

## Ten Things Teens Should Know About Marriage: Research Resources

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Developed for the Dibble Institute for Marriage Education

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### Ten Things Teens Should Know About Marriage: Sources and Explanation

1. **On the benefits of marriage:** Adults who get married are already somewhat better off than those who don't, but marriage itself brings many beneficial consequences. Research findings on the lifelong benefits of marriage are reviewed in Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). See also Norval Glenn, et.al. *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty One Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2002). For men, see Steven L. Nock, *Marriage in Men's Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
2. **On relationship and marriage education:** Large-scale evaluations of the effectiveness of high school level relationship education courses are not yet available. But the small-scale studies that have been done show positive outcomes. See, for example, Scott Gardner, "Evaluation of the Connections: Relationships and Marriage Curriculum," *Journal of Family and Consumer Science Education* 19(2001). The evaluation research that has been done on similar programs for older age groups is also positive. See, for example, P. Giblin et al., "Enrichment Outcome Research: A Meta-Analysis of Premarital, Marital, and Family Interventions," *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy* 11 (1985): 257-271; Jason S. Carroll and William J. Doherty, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs: A Meta-Analytic Review of Outcome Research," *Family Relations* 52 (2003) 105-118, Scott M. Stanley, "Making a Case for Premarital Education," *Family Relations* 50 (2001) 272-280; and Mark H. Butler and Karen S. Wampler, "A Meta-Analytic Update of Research on the Couple Communication Program," *American Journal of Family Therapy* 27 (1999) 223. The leading high-school level courses on marriage and relationship education are reviewed and discussed in Marline Pearson, *Can Kids Get Smart About Marriage?* (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2000). (Available on-line at [marriage.rutgers.edu](http://marriage.rutgers.edu)).
3. **On the connection between formal education and marriage:** On the relationship between educational level and marriage chances, see: Joshua R. Goldstein and Catherine T. Kenney, "Marriage Delayed or Marriage Forgone? New Cohort Forecasts of First Marriage for U. S. Women," *American Sociological Review* 66

(2001):506-519. On the relationship between educational level and divorce risks, see: Jay D. Teachman, "Stability Across Cohorts in Divorce Risk Factors," *Demography* 39 (2002): 331-351. There is, of course, a strong "kinds of people" effect in this research: The kinds of people who persist in getting a good education may also be those who are most likely to marry and to make their marriages work.

4. **On premarital sex:** About 65% of young people have had sex by the time they finish high school. Yet in recent national surveys 94% of adults and 93% of teens agreed that it was important "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." (See the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, "With One Voice 2002: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy," Washington, DC). The following research-based conclusion is reported in Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997) 238: "Sexual experience, and particularly age at first intercourse, represent critical indicators of the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Youth who begin having sex at younger ages are exposed to these risks over a longer period of time. Because sexual intercourse during the teen years, especially first intercourse, is often unplanned, it is also often unprotected by contraception. In addition, research has shown that youth who have early sexual experience are more likely at later ages to have more sexual partners and more frequent intercourse." One recent study of women found that having more than one sexual relationship prior to marriage is associated with an elevated risk of divorce. Jay Teachman, "Premarital Sex, Premarital Cohabitation, and the Risk of Subsequent Marital Dissolution Among Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 65 (2003): 444-455. See also: *When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998)
5. **On age at first marriage:** Depending on how the age categories are delineated and how long a time period after marriage is covered, teenage marriages have been found to be from two to three times more likely to end in divorce compared to marriages at older ages. See T. C. Martin and L. Bumpass "Recent Trends in Marital Disruption" *Demography* 26 (1989): 37-51. A recent government study found that about 59% of marriages for women under age 18 end in divorce or separation within 15 years, compared with 36% of those married at age 20 or older. See M. D. Bramlett and W. D. Mosher, *Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States*, Vital Health Statistics 23 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).
6. **On age at having first child:** The effects of unmarried teen pregnancy, including poverty, lower educational accomplishment, and health problems, are reviewed in R. A. Maynard (ed.) *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1997). According to one calculation, of those women who finished high school, married before having a child, and had the child after age 20, only 8% ended up being poor. Of those who failed to do each of these things, 79% became poor. See the Center for the Study of Social Policy, *Kids Count Data Book* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1993). For men, see: Steven L. Nock, "The Consequences of Premarital Fatherhood," *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 250-263.

