



# Whose Kids?...Our Kids!

## Merrimack School District Teen Sexuality

Recently, the Merrimack School District, Hillsborough County UNH Cooperative Extension and community members joined together to learn more about the youth in our community by conducting the Teen Assessment Project (TAP).

Approximately 86% of the students were surveyed in the Merrimack School District. In all, information from 1940 surveys was used for this newsletter.

		Male	Female
371	7th graders	196	175
339	8th graders	182	157
341	9th graders	156	185
311	10th graders	155	156
326	11th graders	161	165
252	12th graders	114	138

“Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” is a parent newsletter series of the Teen Assessment Project (TAP), a program of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Support for this project was provided by a grant received from the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Program. The Teen Assessment Project (TAP) originated at the University of Wisconsin at Madison under the direction of Stephen A. Small, Ph.D. TAP in Hillsborough County is under the direction of Penny Turner and Carla Billingham, UNH Cooperative Extension Educators in cooperation with Charlotte W. Cross, UNH Cooperative Extension, Youth Development Specialist. For more information about TAP call Charlotte W. Cross at (603) 862-2495 or e-mail at [charlotte.cross@unh.edu](mailto:charlotte.cross@unh.edu).

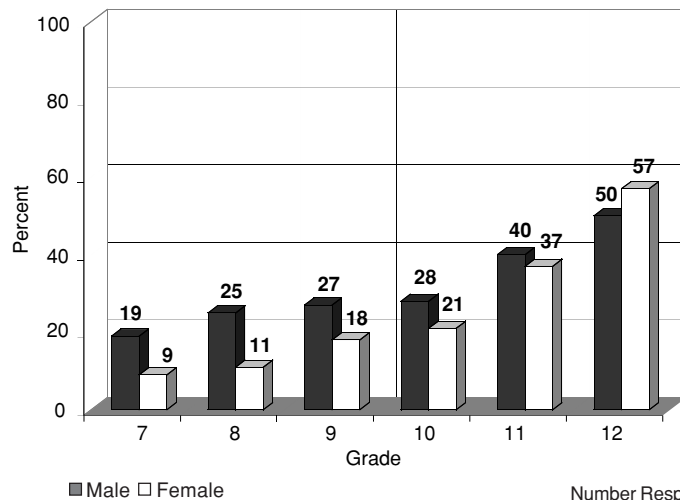
Our survey of local youth covered many areas of concern to adolescents and their parents. This issue of WHOSE KIDS?...OUR KIDS! looks at the topic of teen sexuality.

### Sexual Activity Among Local Youth

A fear for many parents is that their children will become sexually active before they’re ready. Parents fear an unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), emotional harm, date rape, and sexual abuse. Most parents feel early sexual experiences will harm their children.

As the following chart shows, almost 1 in 4 teens (22%) in the 9th grade have had sexual intercourse. In 12th grade more than half (54%) have had intercourse. The number of youth who have had sex generally increases with age. The average age teens first had sex is 14. On the other hand, about 4 out of 5 middle school youth *have never* had sexual intercourse (boys, 78%; girls, 90%). In the high school years, 2 out of 3 (67%) *have never* had sex (boys, 65%; girls, 68%).

Teens Who Have Had Sexual Intercourse



## Communicating With Our Teens About Sex

Most parents feel nervous and not prepared to discuss sexuality with their teens. Here are some hints to help you talk to your child.

- Get the facts straight. There are many good books to help you learn about adolescent sexuality. Ask the town librarian for recommendations.
- Don't be afraid to admit to yourself and your teen that you are not comfortable with the topic.
- If you don't know an answer to a question your teen asks, say so. No one knows all the answers about sex.
- Listen to yourself as well as to your children. When you talk to your teen, are you telling him/her your values or what you think is most important about sexuality?
- You and your child may disagree. Try to talk about a topic, not argue.
- Try to convey to your teenager you care more about his/her health and happiness than what he/she did on last night's date.

### Tips for Parents

What can parents do? We hope you've been able to talk with your children about sexuality as they've been growing up. If not, it's never too late — start now! In her book, *Straight From the Heart*, Carol Cassel offers the following hints for getting started.

