their married parents have significantly better academic achievement, psychological and emotional adjustment, self-concept, social relations, and lower levels of misconduct such as delinquency or aggression.^{xix}
- Children living in households headed by unmarried women were more likely to be poor—42% compared to 9% of children living with two married parents. There are large disparities in poverty rates by children's race and ethnicity.^{xx}
- Over 500,000 children and adolescents live in foster care. In 2003, nearly half (48%) of all children in foster care were adolescents ages 11 to 18 years, and an additional 2% were at least 19 years.^{xxi} Youth who age out of the foster care system often have multiple challenges: 38% have mental health challenges, 50% have used an illicit drug, and 25% are already involved with the judicial system.^{xxii} In addition, only 54% of youth have graduated from high school up to four years following discharge from foster care. In 2003, 18% of children who exited foster care were adopted, the vast majority of whom (79%) were ages 10 and under.
- In 2000, there were an estimated 19 million new cases of (sexually transmitted diseases (STD) among Americans. Approximately half of all new STD infections occur in teens and young adults (ages 15-24) each year.^{xxiii}

The Impact of Caring Adults in Schools

Schools equip children and youth with the knowledge and skills to be successful throughout their lives. Teachers, school counselors and coaches are examples of caring adults who can connect with teens in schools.

- Having a teacher who gives emotional as well as instructional support can buffer the risk of early school failure. At the end of first grade, at-risk children whose teachers were moderately to highly supportive had similar levels of academic achievement as their low-risk peers.^{xxiv}
- Teachers can play an important role in students' adjustment to middle school, which is an important and challenging developmental period for youth. Boys and girls who perceived an increase in levels of teacher support over the middle school years showed corresponding declines in depression and increases in self-esteem.^{xxv}
- When teachers emphasize mutual respect between classmates, middle school students tend to feel more effective in their schoolwork than those whose teachers place less emphasis on mutual respect.^{xxvi}
- A positive student-teacher relationship has been linked to higher grades and a lower probability of engaging in risky behaviors or being suspended in the subsequent year.^{xxvii}



Key Statistics on Youth and Schools

- Students who have difficulty learning to read will have a greater chance of school failure and behavior problems such as aggression.^{xxviii}
- In 2005, 64% of 4th graders and 73% of 8th graders read at the basic level or higher. Conversely, however, 36% of 4th grade and 27% of 8th grade students' reading skills were below the basic level.^{xxix}
- More than 40% of students who dropped out of high school during the 2000 – 2001 school year were between the ages of 15 and 17 years. Students whose families are poor, live in rural areas or areas of urban poverty, and students who are Hispanic, American Indian or African American all have significantly higher dropout rates.^{xxx} The percentage of 16 to 24 year-olds who are high school dropouts decreased from 15% in 1972 to 11% in 2002,^{xxxi} and the high school completion rate among 18 to 24 year-olds has remained stable at 87%.^{xxxii}
- In 2003, 7% of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school over the past year. Almost 13% of students reported being in a physical fight, and about 9% of students were threatened or injured by a weapon on school property during the past year. More than 5% of students in grades 9 to 12 had not gone to school on at least one day in the last year because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to and from school.^{xxxiii}

The Impact of Caring Adults in Communities

A caring adult in the community who takes the time to make a real connection can play a very significant role in a young person's life.

- A review of 10 evaluated mentoring programs concluded that one-on-one mentoring programs can enhance positive youth development: mentored youth have shown evidence of significant reductions in school absence; higher college participation; better school attitudes and behavior; less drug and alcohol use especially among minority youth; less likelihood of hitting others; less likelihood of committing crimes; more positive attitudes toward their elders and toward helping; and improved parental relationships and support from peers.^{xxxiv}
- Research shows that youth who feel more supported and connected to caring adults at a community program are more likely to attend and to get more from the program.^{xxxv}
- Continuity of mentor relationships is important. For example, a study found that youth who were matched to one mentor for more than 12 months compared to less than 12 months, reported significant increases in their self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, value of school, parental relationship quality, and significant decreases in drug and alcohol use.^{xxxvi}
- In a study of approximately 800 mostly African-American teens in the Midwest, 52% of youth reported having a natural mentor, most often (36%) an extended family member such as an aunt, uncle, grandparent or cousin. Teens who had a natural mentor were less likely to use marijuana, participate in non-violent delinquency, and to have higher levels of school attachment, school efficacy, and a belief that it is important to do well in school.^{xxxvii}
- Close connections with caring adults can foster improvements in adolescents' relationships with others. For example, volunteer mentoring relationships can lead to improvements in teens' perceptions of their relationships with their parents in terms of intimacy, communication, and trust.^{xxxviii}



