



Teen Relationships Study
TeenTalk on Parents, Marriage and Sex

A statewide look at the attitudes of teens on
marriage, family, and relationships

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Barna Research Group, Ltd. was hired to assist with the design of the survey, conduct all the interviews, tabulate and analyze the data, and report the findings of this research. Cover design produced by Corey Yiap of WorldStream Communications. Layout by Anthony Perez of Soul Design. Questions about this study should be directed to Dawn Wilson at Families Northwest.



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I. TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Table of Contents	pg. 2
II. Introduction	pg. 3
III. Executive Summary	pg. 4
IV. TeenTalk on Parents	pg. 7
V. TeenTalk on Marriage and Sex	pg. 14
VI. Teens in Washington	pg. 22
VII. Recommendations	pg. 26
VIII. Resources	pg. 29
IX. Methodology	pg. 31
X. Endnotes	pg. 32



II. INTRODUCTION

*Parents and children...*the image is a “warm fuzzy,” mom and dad walking hand-in-hand with smiling, energetic youngsters scampering around them. But add some additional information to the scene...*parents and their teenaged children...*and the stereotypical image explodes in conflict – the “warm fuzzy” is overcome by an icy stare.



Is this impression of conflict and cold silence an accurate picture of relationships between parents and teenagers today? Is “survival” the best parents can hope for as they endure their teenager’s progression to independence? Or are the teenage years an opportunity for parents to have a significant and lifelong influence – for better or for worse – in their children’s lives?

Observe any group of preschoolers at play and eventually someone will be the bride and someone will be the groom as they “play wedding.” No doubt the conversations of “twenty-something’s” include the latest friend to “take the plunge” or the upcoming social calendar’s plethora of nuptials. Convention centers book wedding expositions at least twice a year, and department stores devote floor space and personnel to create wedding registries – all for the purpose of helping an overwhelmed bride and groom plan their “perfect” day.

People consider weddings to be a sacred event, but what do they think about marriage? More specifically, what do teens – the people living and developing through the last stage of life before reaching “marrying age” – think about a relationship and institution that will be a significant part of their lives, in the near future? Is marriage a desirable relationship, or is it a relic of times gone by? Are resources and relationships that will teach teens about choosing the right partner as accessible as those that will teach them about picking the right cake or the right china pattern?

In January 2000, Families Northwest conducted research in Washington State that reveals the relationship between parents and teens is more like diet and exercise than gasoline and matches. The parent-teen relationship offers many positive, healthy benefits and Washington teens, for the most part, recognize, desire, and have good relationships with their parents. But, in some cases, just like with diet and exercise, there are obstacles that make it easier to be a “couch potato” and accept negative or nonexistent relationships. And, the research shows that the attitudes of Washington teens are generally hopeful about marriage. Teens want the ideal and they recognize that it will take deliberate effort to achieve it.

Why did we do the research?

Primary Goal I

To gather information about the next generation’s attitudes toward marriage and parenting and their expectations for their future roles as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.

Primary Goal II

To establish a benchmark by which the next generation’s attitudes, expectations, and behaviors, relative to their interpersonal relationships, can be measured and assessed over time.

Secondary Goal

To create an objective, respectable, and reputable tool that can be used by Families Northwest to raise awareness and discussion in various arenas of influence (media, legislature, churches, business, youth leaders, etc.) about the importance of preparing youth for healthy relationships.

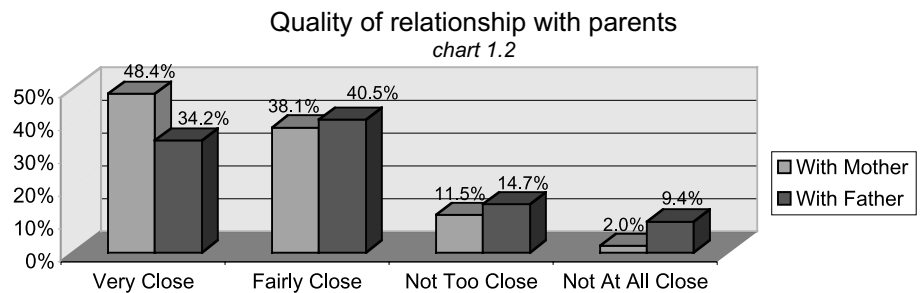
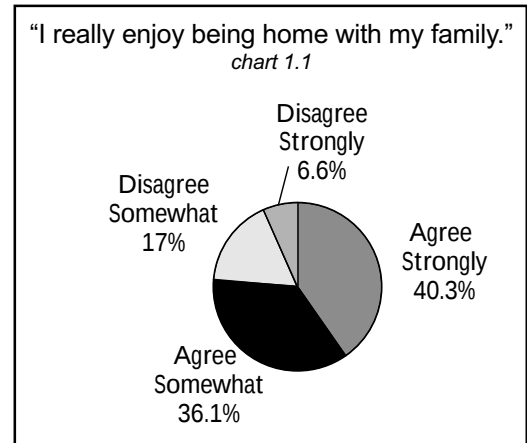
III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TeenTalk on Parents

The relationship between parents and their teenagers is often thought to be one of conflict and tension, but recently conducted research in the state of Washington paints a more positive picture.

Washington teens want and have strong relationships with their parents.

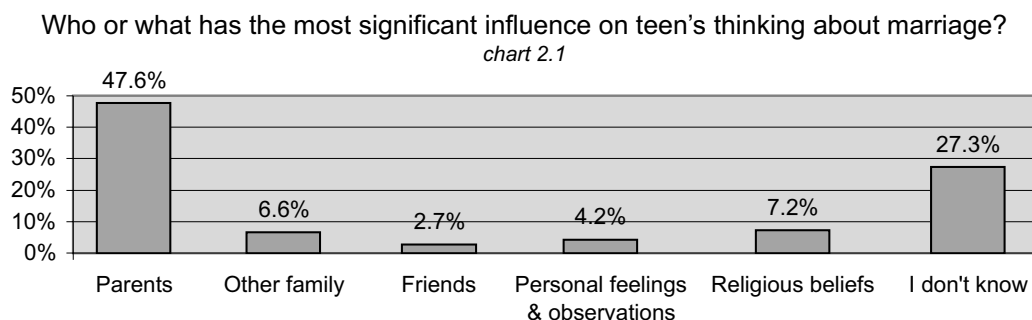
- More than three-quarters (76.4%) of Washington teens “really enjoy being at home with their family.”
- Nearly half (48.4%) of the teens in Washington say their relationship with their mother is “very close.” A substantial majority of teens (74.7%) report “very close” and “fairly close” relationships with their father.



- Approximately two of every three teens in Washington feel all of the relationships in their family are healthy (29.9% rate them as “very healthy” and 36.6% rate them as “pretty healthy”), while the remaining one-third report some unhealthy relationships in their immediate family.

Positive parental relationships lay the foundation for teens’ healthy decisions.

- Teens who report having healthy family relationships and/or close relationships with their parents are more likely to express positive attitudes about their future relationships and are more likely to avoid behaviors that could damage those relationships.
- Nearly half of all teens (47.6%) look to their parents as the “single, most significant influence on (their) thinking about what it will take to have a good marriage.” And about 6 of 10 teens (59.7%) agree that “Someday (they) hope to have a marriage like (their) parents have” (39.6% agree strongly with this statement and 20.1% agree somewhat).



- More than 8 in 10 teens (83.8%) agree that “It is best for a child to be raised by a married mother and father” (64.3% agree strongly and 19.5% agree somewhat).
- Overall, fairly low percentages of teens participated in risky behaviors (cheating on tests, looking at pornography, using drugs or alcohol, having sex, etc.) on a “frequent” or “occasional” basis. However, the characteristics of teens more likely to engage in these behaviors were fairly consistent: teens who said their family relationships were not healthy, those living with a single parent, or teens who do not have close relationships with their mother and/or father. Teens who engage in one of these risky behaviors are also significantly more likely to be involved in others.

Positive parental relationships influence other teen relationships.

- Almost 8 of 10 Washington teens (79.8%) say that it is important for their parents to accept their close friends (39.3% say it is “very important,” 40.5% say it is “some-what important”).

Equipped with the knowledge that most teens enjoy healthy family relationships and that these relationships lay a foundation for healthy attitudes and behaviors among teens, we can work to encourage and support teens and parents in their healthy interactions. This research, however, also identified a need for some teens to be introduced to such relationships so that they have a positive model to emulate, rather than just a negative model to avoid.

TeenTalk on Marriage and Sex

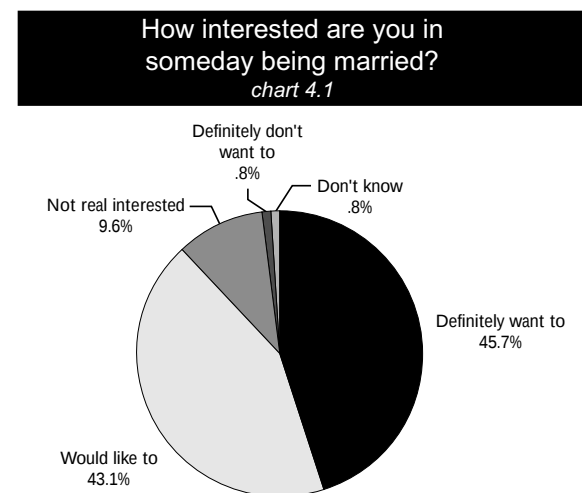
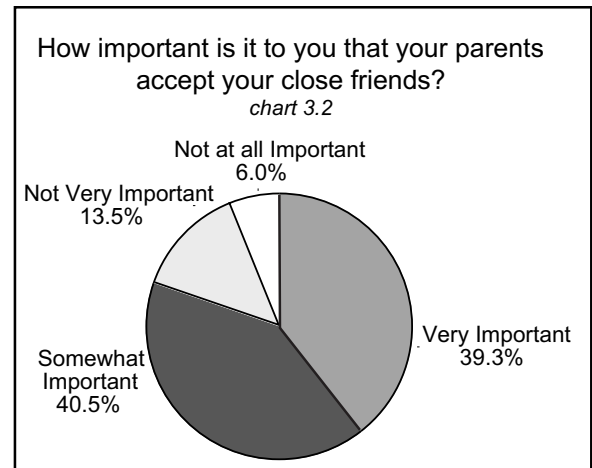
Marriage is a fundamental part of our culture and society; it is a significant part of virtually every person’s life whether or not it involves them as a spouse, a child, or a parent. As significant as the marriage relationship is, however, our culture seems to spend more time and attention on weddings than it does on the lifelong relationship that follows.

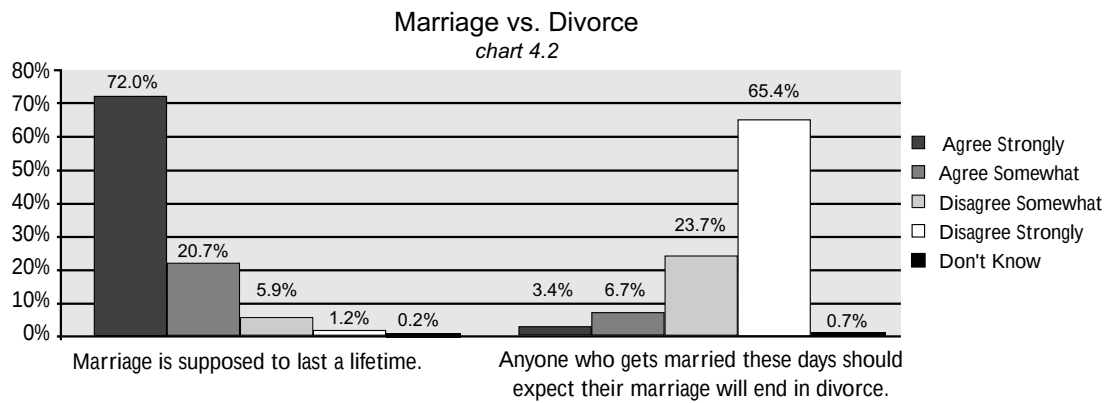
Teens are optimistic about their own future marriages, and generally view marriage as a positive and desirable relationship.

- Nearly all Washington teens (88%) express interest in getting married someday.
- Nearly all teens believe marriage is a lifelong relationship (93% agree) and disagree that couples should expect their marriage to end in divorced (90% disagree).
- More than 8 of 10 Washington teens believe that marriage is an important foundation for parenting; 84 percent agree that “It is best for children to be raised by a married mother and father.”

Teens generally have healthy and realistic expectations for marriage, but they need and want more intentional modeling and instruction.

- Washington teens recognize that having a strong marriage requires effort; “good communication,” “being faithful to your spouse,” and “being able to work through tough times” are rated “extremely important” to a good marriage by teens.





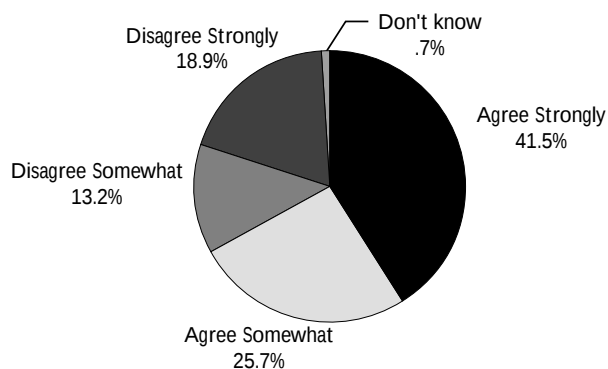
- Less than half of the teens in the state (39.9%) believe in the importance of premarital counseling to having a good marriage.
- While teens commonly look to their parents as the most significant influence on their thinking about marriage, more than one-quarter of teens “don’t know” who influences their thinking most.

Despite all of the cultural influences that separate sex from marriage, the majority of teens still connect sex with marriage.