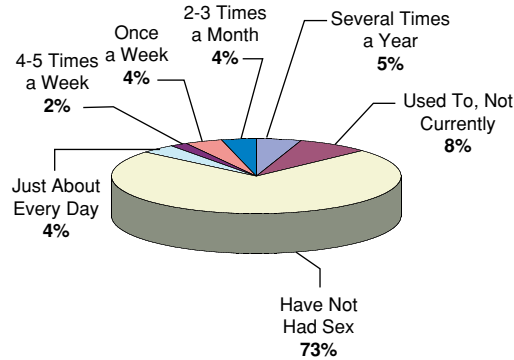
#### • Seize the moment.

While doing a job together, or watching TV, talk to your child about a sexual issue. Choose a night, choose a TV program (the "soaps" are ideal), and watch with your child. Many of the TV scenes can lead into a good talk about sexuality.

Continued on page 3

One in 12 local youth (8%) used to be sexually active but aren't now. About 1 in 5 youth (19%) are currently sexually active. Another 73% of local youth have never been sexually active (84%, middle school; 67%, high school). The chart below shows how often teens have sex.

Frequency of Sexual Activity



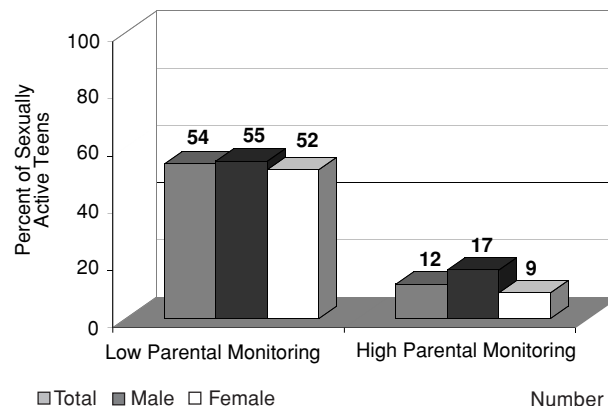
Number Responding 1925

Since many teens are having intercourse, most adults hope they're protecting themselves from pregnancy. Unfortunately, many teenagers don't always use birth control. Over half of the sexually active teens (52%) reported they didn't always use birth control (53%, boys; 51%, girls). Less than half (46%) of 12th graders who have sex always use birth control (29%, boys; 59%, girls). This means that a large number of local teens are at risk for pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

## Parental Monitoring and Levels of Teen Sexual Activity

Parental monitoring is an important factor in preventing adolescent problem behavior. Parental monitoring means parents supervise their children or know where they are and what they're doing. Higher levels of parental monitoring are related to lower levels of sexual activity in teens. The level of sexual activity of teens is greater when parents don't supervise them closely.

Relationship Between Parental Monitoring and Levels of Teen Sexual Activity



Number Responding 1925

### Tips for Parents

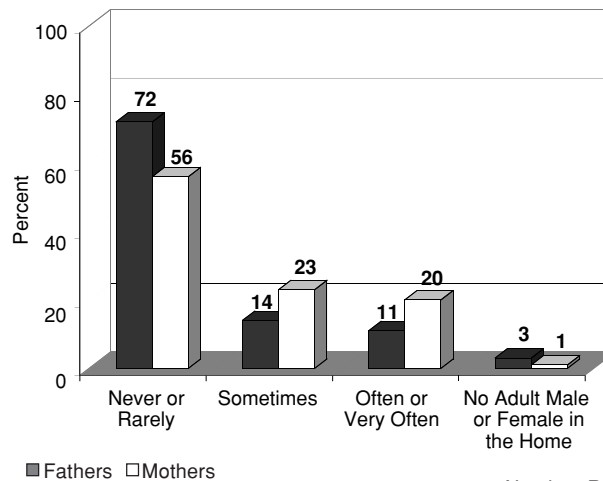
- **Be alert to moments to teach.**  
As your teen's body is changing, use this chance to discuss the subject. An easy opener could be, "You are really growing up. One of the experiences you may soon have, or already have had, is ...."
- **Get to the point.**  
Answer your teenagers' questions without being too boring or jumping to conclusions. Don't accuse them of having sex just because they ask a question, they may only be curious. If you don't know an answer, say so. Offer to find out for them. Buy them their own book on teenage sexuality. Talk with them about the books.
- **Honor their privacy.**  
What your teenager tells you should remain confidential. Don't tell your friends or relatives what your teen has told you.
- **Be available, but don't push.**  
Answer questions, and ask if there's anything else your teen wants to talk about.
- **Discuss, don't dictate.**  
You can talk about what you think is important while respecting your child's views. Ask questions to make your teen think. When a boy and girl have intercourse, what does the girl think about the relationship? What about the boy? What could he be thinking?