Key Statistics on Youth in their Communities

- At least one-quarter of 8th and 10th grade students and almost one-third of 12th grade students volunteer in community service at least once a month.^{xxxix}
- In 2001, 38% of children in kindergarten through 8th grade participated in one or more organized activities after school.^{xi}
- In 2004, approximately one-third of 8th, 10th and 12th grade students reported that religion plays a very important role in their lives. About 34% of students planning to complete four years of college reported that religion played an important role in their lives compared to 23% of students with lower academic aspirations. Between 1990 and 2002, there was a modest increase in the percentage of students who report that religion has a very important role in their lives, so that in 2002, about one-third of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reported this connection, compared to 28 to 29% (depending on grade level) in 1990.^{xii}

Increased Risk Factors for Boys

Statistics show boys are at greater risk than girls for developing learning disabilities,^{xlii} illiteracy,^{xliii} dropping out of school,^{xliiv} substance abuse problems,^{xliv} violence, juvenile arrest, and early death caused by violent behavior.^{xlvi} As boys grow older, risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug abuse,^{xlvii} become more prevalent and gang involvement increases.^{xlviii}

Mortality and Victimization

- Death rates are more than twice as high for adolescent males compared to adolescent females.^{xlix}
- An estimated 1,600 persons under age 18 were murdered in the U.S. in 2002. About two-thirds (64%) of these juvenile murder victims were male.ⁱ
- Rates of suicide for adolescent males (12 per 100,000 youth) are more than five times the rate for adolescent females (2 per 100,000 youth).ⁱⁱ
- From 1993 through 2003, the nonfatal violent victimization rate for males ages 12–17 was about 50% greater than that for females.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Injury and violence are the leading cause of death among youth ages 5-19;^{liii} motor vehicle crashes account for approximately 40% of all teen deaths;^{liv} and almost one-quarter of young drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking alcohol. More male drivers ages 15 to 20 are involved in fatal car crashes than females and they are also more likely to have an alcohol-involved fatal crash.^{lv}
- In 2002, 1.6 million youths, or 7% of 12 to 17-year-olds, ran away from home and slept on the street during the past 12 months. About 55% were male.^{lvi}

Juvenile Delinquency

- In 2003, 71% of all juveniles arrested ages 17 and under (2.2 million) were boys, and boys represented 85% of juvenile offenders in residential placement.^{lvii}
- Juvenile arrest rates for Property Crime Index offenses (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson) declined in 2003, falling 46% since 1980. In 2003, boys accounted for 68% of all juvenile property crime arrests.^{lviii}

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- About 15% of all juvenile arrests were for Violent Crime Index offenses (murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault). In 2003, boys represented 82% of all juvenile arrests for violent crimes.^{lix} This rate declined in 2003 for the ninth consecutive year, falling 48% from its 1994 peak and reaching its lowest level since at least 1980.
- In 2003, the male juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate was 4.2 times the female rate compared to 8.3 times the female rate in 1980. The gender disparity between male and female violent crime arrest rates has decreased, reflecting an overall 26% decline in the male rate coupled with a 47% increase in the female rate.^{lxi}

Substance Abuse

- According to the 2004 Monitoring the Future Survey, the proportion of 12th graders who had used marijuana in the past 12 months, is higher among males than females (37% versus 31%) along with the proportion using marijuana daily (8% versus 3% for females). This gender difference is also true among 8th and 10th grade students.^{lxii}
- The annual prevalence-of-use rates on most other illicit drugs tend to be at least one and one-half to two times higher for males than females in the 12th grade. For many of these drugs, however, there is little gender difference in use among 8th and 10th graders; the differences between boys and girls seem to emerge over the course of middle to late adolescence.^{lxiii}
- Boys are also more likely to use alcohol frequently. For example, daily alcohol use is reported by 4.1% of the 12th-grade males versus 1.4% of the 12th grade females. Males are more likely than females to drink large quantities of alcohol in a single sitting: 34% of 12th-grade males reported drinking five or more drinks in a row in the prior two weeks versus 24% of 12th-grade females. These gender differences become considerably larger at the upper grade levels.^{lxiv} However, in the last two years, 8th grade girls actually had a higher binge drinking rate than 8th grade boys—11.8% vs10.8%.^{lxv}

Education

- Female high school seniors tend to have higher educational aspirations than their male peers and are more likely to enroll in college immediately after graduating from high school. Females also account for the majority of undergraduate enrollment and the majority of bachelor's and master's degree recipients. Females still lag behind males in enrollment in first-professional (e.g., law, medicine) and doctoral programs, but they have made gains in the past 30 years and are closing the gender gap.^{lxvi}
- Boys often begin to fall behind girls in reading^{lxvii, lxviii} and writing achievement in elementary school,^{lxix} and boys often show signs of behavioral problems early in life.^{lxx} Poor academic achievement is related to higher rates of school dropout^{lxxi} and juvenile delinquency.^{lxxii}
- Girls performed better than boys at every grade level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment in 2002.^{lxxiii}
- In 2004, 12% of males ages 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, compared with 9% of females. Although males comprise one-half of the population, they make up 57% of the dropouts in this age group.^{lxxiv}

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