- More than half of the teens in the state believe cohabitation is an important precursor to marriage, and about 6 in 10 teens think that they will live with someone before deciding whether or not to marry that person.
- On the other hand, 6 in 10 teens also believe that “It is realistic to expect a person to wait until they are married to have sex,” and more than 40 percent of teens believe the “right” time for a person to have sex is to “wait until they are married.”

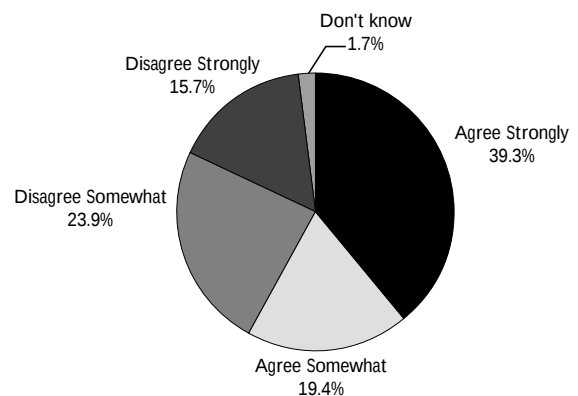
Before getting married, it's better to live with that person for a while to make sure that the two people are compatible.

chart 6.1



It is realistic to expect people to wait until they are married to have sex.

chart 6.2

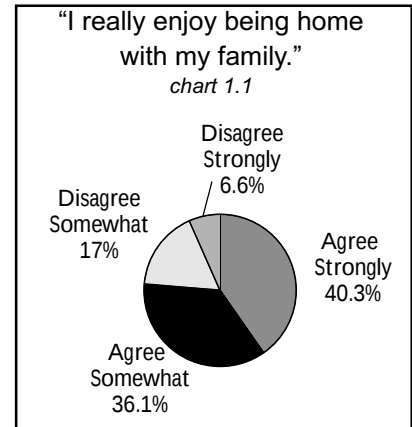


IV. TEENTALK ON PARENTS

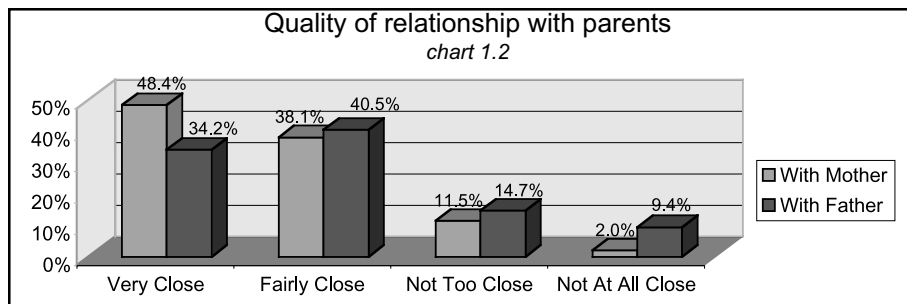
Washington teens want and have strong relationships with their parents.

More than three-quarters (76.4%) of Washington teens “really enjoy being at home with their family.” About 4 in 10 strongly agree with this idea, while an additional 36 percent “agree somewhat” that spending time with their family is enjoyable to them. Only 1 in 15 teens (6.6%) disagrees strongly with this belief (see chart 1.1).

What characteristics are associated with teens being more likely to enjoy family time? Middle-schoolers, teens with an “A” GPA, teens living with two parents, or teens who report being close to their mother and father are significantly more likely to agree that they enjoy spending time with family. On the other hand, high schoolers, teens with a “C or lower” GPA, teens who say their family relationships are not healthy, or who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months are more likely to disagree with this notion.¹



One of the factors more common among teens who enjoy spending time with their family is having close relationships with moms and dads. Nearly half (48.4%) of the teens in Washington say their relationship with their mother is “very close,” while an additional 38 percent say their relationship with their mom is “fairly close,” for a total of almost 9 of 10 teens enjoying a close relationship with mom (86.5%). While the incidence of close paternal relationships is slightly lower, a substantial majority of teens (74.7%) report “very close” and “fairly close” relationships with their father (see chart 1.2).



A teen’s belief that they have a close relationship with their mother and father is also associated with the teen reporting “hardly ever” or “never” having a “major argument with parents” in the past three months. Younger

teens (12-14 year olds, or middle-schoolers) and teens with an “A” GPA are also more likely to report less frequent conflict with their parents, while teens without close parental relationships are more likely to report having argued frequently or often with their parents.² Overall, only 15 percent of all teens say they have “frequently” had major arguments with their parents in the past three months, while 36 percent say they “hardly ever” argue and 21 percent say they have “never” had a major argument with their parents in the past three months.

Both the frequency of arguments and the level of closeness in relationships with their parents are related to teens’ assessments of the overall health of all the relationships in their immediate family (teen, parents, and siblings). Approximately two of every three teens in Washington

feel all of the relationships in their family are healthy (29.9% rate them as “very healthy” and 36.6% rate them as “pretty healthy”), while the remaining one-third report some unhealthy relationships in their immediate family. Teens who live with two parents or say they have close relationships with their mother and/or father are significantly more likely to say that all of their family relationships are healthy, while teens living in a single-parent or blended family, who are not close to their parents, or teens who have engaged frequently in risky behaviors (i.e., using drugs, having sex, etc.) in the past three months are more likely to report unhealthy family relationships.³

Not only do a majority of Washington teens, in their own opinion, have healthy relationships with their parents, they see value in strengthening those relationships. When asked about how some specific things could improve the quality of their life, Washington teens felt that having “more time to spend with (their) father” would yield the most improvement (55.9% said it would improve their lives “a lot” or “some”). “More really close friends” and “more time to spend with (their) mother” are thought to offer almost as much improvement to the quality of teens’ lives (55.2% of teens said “more really close friends” would improve the quality of their life “some” or “a lot,” and 53.3% said “more time to spend with mother” would improve the quality of their life “some” or “a lot”). Teens seem to know a good thing when they see it. Those who already report a close relationship with their father are more likely to say that having more time with their father would improve the quality of their lives. The same pattern was present among those who wanted more time with their mother.⁴

While Washington teens are more likely to think stronger relationships will improve the quality of their lives, a significant portion of teens believe having more money to spend on things they like would better their situations (44.5% said this would improve life “some” or “a lot”). Teens who are more likely to believe money will make things better however, are a dramatically different group than those who look to relationships. Teens who say they are not close to either parent, who live with a single-parent, or who have engaged in risky behaviors frequently in the past three months are significantly more likely than average to say that money would improve the quality of their lives.⁵

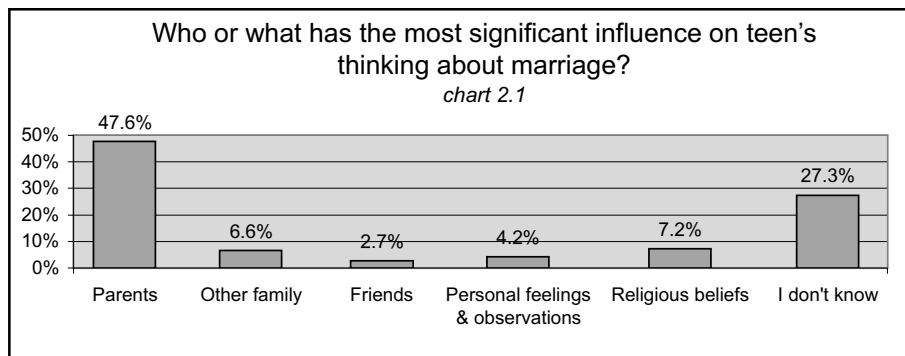
Positive parental relationships lay the foundation for teens’ healthy decisions

These study results point to a new kind of societal divide among today’s teens – new categories of the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Teens who say they have healthy family relationships are significantly more likely to have healthy ideas about their future family relationships (marriage and parenting) and are significantly more likely to be making healthy behavioral choices, while teens who say their family relationships are not healthy are less likely to be demonstrating healthy attitudes and behaviors.

Relationships of any type do not become healthy overnight; much thought and effort goes into building strong relationships – parent-child, husband-wife, and peer friendships. So while marriage may seem to be a “far-off in the future” concept to some Washington teens, many of them are already thinking about what role marriage will play in their lives.

Nearly half of all teens (47.6%) look to their parents as the “single, most significant influence

on (their) thinking about what it will take to have a good marriage” (see chart 2.1). Six of ten teens (59.7%) agree that “Someday (they) hope to have a marriage like (their) parents have” (39.6% agree strongly with this statement and 20.1% agree somewhat).

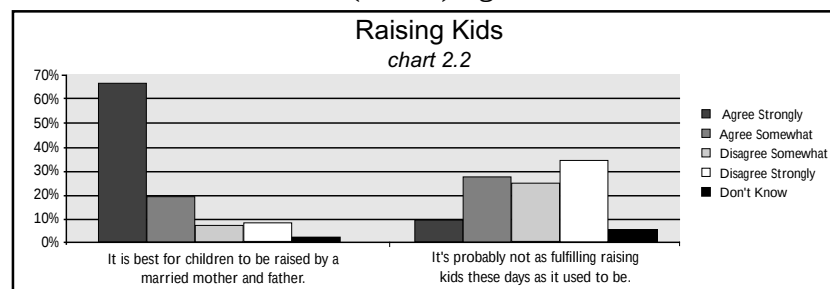


Not surprisingly, teens who are living with two parents, who have healthy family relationships, or who report close relationships with their mother and father are significantly more likely to agree that they want a marriage like their parents. On the other hand, teens living with a single-parent, those who report that their family relationships are not healthy, who aren't close to their parents, or teens who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months are more likely to disagree that they want a marriage like their parents.⁶

While it can be taken as a positive sign that teens who feel they are living with unhealthy relationships do not emulate them, for more than one-quarter of teens (27.3%) in Washington, the “single, most significant influence” on their thoughts about marriage is an unknown. This identifies a void and raises the question, “Where will these teens see a healthy model of marriage and family relationships?” Answering this question in theory and in practice needs to be a top priority if we want to equip teens to make healthy relationship decisions and avoid the potential emotional and physical damage done by broken relationships.

The “haves” possess a resource others lack when it comes to their future relationships. Not only are teens who consider their current family relationships close and healthy more likely to say they want to emulate their parents' marriage, they also believe their parents' approval is an important precursor to marriage. More than two-thirds (67.2%) of Washington teens believe “getting parents' approval” is an important accomplishment prior to marriage. Teens living with two parents, who have healthy family relationships and are close to their mom and dad, or teens who consider themselves Christians and attend church regularly are significantly more likely to agree that parents' approval is important, while teens in the converse circumstances are more likely to disagree.⁷

Healthy parent-teen relationships also impact teens' attitudes about parenting in general. More than 8 in 10 teens (83.8%) agree that “It is best for a child to be raised by a married



mother and father” (64.3% agree strongly and 19.5% agree somewhat — see chart 2.2). Teens living with two parents, teens who say their family relationships are healthy, or teens who say they are Christians are significantly more

likely to agree. Teens living with a single-parent, teens who say they are not close to their

mother and father, or those who have engaged in some risky behaviors in the past three months, are more likely to disagree with this idea.⁸

Close to 4 in 10 (38.5%) Washington teens are getting a less positive message about parenting these days. They agree that “It is probably not as fulfilling raising kids these days as it used to be.” (see *chart 2.2*) Younger teens (12-14 year olds or middle-schoolers) and those reporting a “C or lower” GPA are significantly more likely to feel this way, while older teens (17-18 year olds and high schoolers) are significantly more likely to disagree with this idea.⁹

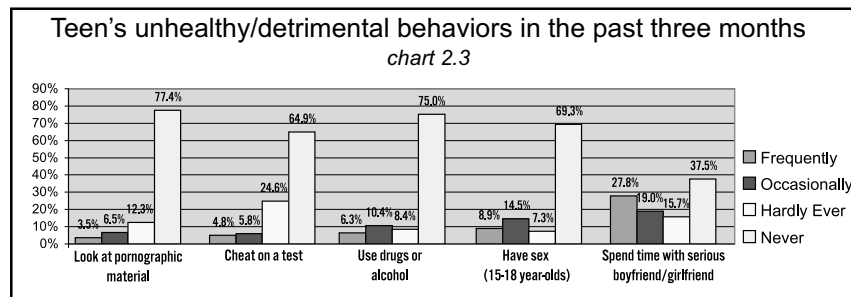
According to the teens themselves, overall, parents wield the most influence over teens’ views about family and relationships. Sixty percent of teens say their parents have “a lot” of influence on their views about family and relationships, and another 23 percent say their parents have “some” influence. Friends and religious beliefs garner the next highest level of influence, but are substantially lower than parents (33.9% say friends influence their views “a lot” and 32.1% say friends have “some” influence; 38.1% say religious beliefs influence their views “a lot” and 23.6% say religious beliefs have “some” influence).

Teens with healthy family relationships, who say they are close to their mom and dad, who live with two parents, who say they are Christians, or teens whose parents graduated from college are significantly more likely to say their parents have “a lot” or “some” influence on their views. On the other hand, teens living with a single-parent, who say their family relationships are not healthy and they are not close to their parents, or teens who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months are significantly more likely to say their parents have little or no influence on their views. However, given some of the views that teens with these characteristics are more likely to hold, it could be that their family situations exert more influence than they are willing to acknowledge.¹⁰

Interestingly, the influence that carries the least amount of weight with teens when it comes to family and relationships is the information they find on the Internet. More than 60 percent (63.2%) of teens say that the influence of the Internet on their thinking about family and relationships is “none.” Can the latest frontier in technological innovation that is currently a driving force in our nation’s economy really be having no influence on teens’ relationships? Can a venue where two-thirds of teens invested a significant amount of time in the past three months (33.8% surfed “frequently” and 33.3% surfed “occasionally”) have no effect on their views about relationships? Or are teens reporting that in their “surfing,” they aren’t encountering any information about family and relationships, and doesn’t that have an influence all by itself?