*Be aware of your own values, beliefs, ideas, and fears.*

## Parent-Teen Communication About Sexuality

How do teenagers learn about sexuality? Do they get education at home, at school, or at church? Do you talk with your child about his/her developing sexuality? We asked teens if their mothers or fathers talked with them about sex or birth control. Many parents don't talk to their teens about whether or not it's okay for teenagers to have sex. Over half of all teens (56%) reported that their mothers never or rarely talked to them about teen sexual activity. Even more adolescents (72%) said their fathers never talked to them about their attitudes on teen sex.

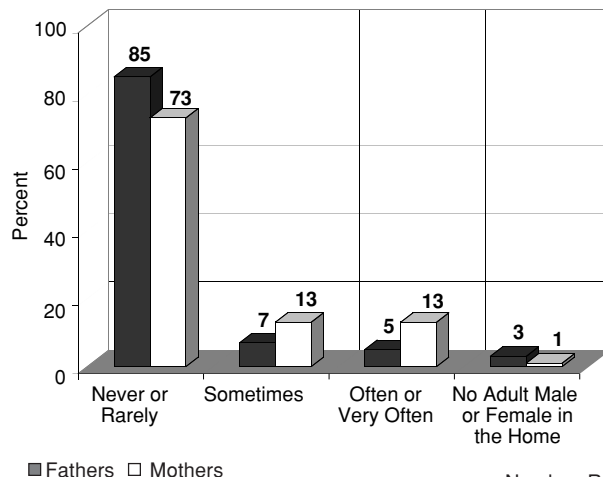
**Talks With Parents About Whether or Not it is Okay to Have Sex**



Number Responding About Fathers 1923 - Mothers 1928

If you haven't talked with your adolescent about birth control, you aren't alone. Many teens (73%) reported they never or rarely talked to their mothers about birth control. Even more teens (85%) said they never or rarely talked to their fathers. Although you may find it is difficult, it is important to talk with your teen about sexuality issues.

**Talks With Parents About Birth Control**



Number Responding About Fathers 1917 - Mothers 1924

## National Trends

A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (1998) shows that over half of the U.S. high school students have had sexual intercourse. Over 1 out of 3 freshman (38%) and 3 out of 5 seniors (61%) reported having had sexual intercourse. Nearly 1 of 5 high school students have had four or more sexual partners before their graduation. About half of the sexually active high school youth reported that they or their partners used condoms during last intercourse (63%, males; 51%, females). One in 4 sexually active high school youth reported that they had used alcohol or drugs before last intercourse (31%, males; 19% females).

About one-half of all teenagers use contraceptives the first time they have intercourse. Younger teens are even less likely to use contraceptives. Many teens who plan ahead for first intercourse are much more likely to use contraception. Half of all first pregnancies happen in the first six months of having intercourse. About 1 in 5 first pregnancies happen in the first month.

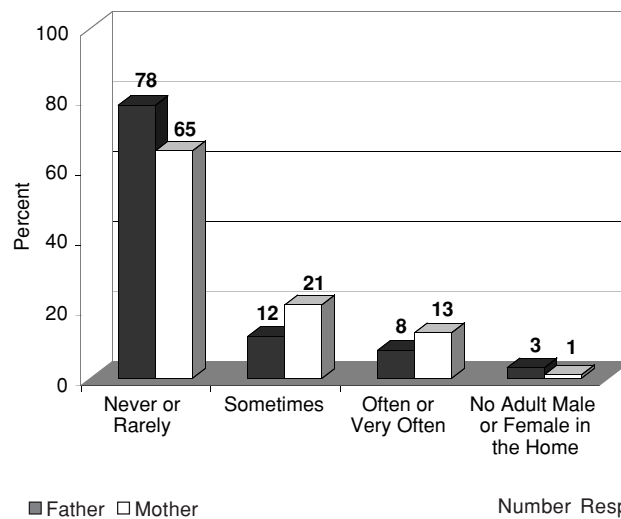
These statistics paint a frightening picture of the risk of unplanned pregnancy. Most girls say they are surprised when they find out they are pregnant. They give many reasons for being surprised. They think they didn't have sex often enough. They were at the wrong point in their menstrual cycle. They were too young. They didn't have an orgasm. The boy had withdrawn before he ejaculated. Some girls forgot to use a method of birth control. Some believed they wouldn't get pregnant.