The likelihood that a woman will eventually marry is significantly lower for those

who first had a child out of wedlock. By age 35, only 70% of all unwed mothers are married in contrast to 88% of women who have not had a child out of wedlock. See Daniel T. Lichter and Deborah Roempke Graefe, "Finding a Mate? The Marital and Cohabitation Histories of Unwed Mothers," in Lawrence L. Wu and Barbara Wolfe (eds.) *Out of Wedlock: Trends, Causes and Consequences of Nonmarital Fertility* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

On the consequences for children of growing up in single-parent and never-married parent families, see Sara McLanahan and G. Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), and G. J. Duncan and J. Brooks-Gunn, *Consequences of Growing Up Poor* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). Children born out-of-wedlock are more likely to be poor, to have lower educational attainment, and to have a higher risk of teen and nonmarital childbearing themselves. See also J. Seltzer, "Families Formed Outside of Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 (2000): 1247-1268; W. S. Aquilino, "The Life Course of Children Born to Unmarried Mothers: Childhood Living Arrangements and Young Adult Outcomes," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 293-310).

7. **On choosing a marriage partner:** Research on mate selection and marital success is reviewed in Jeffry H. Larson and Thomas B. Holman, "Premarital Predictors of Marital Quality and Stability" *Family Relations* 43 (1994): 228-237. Children from divorced homes should be particularly mindful when selecting a marriage partner. They have a higher risk of divorce when they marry, and higher still if the person they marry also comes from a divorced home. One study found that when the wife alone had experienced a parental divorce, the odds of divorce increased by more than half (59%), and when both spouses experienced parental divorce, the odds of divorce nearly tripled (189%). See Paul R. Amato, "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 628-640.
8. **On the effects of premarital cohabitation:** The available research on the effects of premarital cohabitation is reviewed in David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together?: What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation before Marriage*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2002. (Available on-line at [marriage.rutgers.edu](http://marriage.rutgers.edu)) Marriages preceded by cohabitation are as much as 50% more likely to end in divorce. The higher divorce risk is due in part to the fact that people who cohabit tend to be more unconventional and already less committed to the institution of marriage. But the results of several studies suggest that the act of living together itself may change partners' attitudes toward marriage, contributing to making marriage less likely, or if marriage takes place, less successful. There is no higher divorce risk, however, if you live with someone to whom you already are engaged, which means "a ring and a wedding date," or if cohabitation is limited to one's future spouse. Some of the major research sources on this topic are: Jay Teachman, "Premarital Sex, Premarital Cohabitation, and the Risk of Subsequent Marital Dissolution Among Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 65 (2003): 444-455; Alfred DeMaris and K. Vaninadha Rao, "Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Instability in the United States: A Reassessment," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54 (1992):178-190; Pamela J. Smock, "Cohabitation in the United States," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000); William G. Axinn and Jennifer S. Barber, "Living Arrangements and Family Formation Attitudes in Early Adulthood," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*

59 (1997): 595-611; Susan L. Brown, "The Effect of Union Type on Psychological Well-Being: Depression Among Cohabitors Versus Marrieds," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (2000): 241-55; Catherine L. Cohan and Stacey Kleinbaum, "Toward a Greater Understanding of the Cohabitation Effect: Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Communication," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 64 (2002): 180-192.

9. **On relationships with parents and other adults:** The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, which includes data on 90,118 American adolescents, found that when adolescents feel connected to their parents (e.g., feelings of warmth, love and caring from parents) they are less likely than other adolescents to: suffer from emotional distress, have suicidal thoughts and behaviors, use violence, smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. They also have their first sexual experience later than adolescents who are not connected to their parents. See Michael D. Resnick, et. al. "Protecting Adolescents from Harm," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Sept. 10, 1997). On the importance of parent substitutes, see: Emmy E. Werner and Ruth S. Smith, *Overcoming the Odds: High-Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
10. **On premarital education:** Research on the effectiveness of premarital education programs, although limited, shows quite positive results. See Jason S. Carroll and William J. Doherty, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Premarital Prevention Programs: A Meta-Analytic Review of Outcome Research," *Family Relations* 52 (2003) 105-118; Scott M. Stanley, "Making a Case for Premarital Education," *Family Relations* 50 (2001) 272-280; and L. Knutson, et al., "Effectiveness of the PREPARE Program with Premarital Couples," publication forthcoming.

**The Divorce Rate:** Some primary sources for the risk factors associated with divorce are: Jay D. Teachman, "Stability Across Cohorts in Divorce Risk Factors," *Demography* 39 (2002): 331-351; and Tim B. Heaton, "Factors Contributing to Increasing Marital Stability in the United States," *Journal of Family Issues* 23 (2002): 392-409

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The National Marriage Project's mission is to strengthen the institution of marriage by providing research and analysis that informs public policy, educates the American public, and focuses attention on the consequences of marriage decline for millions of American children.

The project is co-directed by two nationally prominent family experts: David Popenoe, PhD, a professor and former social and behavioral sciences dean at Rutgers, and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, PhD, an author and social critic.

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The Dibble Institute for Marriage Education is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping young people learn skills which enable successful relationships and marriages. We serve as a nationwide advocate and resource for youth marriage education and publish materials which help teach

relationship skills.

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