One characteristic that appears alongside the characteristic of unhealthy family relationships has been teens’ involvement in risky behaviors in the past three months. Washington teens were asked how often, if ever, they participated in certain activities over the past three months. Some of these behaviors – “use an illegal, nonprescription drug or alcohol,” “look at pornographic material,” “cheat on a test or exam,” “have sex” (only asked of 15-18 year olds), “spend time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend” – could be considered risky behaviors and often appeared together as characteristics of teens who were more likely to express specific views or engage in similar behaviors.¹¹

Overall, fairly low percentages of teens participated in these behaviors on a “frequent” or “occasional” basis. About 1 in 10 Washington teens said they “looked at a pornographic magazine, movie, or website” (3.5% frequently and 6.5% occasionally) or “cheated on a test, exam, or some other type of evaluation” (4.8% frequently and 5.8% occasionally) in the past three months. One in six teens



(16.7%) reported “use of an illegal, nonprescription drug or alcohol” on a “frequent” (6.3%) or “occasional” (10.4%) basis in the past three months, and less than one in four (23.4%) 15-18 year olds (12-14 year olds were not asked this question) said they have had sex

in the past three months (8.9% frequently, 14.5% occasionally). On the other hand, nearly half (46.8%) of teens said they spent time “with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend” in the past three months (27.8% frequently and 19% occasionally — see chart 2.3).

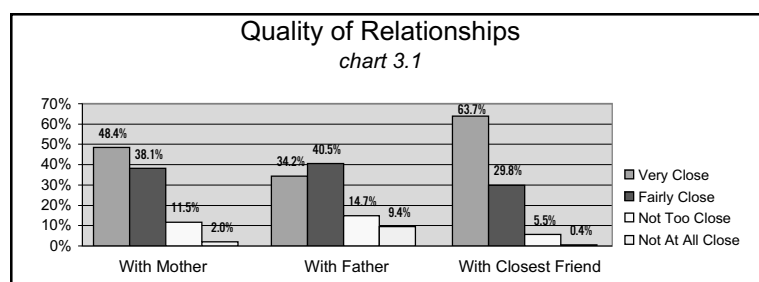
The characteristics of groups more likely to engage in these risky behaviors were fairly consistent – teens who said their family relationships were not healthy, those living with a single-parent, and teens who do not have close relationships with their mother and/or father. Teens who engaged in one of these risky behaviors reported involvement in several of them on a more frequent basis than their peers who avoid such behaviors.¹²

The characteristics of teens who are significantly more likely to report “never” engaging in these behaviors in the past three months are also fairly consistent. They include teens who are living with two parents, who report healthy family relationships and close relationships with their fathers and mothers, who say they are Christians and attend church regularly, or those with only one full-time working parent. Teens with parents who both graduated from college are also significantly more likely to report “never” engaging in some of these behaviors.

Positive parental relationships influence other teen relationships

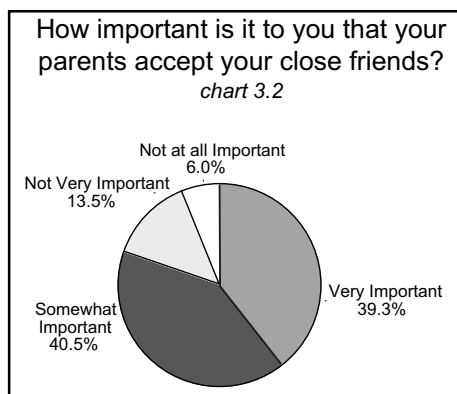
Information gained from this research indicates that parents have a significant and meaningful influence in their teenagers’ lives. Although it would be foolish to think that parents could be the only influence on teens’ attitudes and behaviors, a positive, healthy relationship with parents, can impact the quality and incidence of other influential relationships in a teen’s life.

Peers seem to be the next most significant influence in teens’ lives. “Having more close friends” is thought to have about the same potential for improving the quality of a teen’s life as having more



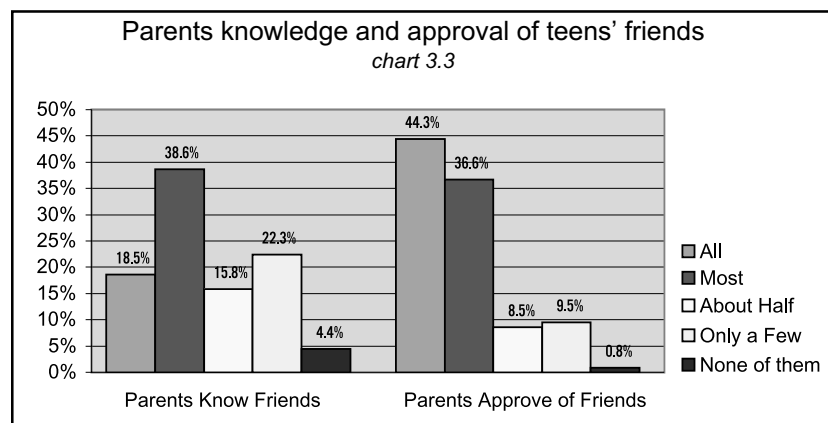
time to spend with mom and dad. And while 86 percent of teens say they are “very” or “fairly” close to their mother and 74 percent have a close relationship with their father, almost all teens (93.5%) say they have a “very” or “fairly” close relationship with their closest (non-familial) friend (see chart 3.1).

Almost 8 of 10 Washington teens (79.8%) say that it is important to them for their parents to accept their close friends (39.3% say it is “very important”, 40.5% say it is “somewhat important” — *see chart 3.2*). Girls or younger teens (12-14 year olds or middle-schoolers), teens with an “A” GPA, teens who say they are Christians, or teens with healthy family relationships and close parental relationships are significantly more likely to say that their parents’ acceptance is important.¹³



Just less than half of Washington teens (44.3%) believe their parents approve of “all” of their close friends, while another third (36.6%) believe their parents approve of “most” of their close friends (*see chart 3.3*). Again, teens with healthy family relationships and close parental relationships, teens with an “A” GPA, or those with only one full-time working parent are more likely to say their parents approve of “all” or “most” of their close friends. To the contrary, teens who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months, and those with unhealthy family relationships, who don’t feel close to their mother or father are more likely to say their parents approve of few or none of their friends.¹⁴

An interesting comparison arises when teens were asked how many of their close friends their parents had taken the time to get to know well. Despite almost 80 percent of parents “approving” of a teen’s friends, only 57 percent of teens say that their parents have taken the time to get to know “all” or “most” of their friends (*see chart 3.3*).



Another somewhat surprising influence in teens’ lives is their grandparents. Despite the pop-culture image of the “geographically-disconnected” family, 7 of 10 Washington teens (70.6%) say that they “spend time with their grandparents regularly and they are a very important part of their life.” Of the 70 percent, nearly half (43.5%) strongly agreed with this

idea. Younger teens (12-14 year olds or middle-schoolers) and teens with close parental relationships are more likely to agree with this statement, as well as teens living in blended- or single-parent families. Older teens (17-18 year olds and high schoolers) and those who are not close to their parents are more likely to disagree with this statement.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, a majority of Washington teens (60.4%) agree that their “parents do not really seem to understand what it is like to be a teenager these days.” Unfortunately, teens who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months, who think their family relationships aren’t healthy and don’t feel close to their parents, or 12-14 year olds are significantly more likely to agree with this statement. Older teens (15-18 year olds) or those with healthy family relationships and close parental relationships, are more likely to disagree.¹⁶

Conclusion

As so many tragic incidents and trends give rise to seemingly unanswerable questions about teenage behavior and motivation, this research seems to point to some hope filled answers. These are not necessarily answers as to why terrible things happen, but possibly indications as to why they don't. Relationships are an integral part of everyday life. Through family relationships, friendships, romantic relationships, work relationships, and peer relationships, one's station in life may change, but the integral presence of relationships never does.

Children develop their first relationship with their parents, and it seems that Washington teenagers recognize the primary importance of that relationship even in their growing independence. Teens who feel that all of their family relationships are healthy and who enjoy a close emotional relationship with their mother and father are more likely to express positive attitudes about future relationships (marriage and parenting) and are more likely to avoid behaviors that are potentially detrimental to their current and future relationships. In fact, teens with healthy family relationships place significant importance on their parents' involvement in and acceptance of their current relationships.

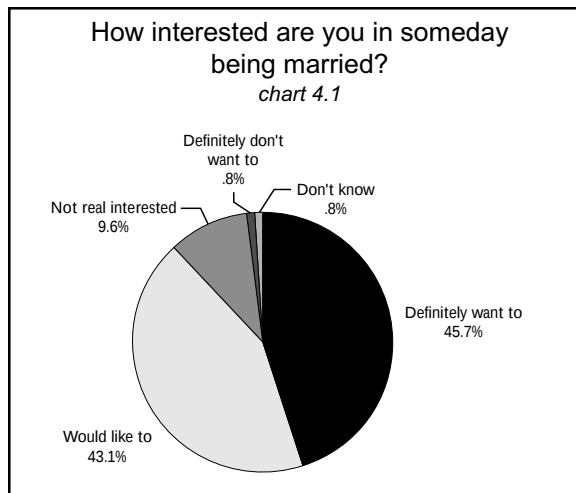
With the knowledge that most teens desire strong relationships with their parents and that such healthy relationships positively impact teens, the call to action is clear. Along with reinforcing the healthy relationships most teens seem to enjoy, a significant portion of teens need to be introduced to such relationships so that they have a positive model to emulate, rather than just a negative model to avoid.

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V. TEENTALK ON MARRIAGE AND SEX

Teens are optimistic about their own future marriages, and generally view marriage as a positive and desirable relationship.

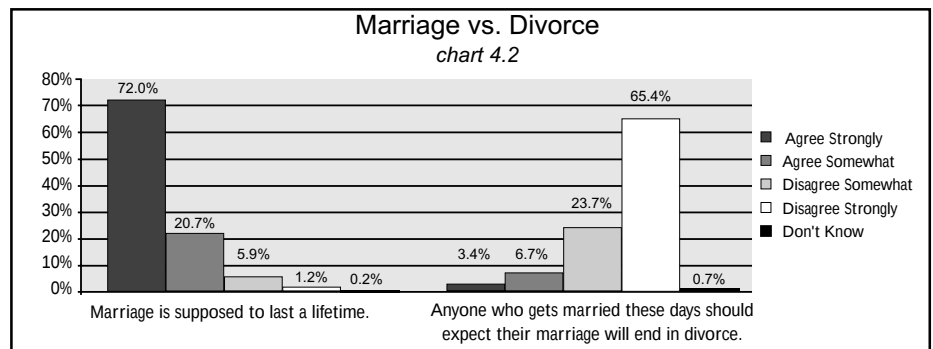
In general, teens seem to be optimistic about their future (78.4%). Teens more likely to be “optimistic” are those who have an “A” GPA, have a role model, volunteer regularly, talk with an adult that isn’t their parent, or those who talk about their religion with peers. Those teens who have a “C” GPA, don’t have a role model, or aren’t close to their father are more likely to not be “optimistic.”¹⁷ This optimism carries into the teens’ views on marriage.



When asked the question, “How interested are you in someday being married?” close to 89 percent of teens said they are interested in getting married (46% “definitely want to,” 43% “would like to”—see chart 4.1). Teens significantly more likely to express an interest in being married are teens who are in high school, white, living with two biological parents, have healthy family relationships, are close to their father or mother, or consider their parents a role model. Teens who express less interest in marriage are non-white, have a “C” GPA, live with a single-parent, or are non-Christian or atheist.¹⁸

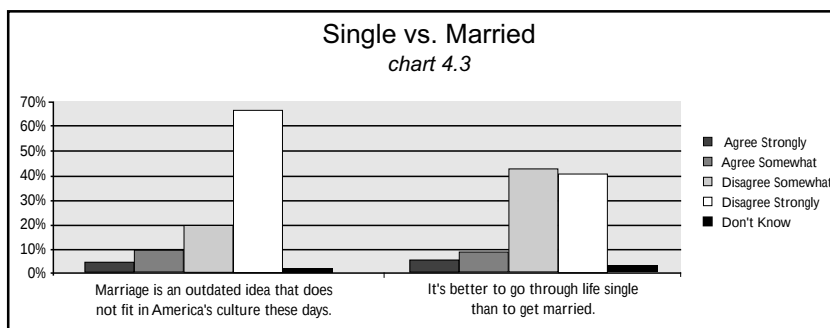
Although the common perception today is that many people are waiting until an older age to marry, many teens believe they should marry in their early 20’s. More than one-third of teens (36%) indicated an age less than 25 was the “perfect age” for marriage, and one-quarter of Washington teens (24.5%) said 25 is the “perfect age” for marriage. Only a quarter of Washington teens (23.7%) thought the “perfect age” was older than 25.