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually active teens are at high risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Female teens have a high rate of gonorrhea, chlamydia cervicitis, pelvic inflammatory disease (P.I.D.) and cytomegalovirus. There is growing concern that AIDS victims in their 20's contracted or caught the disease in late adolescence. Teens use condoms sometimes but not always.

In addition to sexuality and birth control, most parents also don't talk to their teens about the dangers of AIDS and other STDs. Over half of all teens (65%) reported that their mothers never or rarely talked to them about AIDS or other STDs. Again, even more (78%) said their fathers never or rarely talked to them about this subject.

**Talks With Parents About the Dangers of AIDS, HIV, or Other STDs**



Number Responding About Fathers 1917 - Mothers 1931

## Consequences and Parental Values Versus Levels of Teen Sexual Activity

Local teens were much less likely to have sex if they felt they would get in trouble at home. Survey results showed that 7 out of 10 (72%) were sexually active if they did *not* feel they would get in trouble at home versus 1 out of 7 (14%) if they thought they would get in trouble at home. Teens are also less likely to be sexually active if their parents talk to them about parental feelings about teen sex. We asked local teens how much they agreed with the statement, "My parent(s) think it is wrong for teens my age to have sexual intercourse." Local teens who feel their parents think it's wrong for teens to have sexual intercourse are much less likely to be sexually active. This is illustrated in the chart on the following page.

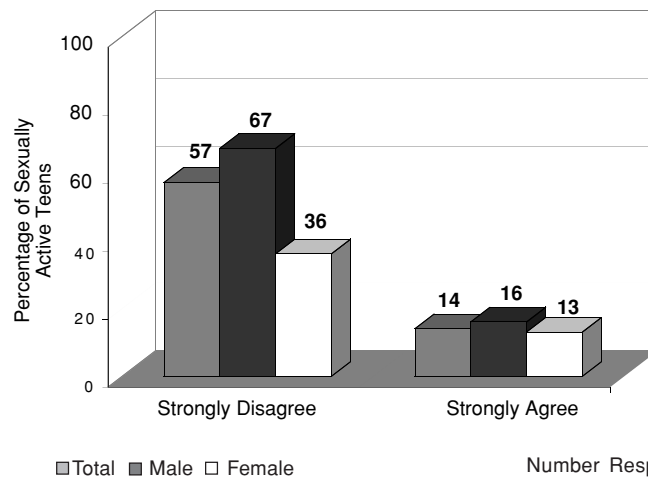
## Why Are Teens Sexually Active?

There are many reasons why teens are sexually active. Obviously, teens are going through changes in their bodies. For example, changes in hormone levels cause breast development, hair growth, and the deepening of male voices. The hormonal changes may increase teens' sex drive, thus contributing to sexual activity.

In addition to the physical changes taking place, teens are also starting a period of greater independence. The teen is balancing parental beliefs, peer group influences, media messages, body changes, and personal values. All of these things contribute to his or her sexual behavior. Researchers have found the following about teen sexuality:

- Teens who can't talk with their parents are more likely to have sex early. They're also more likely to begin smoking and drinking earlier.
- Teens whose parents supervise them closely are likely to begin intercourse later. These parents know where their teenagers are and who they are with. They check to see if there is adult supervision when appropriate.
- Some fathers may believe sex is okay for boys, but not girls. This gives girls and boys different messages.
- The more often parents talk to children about sexuality, the later teens are likely to begin sexual intercourse.
- What kids *think* their peers are doing affects early intercourse *more than* what their peers are *actually doing*.
- Teens who are not doing well in school or don't care about education are more likely to have sex at an early age.

*“My parents think it's wrong for teens my age to have sexual intercourse.”*



## Have You Talked to Your Adolescent About Sex?

Have you talked to your teen about the topics in the box below? Are you embarrassed? Do you know about all the topics? Do you know how you feel about the topics? Do you know how to discuss the subject? Are you put off when your teen says, “Oh Mom, I know that!” **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** Don't give up! Try a new approach, buy a book, or talk to a friend. Find a way to talk with your teenager.

*Think how much you have talked about the topics listed below with your teen. If you have not discussed the subjects below with your adolescent to the degree that you would like, decide when you will.*

	Never	Somewhat	Enough
Body changes during puberty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Menstruation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wet dreams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homosexuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Peer pressure to be sexually active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender roles (what does it mean to be male/female)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conception/reproduction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anatomy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Masturbation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contraceptives/birth control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your values/beliefs about the above topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Resources For Parents

- Acker, L., Goldwater, B. & Dyson, W. (1992). **AIDS-Proofing Your Kids: A Step-By-Step Guide.** Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing.
- Boston Women's Health Book Collective. (1992). **The New Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book By and For Women.** Old Tappan, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Griffin, C.W., Wirth, M.J., & Wirth, A.G. (1996). **Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbians and Gays Talk About Their Experiences.** New York: Prentice Hall
- Reiss, I. L. (1990). **An End To Shame: Shaping Our Next Sexual Revolution.** Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.

## Resources For Young People

- Bell, R. (1988). **Changing Bodies: Changing Lives.** New York: Random House.
- Hein, K. & DiGeronimo, T.F. (1993). **AIDS: Trading Fears for Facts-A Guide for Teens.** Fairfield, OH: Consumer Reports Books.
- Heron, A. (1995). **Two Teenagers in Twenty: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth.** Boston: Alyson Publications.
- Johnson, E. (Magic). (1993). **What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS.** San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- SIECUS. (1992). **Talk About Sex: A Booklet for Young People on How to Talk About Sexuality and HIV/AIDS.** (Available for \$2 from SIECUS, 130 West 42nd St., Suite 2500, New York, NY).

## UNH Cooperative Extension Resources:

- **Publication Series:**  
Living with your Teenager
- **Workshop Series:**  
Family Focus: Parenting the Adolescent

## Helpful Resources

### Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse Info Line (Nashua).....	883-0377
Child Help USA Child Abuse Hotline .....	1-800-422-4453
NH Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) .....	1-800-894-5533
Rape & Assault Support Services .....	883-3044

### Alcohol and Drug Abuse

AA/Al-Anon/Alateen .....	882-2259
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) .....	1-800-593-3330
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Recovery .....	1-800-852-3345 ext. 6100
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services Hotline .....	1-800-593-3330
Narcotics Anonymous .....	645-4777
National Drug Info Hotline .....	1-800-662-4357

### Counseling Services

Growth & Healing Groups .....	598-6205 ext. 20
Nashua Youth Council (counseling) .....	889-1090
ParentLine .....	1-800-640-6486
Parent to Parent of NH Family Support Network .....	1-800-698-5465
SAF-TALK Peer support (3-9 p.m.) .....	424-2822

### Crisis Hot Lines

Mental Health Crisis Line .....	1-800-987-6562
Boys Town Hotline .....	1-800-448-3000
TeenLine (confidential, for any problem) .....	1-800-639-6095
Youth Crisis Hotline .....	1-800-448-4663

### Family Planning/Health Services

Child & Family Services Pregnancy Counseling .....	1-800-640-6486
Nashua Crisis Pregnancy Center .....	883-1122

### Information and Referral

Nashua Information and Referral .....	883-9330
Help Line (also crisis intervention) .....	1-800-852-3388
Portsmouth Pavilion (mental health referrals) .....	1-800-924-1086

### Runaway

Child & Family Services of NH Group Home .....	224-9313
National Runaway Switchboard .....	1-800-621-4000

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases

STD Information & Testing .....	594-3355
National STD Hotline .....	1-800-227-8922
NH AIDS Hotline .....	1-800-752-2437
Southern NH - HIV/AIDS Task Force .....	595-8464

### Suicide and Depression

New Life Ministries – Crisis Line .....	1-800-639-5433
The Samaritans .....	424-8070

### UNH Cooperative Extension

Hillsborough County, Family and 4-H Youth Development .....	673-2510
---	----------

**Also see the "Self-Help Guide to Human Services in N.H." at the front of your telephone book.**

This newsletter was based on a publication by Donell Kerns, University of Wisconsin at Madison. The UNH Cooperative Extension newsletter "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" was edited by Charlotte W. Cross, Extension Specialist, Youth Development and Mary W. Temke, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Human Development, with technical assistance from Karen M. Watts, Program Assistant, UNH Cooperative Extension. Desktop publishing provided by UNHCE Educational Marketing & Information Office.

### "Helping You Put Knowledge and Research To Work"

The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.