“Marriage is supposed to last a lifetime.” Does this statement sound more like a greeting card sentiment than a principle valued by almost all Washington teens? Evidently not, since nearly 93 percent of teens agree with this statement (72% “agree strongly” and 20.7% “agree somewhat”—see chart 4.2). Teens living with two biological parents, Christians, teens who attend church regularly, those with healthy family relationships, those who are close to their mother, father, or friend, teens who state that their parents are a role model for them, or teens who think their parents model marriage are significantly more likely to agree that “marriage is supposed to last a lifetime.” Those more likely to disagree are younger teens, those living with a single-parent, non-Christians, atheists, or those who don’t attend church.¹⁹

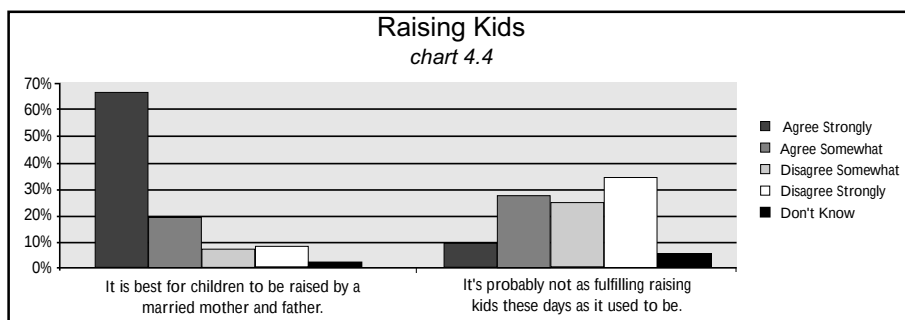


Teens affirm their belief in lifelong marriage by their disagreement with an opposing statement. Ninety percent of teens disagree with the statement, “Anyone who gets married these days should expect their marriage will end in divorce” (23.7% “disagree somewhat,” 65.4% “disagree strongly”—see *chart 4.2*). More likely to disagree are those with an “A” GPA, those who live with two biological parents, those with healthy family relationships, teens who are close to their mother or father, teens who say their parents are their role model, or those who say their parents influence their views on marriage. Those teens who are more likely to agree that one should expect marriage to end in divorce are non-Christians, atheists, those who live in a blended family, those who say their family relationships are not healthy, or those who are not close to their mother or father.²⁰

The message from teens is clear: Marriage is a valuable and viable part of today’s culture. Eighty-four percent of Washington teens disagree with the statement, “Marriage is an outdated idea that does not fit in America’s culture these days,” and two-thirds of all teens disagree *strongly* (see *chart 4.3*). Those with a “C” GPA or those who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months²¹ are more likely to agree that marriage is outdated. Those more likely to disagree are teens who are older or those close to their mother or father.²²



Not only do teens believe marriage is a relevant part of today’s culture, it seems to be a preferred status. Eighty-three percent of Washington teens disagree with the statement, “It’s better to go through life single than to get married” (see *chart 4.3*). Teens living with a single parent or who are non-Christian are more likely to agree that it’s better to be single. Younger teens, teens who are very close to their father, or teens whose mother graduated from college are more likely to disagree that being single is better than being married.²³



Washington teens recognize that marriage is a relationship impacting more than just a husband and wife, it’s also important to children. Most teens (84%) agree, “It is best for children to be raised by a married mother and

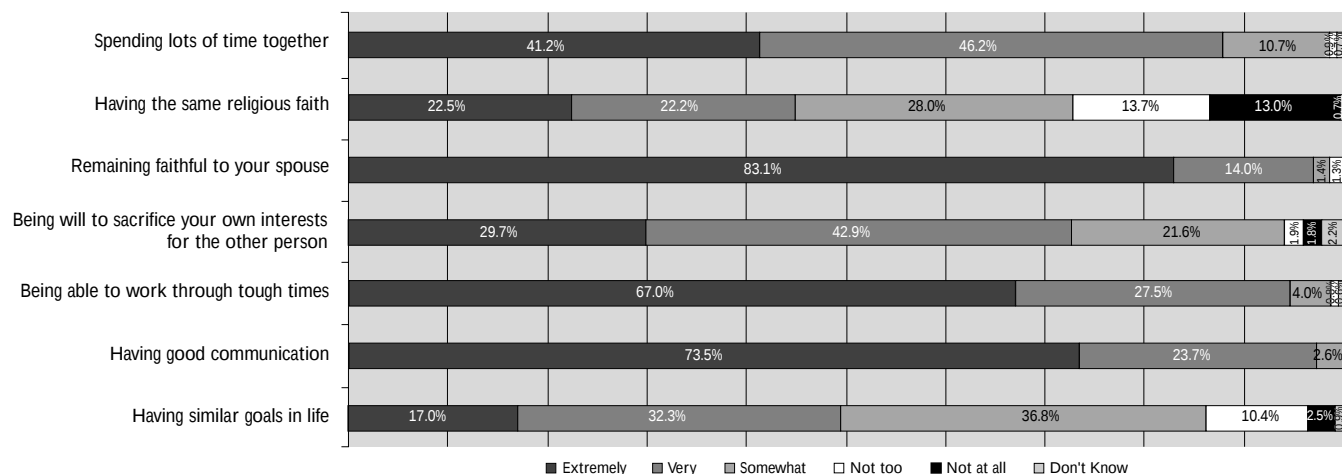
father” (see *chart 4.4*). Boys, white teens, those living with two biological parents, Christians, or those with very healthy family relationships are significantly more likely to agree. Those more likely to disagree with this statement are girls, 17-18 year olds, non-whites, those living with a single-parent, non-Christians, atheists, those who aren’t close to their mother or father, or those who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months.²⁴

Although Washington teens are positive about marriage and the importance of marriage to parenting, they are less sure about the prospect of being a parent. The teens surveyed were asked whether or not they agreed with the statement, “It’s probably not as fulfilling raising kids these days as it used to be.” While a majority (57.8%) disagreed with this statement, more than one-third of teens (38.5%) agreed that parenting doesn’t seem as fulfilling as it might have been in the past (*see chart 4.4*). Younger teens, middle-schoolers, those with a “C” GPA, those living with a blended family, or those who are close to their mother are more likely to agree that raising kids today is not “as fulfilling as it used to be.” Older teens, high schoolers, those with an “A” GPA, those who say their parents are a role model, or those who say their parents influence their views are more likely to disagree.²⁵

Teens generally have healthy and realistic expectations for marriage, but they need and want more intentional modeling and instruction.

Teens view good communication, fidelity, and an ability to resolve conflict as “extremely” important to having a good marriage; these are also three of the top five qualities that Washington adults rate as the most important factors to a strong marriage.²⁶ Teens were asked to rate the importance of several characteristics as they relate to marriage; 83 percent believe that “remaining faithful to your spouse” is “extremely” important to a strong marriage. About three-quarters of teens (73.5%) rated “good communication” and two-thirds (67%) rated “being able to work through tough times” as “extremely” important to having a strong marriage. Fewer than half of all teens believe any other quality is “extremely” important to a good marriage (*see chart 5.1*).

Things that are important for a good marriage
chart 5.1



“Spending lots of time together” and “being willing to sacrifice your own interests for the other person” rate next highest in importance among Washington teens. Approximately 4 in 10 Washington teens (41.2%) believe spending lots of time together is extremely important to a good marriage, and 3 in 10 (29.7%) believe sacrifice is extremely important to a good marriage. Teens who say they have healthy family relationships or those who say their parents are a positive role model are more likely to value the importance of “being able to work through tough times.”²⁷

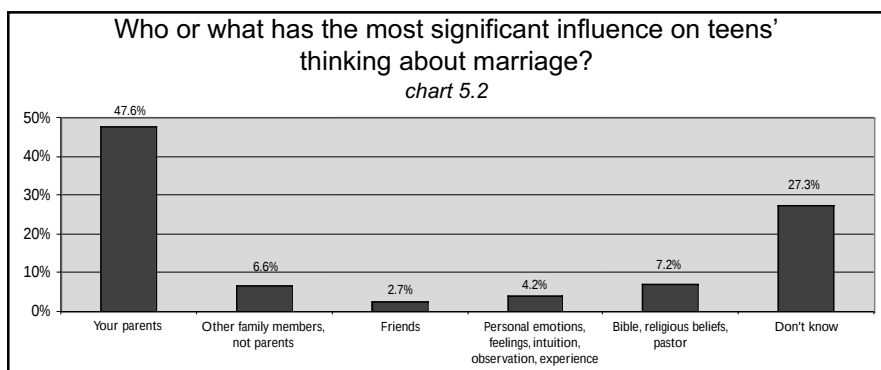
While teens recognize that a certain level of independence should be attained before entering a marriage relationship, they define that independence primarily in financial terms. When asked what things a person should accomplish, ideally, before marriage, nearly all Washington teens believe “have(ing) enough money to support themselves” and “have(ing) a good job” are necessary (95% and 88.1%, respectively). “Living on their own away from parents” and “have(ing) finished college” are also important precursors to marriage for many Washington teens (79.7% and 66.5%, respectively).

The majority of Washington teens (67.2%) also believe a person should “get their parents’ approval” before getting married. Younger teens, teens with an “A” GPA, teens living with two parents, those that report healthy family relationships, teens who feel close to their mother and/or father, those who see their parents as a role model, or those who say they are Christians are significantly more likely to believe parents’ approval is an important precursor to marriage.²⁸

Only 4 in 10 Washington teens (39.9%) believe a person should “receive premarital counseling or take classes to prepare for marriage” before getting married. Middle-schoolers, those who say they have healthy family relationships, teens who say they are close to their mother and/or father, those who say they are Christians, or those who attend church frequently are significantly more likely to see the importance of premarital counseling than the average teen in Washington.²⁹ According to a 1997 survey of Washington adults, only one-third of those who have been married participated in premarital counseling prior to marriage, yet of those, 80 percent said the counseling was helpful to their marriage.³⁰ While Washington teens generally view marriage as an important relationship that they would like to experience someday, they are less likely to see the importance of preparing for marriage now or in the future.

Washington teens can be taught about the importance of premarital counseling, the characteristics that are most important to having a strong marriage, and what, ideally, a person should accomplish before marriage. In fact, a significant portion of Washington teens are wondering where that influence will come from; some want it to come from their parents, others don’t seem to know where to look.

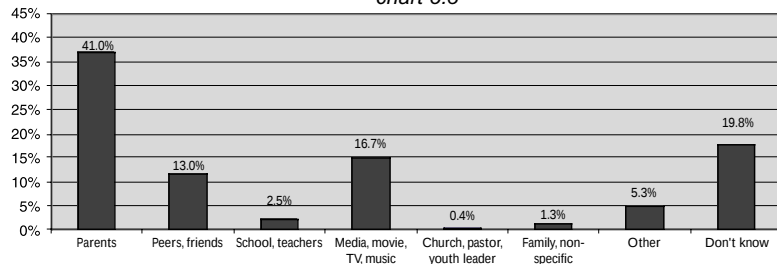
When asked who or what the “single, most significant influence” is on their “thinking about what it will take to have a good marriage,” nearly half of all Washington teens (47.6%) said their parents provide this influence. Other family members, friends and friend’s parents, pastors, religious beliefs, and personal experiences were also named by some teens as an influence (6.6% said “other family members,” 2.7% said “friends” or “friend’s parents,” 7.2% said “pastors” or “religious beliefs,” and 4.2% cited “personal feelings, observations, or experiences” as the most significant influence). However, the second largest response—more than one in four Washington teens (27.3%)—said they “didn’t know” who or what influences their thoughts about marriage (see *chart 5.2*).



Encouragingly, those teens living with two parents, those who report healthy family relationships, or those who say their parents model marriage are significantly more likely to say that their parents influence their own thinking about marriage.³¹ The majority of teens feel their parents are a positive model for marriage, and they want to have a marriage like their parents have. Nearly 6 in 10 Washington teens agree with the idea, “Someday you hope that you will have a marriage like your parents have” (39.6% agree strongly and 20.1% agree somewhat). Some groups of teens are significantly more likely to agree with this statement than average: boys, teens in middle school, those living with

Who or what has the most influence on other teens’ attitudes about marriage?

chart 5.3



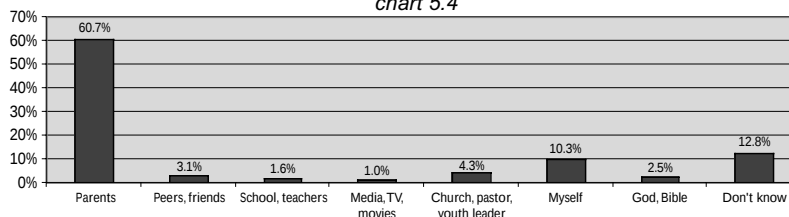
two parents, those with siblings at home, teens who report healthy family relationships and/or close relationships with their mother and/or father, or teens who say they are Christians. On the other hand, females, older teens (17-18-year olds), those living with a single-parent, teens who say their family relationships are not healthy, those who are not close to their

mother and/or father, or those who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months are significantly more likely to disagree with this idea.³² Also, younger teens and those living with a single-parent are significantly more likely to say they “don’t know” who or what influences their thinking about marriage.³³

Though none of the teens surveyed said that “media, movies, TV, or music” have the most significant influence on their personal attitudes about marriage, about one in six (16.7%) Washington teens believe these things have the most influence on teens in general. Parents are still believed to hold the most influence (41% of teens believe parents have the most influence on teens in general), but “peers/friends” (13%) and pop culture (16.7%) are perceived to have more influence than they actually do, while “pastors” (0.4%) are thought to have the least amount of influence on teens thinking about marriage (see chart 5.3).

Who or what has the most influence on other teens’ attitudes about marriage?

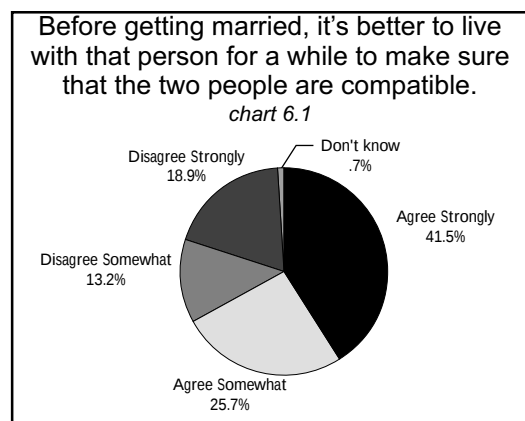
chart 5.4



A clear call to parents, and others who have influence with teens, to be more deliberate in their modeling of and instruction about marriage comes from Washington teens in their response to a third question. Nearly two-thirds of Washington teens (60.7%) said that “parents” should have the most influence on teens’ attitudes about marriage, regardless of who they thought actually had the most influence. While teens also mentioned “church/pastor/youth leaders” (4.3%), “peers/friends” (3.1%), “school/teachers” (1.6%), and “myself” (10.3%), more than 1 in 10 Washington teens (12.8%) “didn’t know” who should have the most influence on their thinking and attitudes about marriage (see chart 5.4). Considering marriage is a relationship that 9 in 10 Washington teens want to enter into and these teens hold lifelong expectations for their future marriages, it would be to their benefit to have a reliable source of marital information and role modeling, and it would be to families’ and society’s benefit to meet this need.

Despite all of the cultural influences that separate sex from marriage, the majority of teens still connect sex with marriage.

One area where teens' idealism and practical knowledge sharply diverge is in the area of sex and cohabitation. While teens hold high hopes for lifelong marriage, they seem to think one of the ways to make those hopes a reality is to “practice” marriage before making the commitment—a “practice” that social science research is showing leads to more divorce, not less.³⁴



Washington teens were asked about the issue of cohabitation in three different ways, and the results are fairly consistent. Approximately two-thirds of teens (67.2%) agreed with the statement, “Before getting married, it’s better to live with that person for a while to make sure that the two people are compatible” (41.5% said they “agreed strongly” and 25.7% said they “agreed somewhat”—see chart 6.1). Boys, teens who are living with a single-parent, teens who said they engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months,

or teens who do not consider themselves Christians are significantly more likely to agree with this idea than the average teen.³⁵

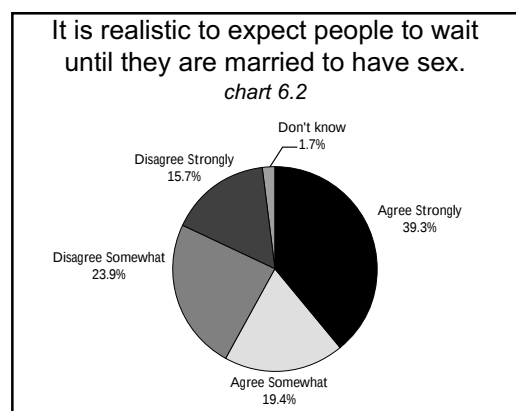
Slightly fewer teens, but still a majority, expressed agreement with the idea that they themselves would cohabit before marriage. About 6 in 10 Washington teens agreed with the statement, “You expect that you will probably live with your boyfriend/girlfriend before you decide to marry him/her” (36.8% “agreed strongly” and 22.5% “agreed somewhat”). Boys, teens who live with a single-parent, those who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months, or those who say they do not have a close relationship with their mother are among teens significantly more likely to believe they will cohabit before marriage.³⁶

Some Washington teens may see cohabitation as a “necessary evil”—something they wouldn’t choose to do in an ideal situation, but a “practice” that may be necessary in today’s marriage environment. Just fewer than half of all teens (49.6%) believe that “ideally, . . . a person should live together with the other person . . . before marriage” almost equal portions of teens (47.7%) believe that this is not something people should ideally accomplish before marriage. Again, boys, teens who live with a single-parent, or teens who consider themselves non-Christian or atheist are significantly more likely to see cohabitation as an ideal accomplishment before marriage than the average teen.³⁷

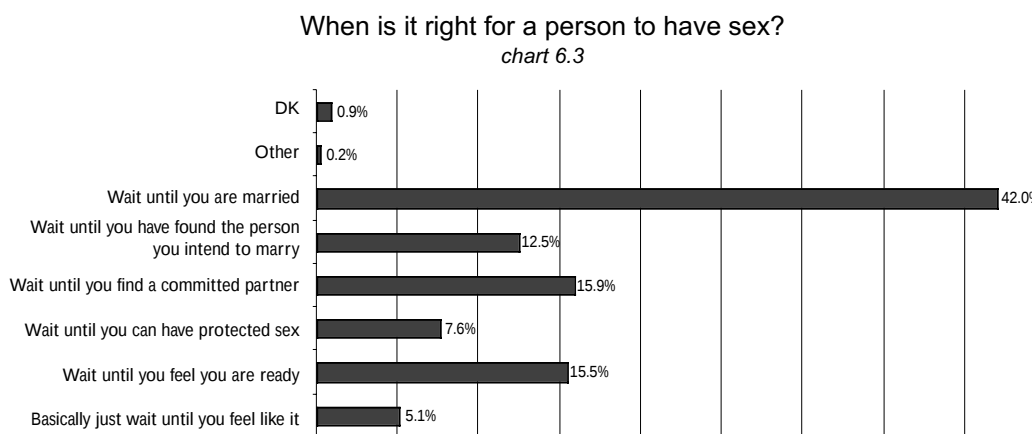
Despite the significant level of agreement with the idea of cohabitation before marriage, teens express strong “traditional” beliefs about saving sex for marriage. On a variety of measures, teens echo more traditional ideas about the appropriate relational context for sex.

In direct contrast to the one in two teens that believe cohabitation is an ideal accomplishment before marriage, fewer than one-quarter of teens* (22.2%) believe that “have(ing) sexual experience” is something a person should accomplish before marriage. Only one-third of teens (36.1%) believe that a person should “have dated lots of people” before getting married. In

addition to believing that sexual experience is not a necessary accomplishment before marriage, a majority of Washington teens (58.7%) agree that “It is realistic to expect people to wait until they are married to have sex” (39.3% “agree strongly” and 19.4% “agree somewhat”—see chart 6.2). Girls, middle-schoolers, teens with an “A” GPA, teens who have a “stay-at-home” parent, those who say their family relationships are healthy, teens who report close relationships with their mother and father, those who consider their parents their primary role model, or teens who say they are Christians are significantly more likely to agree with this idea than average.³⁸



When asked about their personal view of when it is “right for a person to have sex,” more than 4 in 10 Washington teens (42%) said they believe a person should “wait until (they) are married.” Another one-quarter of teens (28.4%) connected the “right” time to have sex with being in a committed relationship (12.5% said “wait until you have found the person you intend to marry” and 15.9% said “wait until you find a committed partner”—see chart 6.3). Girls, teens with an “A” GPA, teens who say they are Christians, attend church regularly, teens who have healthy family relationships, or those who report close relationships with their parents are significantly more likely to say it is right for a person to “wait until they are married” to have sex than the average Washington teen.³⁹



The opinions and principles expressed by Washington teens are borne out by their reported experiences. Among 15-18 year olds in Washington*, almost 7 in 10 report “never” having had sex in the past three months (69.3%) and an additional 7.3 percent of these older teens said they “hardly ever” engaged in sex in the past three months. Only 23 percent of teens age 15 and over were “sexually active” in the past three months (14.5% say they had sex “occasionally” and 8.9% say “frequently”). Older teens (17-18 year olds), teens with a “C” GPA, teens living with a single-parent, those who said they are not close to their father, those who do not have healthy family relationships, or those who have engaged in risky behaviors in the past three months are significantly more likely to report having had sex “frequently” in the past three months than average. On the other hand, 15-16 year olds, teens with an “A” GPA, those who live with two

parents, those who have a mother that graduated from college, teens who are close to their father, those who report healthy family relationships, those who say they are Christians, teens who attend church regularly, or teens who say their parents are their role model are significantly more likely to say they “never” had sex in the past three months.

Conclusion

Messages about sex, marriage, and romantic relationships abound in today’s culture. We are bombarded with them from every angle: television and music, billboards and newspaper ads, Internet chat rooms, and chats with friends. Sorting through all those messages Washington teens have gleaned some positive, accurate information about marriage. They want to be married, and they generally prefer the prospect of married life to the prospect of single life. They expect marriage to last a lifetime, and they expect that it will take deliberate effort and sacrifice to achieve that standard in their own relationship.

While nearly all Washington teens share this healthy picture of marriage, they differ in the amount of skills, tools, and guidance they possess to create a reality that resembles their ideal. Some teens benefit from having parents that provide a healthy role model of marriage or from close family relationships or from strong religious connections that seem to increase their likelihood of successfully creating the ideal picture they envision now. Others, while they seem to hold the same ideal, are confused about what steps to take to achieve lifelong marriage. Because healthy relationships create a healthy society, it is in everyone’s best interest to do what we can to make sure teens have the strong, healthy relationships now—primarily with their parents—that seem to provide the skills and tools necessary to make their ideal marriage relationship a reality in the future.

VI. TEENS IN WASHINGTON

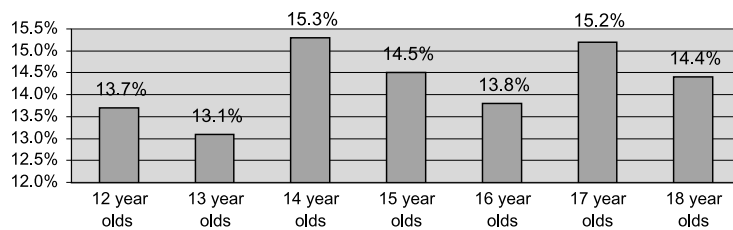
Initial Demographics

The sample of 405 Washington State teens is representative of the teen population in Washington.

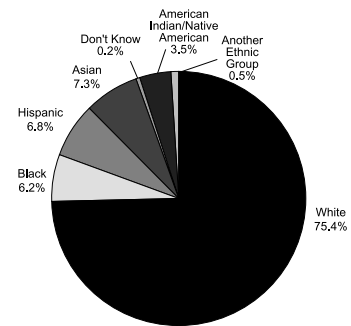
- 51.2% female and 48.8% male
- *see chart 7.1 — Ages*
- *see chart 7.2 — Ethnicity*



Age of Respondents
chart 7.1



Ethnicity of Respondents
chart 7.2



When it comes to political and social issues, the majority of youth in Washington say they are “somewhere in between” (59.5%). A little more than 15 percent say they are mostly conservative, 10 percent say they are mostly liberal, 8 percent don’t know, and 8 percent say it depends on the issue.

Teens’ Self-Perceptions⁴⁰

Would you consider yourself ...?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
optimistic about your future	78.4%	17.8%	3.8%
stressed out	35.7%	63.1%	1.1%
too busy	53.1%	46.5%	0.4%
skeptical	31.9%	59.6%	8.5%
religious	56.9%	39.8%	3.3%
a committed born again Christian	42.5%	52.8%	4.7%
searching for meaning in life	41.9%	56.7%	1.4%
lonely	7.8%	91.3%	1.0%
easily makes friends	89.7%	9.8%	0.5%
physically attractive	67.6%	22.7%	9.8%

Teen Behaviors⁴¹

Over the past three months, how often, if ever, did you ...?

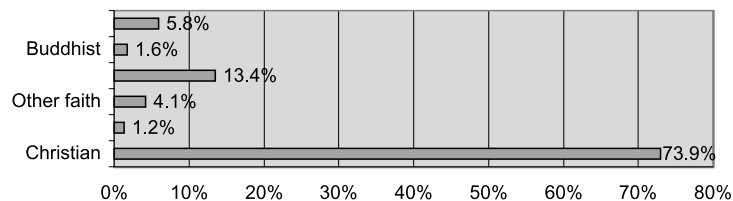


	Frequently	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never	Don't Know
volunteer some of your free time to help needy people in your area	14.6%	37.5%	23.0%	24.9%	
discuss your religious beliefs with other kids your age	23.0%	30.2%	22.4%	24.0%	0.4%
cheat on a test, exam, or some other type of evaluation	4.8%	5.8%	24.6%	64.9%	
look at a pornographic magazine, movie, or website	3.5%	6.5%	12.3%	77.4%	0.2%
use an illegal, non-prescription drug or alcohol	6.3%	10.4%	8.4%	75.0%	
have sex (only asked of 15-18 year olds)	8.9%	14.5%	7.3%	69.3%	(171)
have a big disagreement with a close friend	8.8%	21.5%	44.1%	25.6%	
spend time surfing on the Internet	33.8%	33.3%	20.8%	12.2%	
spend time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend	27.8%	19.0%	15.7%	37.5%	
have a major argument with your parents	15.8%	26.9%	36.1%	21.1%	
spend a lot of time talking with adults other than your parents	34.0%	38.9%	20.0%	7.2%	

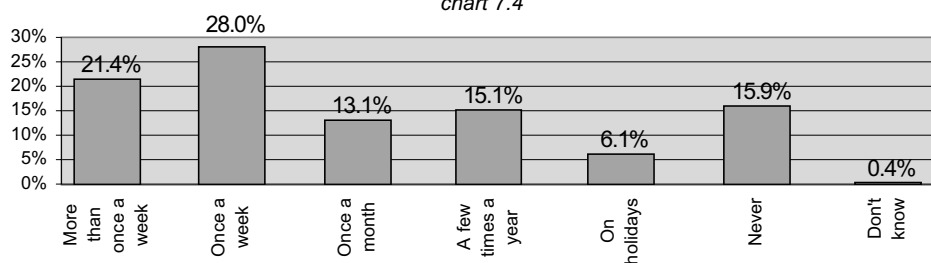
Teens and Religion⁴²

Religion — see chart 7.3; Church attendance — see chart 7.4

Religion
chart 7.3



Church Attendance
chart 7.4



Would you consider yourself ...?

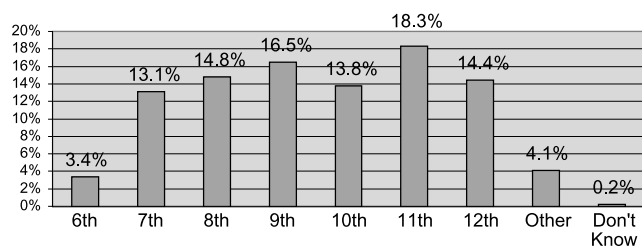
	Yes	No	Don't Know
religious	56.9%	39.8%	3.3%
a committed born again Christian	42.5%	52.8%	4.7%

When asked how often they discuss their religious beliefs with other kids their age, 23 percent answered “frequently,” 30 percent answered “occasionally,” 22 percent said “hardly ever,” 24 percent said “never,” and .4 percent said they didn’t know.

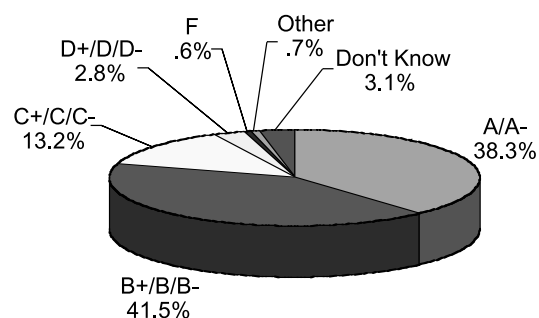
Teens and Education⁴³

Grade — see chart 7.5; GPA — see chart 7.6

Grade in School
chart 7.5



Grade Point Average (GPA)
chart 7.6



Type of School	Percentage of Sample Attending
Public	87.4%
Private	9.4%
Non-religious	(13.1%)
Catholic	(34.6%)
Christian	(43.3%)
Other	(7.3%)
Don't Know	(1.7%)
Home school	1.5%
Other	1.7%

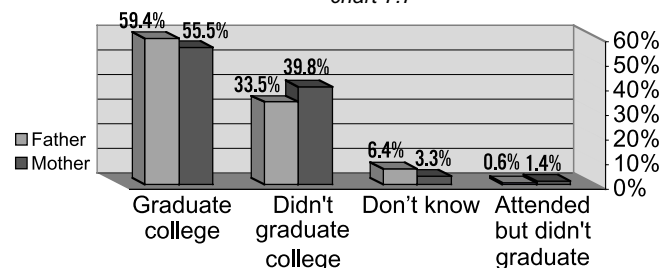
Cheating in school, according to teens, doesn't seem to be much of a problem. When asked whether or not they had cheated on a test, exam, or some other type of evaluation over the past three months, approximately 5 percent said "frequently," close to 6 percent said "occasionally," nearly 25 percent said "hardly ever," and 65 percent said "never."

Teens and Their Families

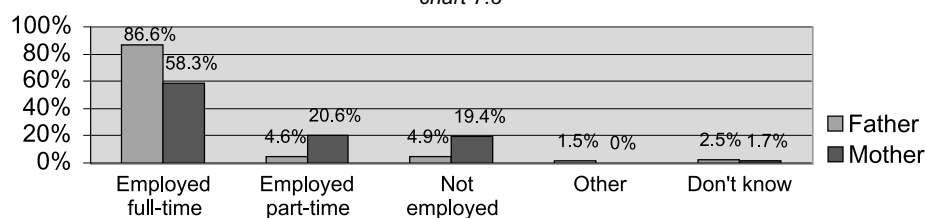
Almost three-quarters (72.4%) of the sample have siblings living in the home.
 Parents' Education — see chart 7.7; Parents' Employment — see chart 7.8

Household Type	Percentage Living in
Single-parent home	22.3%
Living with natural mother	(65.6%)
Living with natural father	(22.4%)
Living with adoptive mother	(2.2%)
Living with legal guardian	(3.7%)
Living with other	(6.2%)
Two-parent home	75.6%

Parents' Education
chart 7.7



Parents' Employment
chart 7.8



VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To Parents . . .

- Listen to your teen, spend time with them on their terms (where they choose what to do and what to talk about).
- Get to know the friends your teen hangs out with, invite them into your home, create opportunities to interact with them.
- Communicate with your teen. Don't simply talk in negative terms telling them what not to do, but speak in positive terms. Express your hopes for their future, not your fears. Share with them the benefits of aiming high in relationships and waiting until marriage for sex. Share with them an optimistic message regarding their future. Avoid showing mistrust by threatening or using negative language.
- Remember to focus on character and relationship skills as much as you focus on performance in athletics, academics, etc.
- Speak about marriage in an honorable way, even if you aren't currently married. Speak about your child's parent (whether you're married to them or not) in an honorable way.
- Focus family entertainment on relationships. Being a good parent is not about what you have and can afford, it's about communication and relationship with your children.
- Give a copy of this report to your teen's teacher and/or youth worker.
- If married, invest in your marriage, make it a priority to strengthen, enhance, and celebrate marriage. Seek help to heal a difficult marriage. Your marriage is your teen's biggest influence for their future relationships.
- Model and share your moral beliefs. Remember, morality is learned.

To Grandparents . . .

- Recognize your influence and role in painting a picture of marriage for your grandchildren.
- Model marriage and talk about relationships with your grandchildren.

To Teens . . .

- Don't be afraid to set high standards in relationships and stick to those commitments. You're not alone in your beliefs, even when those around you and the media messages may tell you otherwise.
- Approach your parents or an adult role model with questions you have about relationships. Talk to your parents about your concerns, feelings, beliefs, etc. when it comes to sex and relationships.
- Give your parents a list of the things you enjoy doing as a family or with them, or a list of things you enjoy about your family.
- Find couples who have a marriage that you admire and get to know them. Ask them questions about their dating relationship and their marriage relationship.

To Churches . . .

- Encourage, involve, and empower parents in the relationship education of their teen.
- Make use of pre-marital materials such as speakers, pamphlets, books, etc. Invite a speaker in to talk about marriage.

- Teach the spiritual and scriptural perspective on marriage, relationships, parenting responsibility, and sexuality.
- Model marriage in your church, particularly in your leadership. Don't be afraid to talk about marriage and relationships in your church.
- Engage youth in a discussion of rap music lyrics, violence and sex in music, movies, TV, etc., and the messages being communicated.
- Provide copies of this report to your youth staff, the pastors, and the parents in your church, and welcome discussion on the topic either formally or informally.

To Youth Organizations . . .

- Model marriage, naturally include and honor your spouse and marriage in your day-to-day interactions.
- Teach relationship principles and values.
- Honor the role of parents in a teens life. Affirm a parents authority and importance.
- Have resources on relationships, marriage, abstinence, etc. available for youth.

To Teachers, Professors, and Schools . . .

- Encourage, involve, and empower parents in the relationship education of their teen.
- Make use of pre-marital materials such as speakers, pamphlets, books, etc. Invite a speaker in to talk about marriage.
- Challenge the state's education system to provide, as part of the curriculum, programs that affirm the importance of family life. Offer them as electives in High Schools, Community Colleges, and Universities.
- Order the Institute for American Values report "Hungry Hearts" on marriage curriculum and encourage schools to offer one of those courses as part of their curriculum.
(Go to www.familiesnorthwest.org for a link to the report.)
- Offer the executive summary from this report to parents, youth, pastors, school leaders, etc. and welcome discussion about the findings. Plan a class hour to discuss these issues.

To Businesses . . .

- Offer "family promotions" — i.e., family night at a theatre, restaurant; family discounts at events, stores, etc.
- Make use of pre-marital materials such as speakers, pamphlets, books, etc. Invite a speaker in to talk about marriage.
- Encourage a "bring a teen to work" day.
- Don't advertise or sponsor entertainment that demeans marriage or the parenting relationship.
- Make policies that recognize marriage, family, and parenting — this will affect your employees' satisfaction and their family's satisfaction, and these will positively affect your business.

To Government Leaders . . .

- Recognize and respect the fundamental priority and influence of parents in children's lives.
- Avoid writing laws for exceptions that may further distance parents and teens who don't fit the exception.
- Re-visit abstinence education guidelines to encourage the integration of marriage/relationship education, not just abstinence education.

To Media . . .

- Affirm the role of parents in their teen's life in your reporting and programming choices. Encourage parents to think positively about marriage and parenting.
- Continue to emphasize the positive things teens are doing in the community individually and with influential social organizations that emphasize positive aspects of marriage and family.
- Do a feature on the keys to success in marriage. Talk about what research shows are factors that make for a successful marriage. Discuss positive relationship principles. Include this in the life-style pages that teens are more likely to read.
- Present marriage in a positive light.
- Present balanced reports on issues. Give equal and fair representation to both sides of an issue. Be willing to dig deeper in order to get information from both sides.

To Concerned readers . . .

- Pass this report on to anyone you know who is a parent of a teen, teaches a teen, counsels a teen, is a teen, or affects the lives of teens.
- Model marriages and talk about relationships and marriage in your home, in your community, and with your friends and family.
- Take an interest in teens, don't be afraid to get involved in their lives. Don't prejudge them.

VIII. RESOURCES

The Center For Parent/Youth Understanding

P. O. Box 414
Elizabethtown, PA 17022
(717) 653-1950
Fax: (717) 653-1961
www.cpyu.org

The Institute for Youth Development

P.O. Box 16560
Washington DC, 20041
(703) 471-8750
www.youthdevelopment.org

National Institute on Media and the Family

606 24th Avenue South, Suite 606
Minneapolis, MN 55454
Voice (612) 672-5437
Fax (612) 672-4113
(888) 672-KIDS (672-5437)
www.mediafamily.org

Cline/Fay Love and Logic Institute

2207 Jackson Street, Suite 102
Golden, CO 80401
(800) 588-5644
www.loveandlogic.com

S.H.A.R.E.

15935 NE 8th Street, #200
Bellevue, WA 98008
(425) 644-3312
www.share-program.com

National Center for Fathering

P.O. Box 413888
Kansas City, MO 64141
(800) 593-3237
www.fathers.com

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 478-8500
www.teenpregnancy.org

Youth for Christ Parenting Workshop

Tacoma, WA

(253) 572-7888

www.members.aa.net/yfcpnw/

Focus on the Family

Colorado Springs, CO 80995

(800) A-FAMILY

www.family.org

Institute for American Values

1841 Broadway, Suite 211

New York, NY 10023

Tel: (212) 246-3942

Fax: (212) 541-6665

www.americanvalues.org

Books:**Parenting Teens With Love and Logic**

Foster Cline, M.D. and Kim Fay

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers

by Gary Chapman

A parent who wants to become a good listener may find these suggestions helpful:

- Pay full attention when your child talks to you. Stop doing other tasks; turn the television off; put down the book or newspaper.
- Listen to the words being said and watch the facial expressions, gestures, and other non verbal clues to understand the feeling behind the words.
- Pay attention to the tone of voice. Yelling can simply be an attempt to be understood or get your attention.
- Keep an open mind. Recognize that you and your child won't agree on everything.
- Employ reflective listening techniques, repeating what you think your child feels and is saying using slightly different words, to be sure you really are getting the message accurately.
- Ask appropriate questions.
- Give appropriate verbal encouragement as your child talks.
- End the conversation when your child is ready to end it, not necessarily when you are ready. Adults sometimes don't listen long enough or try to prolong discussions to be sure the child has understood their point.
- Take your child's concerns seriously.
- Show respect for your child through both language and demeanor.
- Be ready to respond.

(borrowed from The Institute for Youth Development at www.youthdevelopment.org)

IX. METHODOLOGY

This is the third, and last, in a series of three papers sharing the findings of a research project commissioned by Families Northwest and conducted by the Barna Research Group, Ltd. of Ventura, CA. The first paper, “TeenTalk on Parents,” was released in July 2000, and examined the relationships between parents and teenagers in Washington State. The second paper, “TeenTalk on Marriage and Sex,” was released in September 2000, and examined the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and plans of youth in relation to marriage and sex. This final paper is a compilation of the first two and includes other information gathered from the survey which wasn’t previously covered.

The data in this report originated from a telephone survey of 405 Washington youth between the ages of 12 and 18, inclusive. The survey, approximately 19 minutes in length, was conducted in January and February 2000. The survey benefited from very high cooperation rates (76%) which increases the confidence we can have that the data accurately reflects the population studied. The results of the research are accurate to within ± 4.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level (which means that if the study were repeated 100 times, in 95 of those cases the results would fall within ± 4.9 percentage points of the results we obtained with this study). All of the significant differences reported in the endnotes are significant to at least the 0.10-level, with the majority of them significant to the 0.01-level, which means that there is a less than one percent chance that the difference reported is coincidence and a greater than 99 percent chance that there is a correlation between those variables.

In this report, two questions were asked only of 15-18 year olds because of the maturity of the subject matter in those questions. These findings are marked with an asterisk()*.

All questions about this research should be directed to Dawn Wilson at Families Northwest (425-637-5959 x138 or dawn@familiesnorthwest.org).

X. ENDNOTES

¹ Overall, 40.3% of teens strongly agree with the statement “I really enjoy being at home with my family.” Some sub-groups expressed agreement at a significantly greater level: middle-schoolers (51.9%), “A” GPA (48.9%), living with 2 parents (43.8%), those that have healthy family relationships (62.4%), close to mom (57.2%), close to dad (57.0%). Overall, 17.0% of teens disagreed somewhat and 6.6% disagreed strongly with this statement. Some sub-groups expressed significantly higher levels of disagreement: high schoolers (21.9% somewhat disagree), “C” or lower GPA (19.8% strongly disagree), family relationships not healthy (30.9% somewhat disagree, 14.6% strongly disagree), not close to mom (32.8% disagree somewhat, 12.7% disagree strongly), not close to dad (37.3% disagree somewhat, 17.3% disagree strongly), used drugs/alcohol in the past 3 months (27.4% disagree somewhat, 16.4% disagree strongly), had sex in the past 3 months (20.8% disagreed strongly), argue with parents in past 3 months (28.3% disagree somewhat, 13.5% disagree strongly).

² Overall, 36.1% of teens report “hardly ever” and 21.1% report “never” arguing with their parents in the past 3 months. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to report infrequent arguments: 12-14 year olds (46.9% “hardly ever”), middle-schoolers (50.9% “hardly ever”), “A” GPA (42.2% “hardly ever”, 26.5% “never”). Overall, 15.8% of teens report “frequently” and 26.9% report “occasionally” arguing with their parents in the past 3 months. Some sub-groups showed significantly higher rates of arguing: “C” or lower GPA (26.1% “frequently”), not close to mom (26.0% “frequently”), not close to dad (24.6% “frequently”, 44.0% “occasionally”).

³ Overall, 29.9% of Washington teens say that “all” of their family relationships are “very healthy”, while 36.6% report that “all of their family relationships are pretty healthy”. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to evaluate their family relationships as healthy: teens living with 2 parents (39.4% say “all are very healthy”), close to mother (42.3% say “all are very healthy”), close to dad (49.7% “all are very healthy”). Overall, 26.8% of teens responded that “some of their family relationships are healthy, some are not healthy” and 4.4% responded that “most of their family relationships are not healthy” while 1.0% said that none of their family relationships were healthy. Some sub-groups were significantly more likely to include their family relationships in one of these categories: living with a single parent (45.0% said “some healthy, some not”, 9.1% said “most not healthy”), not close to mom (56.9% said “some healthy, some not”, 10.2% said “most not healthy”), not close to father (50.0% said “some healthy, some not”, 12.2% said “most not healthy”, 3.1% said “none healthy”), used drugs/alcohol in the past 3 months (41.4% “some healthy, some not”, 9.2% “most not healthy”, 4.5% said “none healthy”), had sex in past 3 months (42.4% said “some healthy, some not”, 11.2% said “most not healthy”), spent time with serious boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (32.6% “some healthy, some not”, 8.2% “most not healthy”), argue with parents in past 3 months (35.0% said “some healthy, some not”, 7.3% said “most not healthy”, 2.3% said “none healthy”).

⁴ Overall, 27.5% of teens said having more time to spend with their fathers would improve their lives a lot, but among those who said they have a close relationship with their dad, 37.0% said more time together would be an improvement in the quality of their life. Among those who said they are not close to their dads, 52.1% said more time would not improve their life (compared to 35.3% of teens overall). A similar pattern is witnessed with the mother-teen relationship. Overall, 26.9% said having more time to spend with their mother would improve their lives a lot, but among those who were close to their moms, 34.2% said more time would bring a lot of improvement. These differences are all statistically significant.

⁵ Overall, only 20.2% of teens said having more money to spend on things they want would significantly improve the quality of their lives. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to believe money would improve their lives: teens who live with a single parent (30.9%), not close to mom (42.5%), not close to dad (30.9%), used drugs/alcohol in the past 3 months (49.6%), had sex in past 3 months (37.8%), argued with friends in past 3 months (29.2%), spent time with serious boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (27.8%).

⁶ Overall, 39.6% of teens strongly agree and 20.1% somewhat agree that they want to have a marriage like their parents have. Some sub-groups of teens are significantly more likely to want their marriage to emulate their parents: teens who live with two parents (54.0% strongly agree, 25.7% somewhat agree), teens with healthy family relationships (66.3%), close to mom (48.2%), close to dad (59.1%). Overall, 13.7% somewhat disagreed and 26.1% strongly

disagreed with the idea that they want a marriage like their parents have. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to disagree: living with single parent (71.5% strongly disagree), family relationships not healthy (54.8% strongly disagree), not close to mom (59.6% strongly disagree), not close to dad (52.6% strongly disagree), used drugs/alcohol in past 3 months (66.0% strongly disagree), had sex in past 3 months (60.6% strongly disagree), argued with friends in past 3 months (36.0% strongly disagree), spent time with serious boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (36.7% strongly disagree), argued with parents in past 3 months (34.4% strongly disagree).

⁷ Overall, 67.2% of teens believe that “getting parents’ approval” is an important accomplishment prior to marriage. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to feel this is important: living with 2 parents (73.3%), healthy family relationships (74.3%), close to mom (72.4%), close to dad (78.3%), Christians (73.5%), attend church regularly (78.0%). Overall, 31.0% of teens said that “getting parents’ approval” was not important. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to express this belief: live with single parent (46.4%), family relationships not healthy (43.9%), not close to mom (46.1%), not close to dad (47.1%), non-Christian (48.8%), “hardly ever” attend church (44.3%).

⁸ Overall, 64.3% of teens strongly agree that “It is best for children to be raised by a married mother and father” and an additional 19.5% somewhat agree. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to agree with this statement: living with two parents (68.5% strongly agree), healthy family relationships (71.8% strongly agree), Christians (68.6% strongly agree). Overall, only 7.7% of teens somewhat disagree with this idea, and 8.1% strongly disagree. However, among some sub-groups the level of disagreement is significantly higher than average: living with single parent (21.4% strongly disagree), not close to mom (17.5% strongly disagree), not close to dad (15.8% strongly disagree), non-Christian (17.4% strongly disagree), atheist (17.7% strongly disagree), used drugs/alcohol in past 3 months (19.3% strongly disagree), had sex in past 3 months (28.7% strongly disagree), argued with friends in past 3 months (14.2% strongly disagree), spent time with serious boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (11.6% strongly disagree).

⁹ Overall, 9.9% of teens said they “agree strongly” with the idea that “It is probably not as fulfilling raising kids today as it used to be,” while 28.6% say they “agree somewhat” with this statement. Certain sub-groups are significantly more likely to agree with this statement: 12-14 year olds (34.1% agree somewhat), middle-schoolers (35.9% agree somewhat), “C” or lower GPA (21.7% agree strongly, 39.1% agree somewhat). Overall, 24.8% of teens say they “disagree somewhat” with this belief and 33.0% say they “disagree strongly.” Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to disagree with this idea: 17-18 year olds (47.5% strongly disagree), high-schoolers (40.3% strongly disagree), “A” GPA (30.2% disagree somewhat and 37.9% disagree strongly).

¹⁰ Overall, 60.2% of teens say their parents have “a lot” of influence over their ideas about family and relationships, while 23.4% say their parents have “some” influence. Some sub-groups of teens are significantly more likely to say their parents have “a lot” of influence: healthy family relationships (82.1%), close to mom (72.8%), close to dad (78.3%), living with 2 parents (71.6%), Christians (67.5%), parents graduated from college (65.8% of those with college-graduated mom, 66.4% of those with college-graduated dad). Overall, only 10.3% of teens say their parents have “little” influence and 5.4% say their parents have “no” influence over their ideas about family and relationships. Some sub-groups are significantly less likely to say their parents have “a lot” of influence and more likely to rate their parents’ influence as low: living with a single parent (37.4% say “a lot”, 37.0% say “some”, 17.3% say “little”), family relationships not healthy (38.3% “a lot”, 35.6% “some”, 17.0% “little”, 9.0% “none”), not close to mom (26.3% “a lot”, 35.9% “some”, 28.2% “little”), not close to dad (32.7% “a lot”, 41.1% “some”, 15.4% “little”, 10.9% “none”), used drugs/alcohol in past 3 months (28.0% “a lot”, 38.1% “some”, 17.7% “little”, 16.2% “none”), had sex in past 3 months (34.7% “a lot”, 42.0% “some”, 11.3% “none”), argued with parents (51.0% “a lot”, 30.3% “some”).

¹¹ Throughout the survey data, this series of variables seemed to cluster together into two groups. Two of the behaviors – looking at pornographic material and cheating on a test, exam, etc. – occurred “frequently” or “occasionally” among so few teens that they did not compose a large enough sub-group to test for correlation with the other data in the research. However, the other nine behaviors were cross-tabulated with all of the other data collected in the survey. The group that tended to be positively correlated with positive attitudes about family relationships included volunteering time to help those in need, talking about one’s religion with one’s peers, talking with adults other than your parents, and surfing the Internet. The group that tended to be negatively correlated with positive attitudes (and positively correlated with negative attitudes) about family and relationships included using drugs/alcohol, having sex (only asked of 15-18 year olds), arguing with friends, arguing with parents, and spending time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend. Thus, when a teen is described as having participated in “risky behaviors,” we are referring to behaviors that seem to be detrimental to healthy ideas about relationships.

¹² Percentage of Teens who engaged in these behaviors on a frequent/occasional basis in the past 3 months

	Cheated on a test, etc.	Looked at pornography	Used illegal drugs or alcohol	Had a big argument with friends	Spent time with serious boy/girlfriend	Had a big argument with parents	Had sex (15-18 year olds only)*
AVERAGE	10.5%	10.1%	16.6%	30.4%	46.8%	42.7%	23.4%
Living with two parents	6.3%	7.2%	9.4%	24.9%	37.9%		(13.2%)
Healthy family relationships			6.1%		35.5%	26.9%	(14.5%)
Close to mom		6.6%	13.4%			33.9%	(23.4%)
Close to dad	3.9%		7.5%		37.7%	31.7%	(14.4%)
Christian			12.5%				(17.5%)
Attend church regularly		5.8%	6.6%		39.2%		(9.4%)
Stay-at-home parent		4.8%	7.0%	21.8%	36.6%		
Mom graduated college	7.1%		9.2%	25.4%	42.9%		(17.1%)
Living with single parent	20.9%	17.7%	36.4%	40.4%	70.2%		(44.4%)
Unhealthy family relationships			28.5%		59.3%	59.3%	(31.7%)
Not close to mom		32.3%	29.4%	42.7%	70.8%	55.4%	(44.6%)
Not close to dad	21.1%	18.0%	36.2%		62.6%	68.6%	(40.0%)
Used drugs in past 3 months	29.5%	27.7%	40.4%		72.4%	60.6%	(56.8%)
Had sex in past 3 months	18.8%	26.5%	58.7%		86.5%		
Argued with friends in past 3 months	15.3%	19.1%	22.1%			53.1%	(31.1%)
Spent time with serious boy/girlfriend in past 3 months	14.5%	13.4%	25.8%			51.2%	(39.3%)
Argued with parents in past 3 months	17.3%		23.6%	37.7%	56.0%		(24.5%)

* Though the percentages in this column bear out the same tendencies as those associated with the other behaviors, because of the smaller number of respondents answering this question, the differences in this column are not statistically significant.

Percentage of teens who “never” engaged in these behaviors in the past 3 months

	Cheated on a test, etc.	Looked at pornography	Used drugs or alcohol	Argued with friends	Spent time with serious boy/girlfriend	Argued with parents	Had sex (15-18 year olds only)
AVERAGE	64.9%	77.4%	75.0%	25.6%	37.5%	21.1%	69.3%
“A” GPA	71.0%	88.4%	86.8%	30.7%	46.3%	26.5%	83.2%
Living with 2 parents	69.9%	83.2%	81.7%	30.7%	43.6%		80.1%
Stay-at-home parent	72.1%	84.5%	85.8%	33.8%	47.1%		80.7%
Mom graduated college	70.0%	81.1%	82.7%		41.2%		76.4%
Healthy family relationships	78.9%	83.5%	90.0%	34.0%	49.5%	35.1%	81.8%
Close to mom	69.8%	81.0%	81.4%				
Close to dad	74.5%	85.6%	88.6%		45.6%	30.5%	80.9%
Christians		80.0%	79.3%				75.7%
Attend church regularly		84.4%	85.2%				84.8%

¹³ Overall, 39.3% of teens say it is “very important” to them for their parents to accept their friends. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to say their parents’ acceptance is very important: girls (44.1%), 12-14 year olds (46.1%), middle-schoolers (49.7%), “A” GPA (46.3%), Christians (43.5%), healthy family relationships (58.6%), close to mom (52.7%), close to dad (55.1%).

¹⁴ Overall, 44.3% of teens say their parents approve of “all” of their friends, but among some groups, teens report higher levels of parents’ approval: healthy family relationships (57.9%), “A” GPA (54.6%), one “stay-at-home” parent (51.2%). Overall, only 8.5% of teens say their parents approve of “about half” of their friends, while 9.5% say their parents approve of a “few.” Only 0.8% of all teens say their parents approve of “none” of their friends. Among some sub-groups, teens report more frequent parental “disapproval”: family relationships not healthy (14.4% say “about half”, 20.6% say “few”), not close to mom (24.4% say “few”), not close to dad (23.1% say “few”), used drugs/alcohol in past 3 months (14.3% say “about half”, 23.1% say “few”, 4.0% say “none”), had sex in past 3 months (27.3% say “few” and 3.5% say “none”), argued with parents in past 3 months (13.2% say “about half”, 14.7% say “few”).

¹⁵ Overall, 43.5% of teens “agree strongly” with the idea that they “spend time with their grandparents regularly and they are a very important part of their life.” Among some sub-groups there is significantly higher agreement: 12-14 year olds (51.2%), middle-schoolers (51.9%), close to mom (51.4%), close to dad (52.0%), living in blended family (53.5%), living with single parent (53.1%). Overall, only 10.6% of teens “disagree strongly” with this statement, but among some sub-groups, strong disagreement is significantly more likely: 17-18 year olds (18.9%), high-schoolers (14.4%), not close to mom (19.7%), not close to dad (19.3%).

¹⁶ Overall, 24.4% of teens “disagree somewhat” and 14.7% of teens “disagree strongly” with the belief that “parents do not really seem to understand what it is like to be a teenager these days.” Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to express disagreement with this idea: 15-18 year olds (33.6% of 15-16 year olds and 30.4% of 17-18 year olds “disagree somewhat”, 19.9% of 17-18 year olds “disagree strongly”), healthy family relationships (24.2% disagree strongly), close to mom (20.5% disagree strongly), close to dad (27.6% disagree strongly). Overall, 29.4% of teens “agree strongly” with this idea, but among some sub-groups there is significantly higher agreement: family relationships not healthy (43.5% agree strongly), not close to mom (42.8%), not close to dad (38.2%), 12-14 year olds (33.9%), used drugs/alcohol in past 3 months (50.9%), had sex in past 3 months (41.9%), argued with friends in past 3 months (36.7%), argued with parents in past 3 months (41.9%).

¹⁷ Overall, 78.4% of teens said that “optimistic about your future” accurately describes them. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to say they are optimistic: “A” GPA (83.9%), have a role model (81.8%), volunteer regularly (83.6%), talk w/adult that is not their parent (83.1%), talk about their religion with peers (83.8%). Overall, 17.8% of teens said that “optimistic about your future” does not accurately describe them. Sub-groups that are more likely to not describe themselves as optimistic: “C” GPA (29.5%), no role model (24.4%), not really close to father (27.2%).

¹⁸ Overall, 45.7% of teens “definitely want to” get married, 43.1% “would like to” get married, 9.6% are “not real interested” in getting married, and .8% “definitely do not want to” get married. Some sub-groups are more likely to express a higher interest in marriage: high schoolers (50.8%), whites (50.7%), living with 2 biological parents (52.6%), very healthy (53.9%) or somewhat healthy (43.2%) family relationships, very close (55.6%) to father, parents are a role model (54.5%), very close (51.5%) to mother. Sub-groups that express less interest in marriage are: non-whites (20.5%), “C” GPA (20.4%), living with single parent (21.5%), non-Christians (16.9%), atheists (10.7%), not healthy family (16%), not close to father (16.8%).

¹⁹ Overall, 72% of teens agreed strongly that “marriage is supposed to last a lifetime,” 20.7% agreed somewhat with this statement, 5.9% disagree somewhat, 1.2% disagree strongly, and .2% didn’t know. Some sub-groups were more likely to agree: living with 2 biological parents (75.8%), Christian (77.9%), attend church regularly (80.4%), healthy family relationships (81%), close to mother and father (82.2%) very close to father, close to other friend (76.8%), parents are role model (81.4%), parents model marriage (79.7%). Sub-groups more likely to disagree that “marriage is supposed to last a lifetime” are: 12-14 year olds (2.9%), living with single parent (11.9%), non-Christian (12.3%) /atheist (7.5%), doesn’t attend church (9.6%).

²⁰ Overall, 3.4% of teens agree strongly that “Anyone who gets married these days should expect their marriage will

end in divorce,” 6.7% agree somewhat, 23.7% disagree somewhat, 65.4% disagree strongly, and .7% don’t know. Some sub-groups are more likely to agree that one “should expect marriage to end in divorce” are: non-Christian (7.9%)/atheist (10.2%), living in blended family (14.8%), family relationships not healthy (11.2%), not close to mother or father (18.5%). The sub-groups more likely to disagree are: “A” GPA (72.2%), living with 2 biological parents (70%), healthy family relationships (73.2%), close to mother (72.6%) and father (75.8%), parents are role model (72%), parents influence views on marriage (72.9%).

²¹ “Risky behaviors” is a term that was introduced and more fully explained in the first “Teen Talk” report. Teens said to have engaged in these behaviors reported that they “frequently” or “occasionally” participated in some or all of the following in the 3 months prior to the survey: use an illegal drug or alcohol, have sex, have a big disagreement with a close friend, spend time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend, or have a major argument with their parents. As was explained and documented in detail in the first report, when a teen is described as having participated in “risky behaviors,” we are referring to behaviors that seem to be detrimental to healthy ideas about relationships based on this research.

²² Overall, 4.2% of teens agree strongly that “marriage is an outdated idea that does not fit in America’s culture these days,” 9.6% agree somewhat, 18.9% disagree somewhat, 65.9% disagree strongly, and 1.3% don’t know. The sub-groups more likely to agree that marriage is outdated are: “C” GPA (12.6%), do drugs in past 3 months (9.2%), have sex in past 3 months (12%), spend time with boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (6.7%). Sub-groups more likely to disagree are: 17-18 year olds (73.9%), close to mother (71.2%) and father (71.8%).

²³ Overall, 4.9% of teens agree strongly that “It’s better to go through life single than to get married,” 8.5% agree somewhat, 42.9% disagree somewhat, 40.8% disagree strongly, and 2.8% don’t know. Some sub-groups are more likely to agree that it’s better to be single: living with single parent (18.7%), non-Christian (13.2%). The sub-groups more likely to disagree are: 12-14 year olds (47.8%), very close to father (49.3%), mother graduated college (49.2%).

²⁴ Overall, 64.3% of teens agree strongly that “It is best for children to be raised by a married mother and father,” 19.5% agree somewhat, 7.7% disagree somewhat, 8.1% disagree strongly, and .3% don’t know. The sub-groups more likely to agree are: boys (68.4%), white (69%), living with 2 biological parents (68.5%), Christian (68.6%), very healthy family relationships (71.8%). The sub-groups more likely to disagree are: girls (11.4%), 17-18 year olds (16.2%), non-white (20.1%), living with single parent (21.4%), non-Christian (17.4%) /atheist (17.7%), not close to mother (17.5%) and father (15.8%), do drugs in past 3 months (19.3%), have sex in past 3 months (28.7%), argue with friends in past 3 months (14.2%), boyfriend/girlfriend in past 3 months (11.6%).

²⁵ Overall, 9.9% of teens agree strongly that “It’s probably not as fulfilling raising kids these days as it used to be,” 28.6% agree somewhat, 24.8% disagree somewhat, 33% disagree strongly, and 3.6% don’t know. Some sub-groups are more likely to agree: 12-14 year olds (34.1%), middle-schoolers (35.9%), “C” GPA (21.7%), living with blended family (24.1%), close to mom (13%). The sub-groups more likely to disagree: 17-18 year olds (47.5%), high schoolers (40.3%), “A” GPA (30.2%), parents are role model (39.1%), parents influence views (38.6%).

²⁶ *1997 Washington Marriage Report*; Washington Family Council. In a survey of 400 Washington adults, respondents were asked to rate 9 characteristics on a scale of 1-10 as to how important they were to having a strong marriage. “Good communication” rated an average 9.3 (tied for 1st with “lifelong commitment”), “fidelity” was rated a 9.0 (tied with “close friendship”), and the “ability to resolve conflict” rated an average 8.9. The other four characteristics rated an average score below 8.

²⁷ Overall, “being able to work through tough times” was evaluated as “extremely important” to having a good marriage by 67.0% of Washington teens. More than three-quarters of teens who reported healthy family relationships (77.0%) and teens who said their parents are a role model (76.2%) said conflict resolution was “extremely important.”

²⁸ Overall, 67.2% of teens said “get parents’ approval” was an ideal accomplishment before marriage. Some sub-groups are significantly more likely to value their parents’ approval: 12-14 year olds (76.4%), middle-schoolers (79.9%), teens with an “A” GPA (72.5%), teens living with two biological parents (73.3%), teens who have a close relationship

with their mother (72.4%), teens with a close relationship with their father (78.3%), those who say their parents are a role model for marriage (77.9%), Christians (73.5%), and those who attend church regularly (78.0%).

²⁹ Overall, 39.9% of Washington teens said “receive premarital counseling” was an ideal accomplishment before marriage. Those subgroups that are significantly more likely to value premarital counseling include: middle-schoolers (50.2%), those with healthy family relationships (42.3%), those who have a close relationship with their mother (46.7%), teens with a close relationship with their father (50.1%), Christians (45.6%), those who attend church regularly (51.6%), and those with a “A” GPA (46.9%).

³⁰ 1997 *Washington Marriage Report*, Washington Family Council.

³¹ Overall, 47.6% of Washington teens said their “parents” were the single, most significant influence on their thinking about marriage. Teens who live with two biological parents (52.8%), those with healthy family relationships (57.3%), those who see their parents as a role model (56.2%), those who see want a marriage like their parents have (62.2%), and those with an “A” GPA (56.3%) are significantly more likely to say their parents are their primary influence.

³² Overall, 39.6% of teens “agree strongly” and 20.1% “agree somewhat” with the idea, “Someday you hope to have a marriage like your parents have.” Some subgroups of teens are significantly more likely to agree strongly with this idea (groups that had significantly higher response rates in “agree strongly” were also equally or more likely to “agree somewhat” as the average teen): boys (41.4%), middle-schoolers (48.3%), living with two biological parents (54.0%), have siblings at home (42.4%), have healthy family relationships (66.3%), close to mother (48.2%), close to father (59.1%), Christians (44.3%). Overall, 13.7% of teens “disagree somewhat” and 26.1% “disagree strongly” with the hope that they will have a marriage like their parents. Some subgroups of teens are significantly more likely to disagree strongly with this idea: girls (30.6%), 17-18 year olds (37.9%), living with single parent (71.5%), not healthy family relationships (54.8%), not close to mother (59.6%), not close to father (52.6%).

³³ Overall, 27.3% of Washington teens said they “didn’t know” what influenced their thinking about marriage the most. More than one-third of 12-14 year olds (34.3%) and teens living with a single parent (39.3%), a significantly higher proportion, responded this way.

³⁴ Stanton, Glenn T., *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in Postmodern Society*, ©1997, pp. 55-70.

³⁵ Overall, 41.5% of teens “agree strongly” and 25.7% “agree somewhat” with the statement, “Before getting married, it’s better to live with that person for a while to make sure that the two people are compatible.” Some subgroups of teens expressed significantly higher levels of agreement: boys (47.1% “agree strongly”), teens living with a single parent (51.1% “agree strongly”), teens who took “illegal drugs without a prescription in the past 3 months” on a frequent or occasional basis (55.0% “agree strongly”), teens who reported “having sex” in the past 3 months on a frequent or occasional basis (73.6% “agree strongly”), non-Christians (58.6% “agrees strongly”).

³⁶ Overall, 36.8% of Washington teens “agree strongly” and 22.5% “agree somewhat” with the belief, “You expect that you will probably live with your boyfriend/girlfriend before you decide to marry him/her.” Some subgroups of teens were significantly more likely to agree with this statement: boys (44.0% “agree strongly”), teens living with a single parent (51.7% “agree strongly”), teens who used drugs in the past 3 months “frequently” or “occasionally” (57.2% “agree strongly”), teens who had sex “frequently” or “occasionally” in the past 3 months (70.5% “agree strongly”), teens who are not close to their moms (54.5% “agree strongly”).

³⁷ Overall, 49.6% of teens believe that “Ideally...a person should live together with the other person...before marriage.” Some subgroups of teens were significantly more likely to agree with this statement: boys (57.5%), teens living with a single parent (61.4%), non-Christians (63.4%), atheists (75.2%), teens who had sex “frequently” or “occasionally” in the past 3 months (70.0%), and teens who “frequently” or “occasionally” spent a significant amount of time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 3 months (57.9%).

³⁸ Overall, 39.3% of Washington teens “agree strongly” and 19.4% “agree somewhat” with the idea, “It is realistic to expect people to wait until they are married to have sex.” Some subgroups of teens were significantly more likely to

“agree strongly” with this statement: girls (46.6%), middle-schoolers (47.0%), teens with an “A” GPA (48.5%), teens with a “stay-at-home” parent (50.3%), teens who report healthy family relationships (52.4%), teens who say they are close to their mother (46.9%), teens who are close to their father (46.9%), those who say their parents are a role model for them (45.1%), and Christians (43.5%).

³⁹ Overall, 42.0% of Washington teens personally believe that a person should “wait until they are married” before it is the right time for that person to have sex. Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls (48.7%), teens with an “A” GPA (53.8%), Christians (49.7%), teens who report attending church regularly (66.0%), teens with healthy family relationships (56.8%), teens who say they are close to their mom (48.8%) and those who say they are close to their dad (52.1%).

⁴⁰ Overall, 78.4% of Washington teens self-identify as “*optimistic*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: teens with an “A” GPA, teens who say they have a role model, teens who volunteer regularly, teens who talk with an adult that is not their parent, and teens who talk about their religion with peers.
Overall, 35.7% of Washington teens self-identify as “*stressed out*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds, high schoolers, those who say their family relationships are not healthy, and those who argue with their parents.
Overall, 53.1% of Washington teens self-identify as “*too busy*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds, teens who have both parents working, and those who also say they are stressed out.
Overall, 31.9% of Washington teens self-identify as “*skeptical*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: teens who are stressed out. **8.5% of Washington teens answered that they don’t know if they are skeptical — this may have been a vocabulary issue in that 12-14 year olds and middle-schoolers replied “don’t know” at twice the rate of older youth.**
Overall, 56.9% of Washington teens self-identify as “*religious*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, those who live with two biological parents, youth with a stay-at-home parent, youth who say they are Christian, those who attend church regularly, those who are close to their mother, those whose parents are a role model and model marriage, and youth who volunteer regularly.
Overall, 42.5% of Washington teens self-identify as a “*committed born-again Christian*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, 12-14 year olds, middle-schoolers, those who live with two biological parents, those who have a stay-at-home parent, those with siblings in the home, those who attend church regularly, those who have healthy family relationships, those who are close to their mother and father, those whose parents are a role model for marriage, and those who are conservative.
Overall, 41.9% of Washington teens self-identify as “*searching for meaning in life*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: those who live with a single-parent.
Overall, only 7.8% of Washington teens self-identify as “*lonely*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds, those with a “C or less” GPA, those whose family relationships are not healthy, those who aren’t close to their parents, and those who are stressed out.
Overall, 89.7% of Washington teens say they “*easily make friends*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 15-16 year olds, those close to their father, those who did drugs/had sex/had serious boyfriend or girlfriend in past three months, those who are optimistic, and those who are physically attractive.
Overall, 67.6% of Washington teens self-identify as “*physically attractive*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 15-18 year olds, and those who have spent a lot of time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend in the last three months.

⁴¹ Overall, 14.6% of Washington teens volunteer “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: those who have talked about their religious beliefs frequently in the last three months.
Overall, 23.0% of Washington teens discuss their religious beliefs “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, 17-18 year olds, those who don’t attend public school, those who are Christians, those who frequently attend church, and those who have a role model.
Overall, only 4.8% of Washington teens cheat on a test “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: boys, those with a “C” GPA, youth with single parents, those who are non-Christians or atheists, those who aren’t close to their father, those with no role model, and those who did drugs or argued with their parents in the past three months.
Overall, only 6.5% of Washington teens look pornographic material “*occasionally*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: boys, 17-18 year olds, those with a “C” GPA, those living with a single-parent, teens who are non-Christian or atheist, those not close to their mother, and those who did drugs/had sex/argued with parents or friends/spent time with boyfriend or girlfriend in past three months.

Overall, 75.0% of Washington teens “*never*” use drugs. Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 12-14 year olds, middle-schoolers, those with an “A” GPA, those living with two biological parents, those with a stay-at-home parent, those whose mother and father graduated college, Christian youth, those with healthy family relationships, teens close to their mother and father, and those whose parents are a role model and marriage model. Overall, 8.9% of Washington teens had sex “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds, those with a “C” GPA, those living with a single-parent, those who aren’t close to their father, those whose family relationships are not healthy, and those who did drugs/argued with friends/spent time with boyfriend or girlfriend in the past three months.

Overall, 8.8% of Washington teens have a big disagreement with a close friend “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: those who are not close to mom.

Overall, 33.8% of Washington teens spend time surfing the Internet “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: high schoolers, those with an “A” GPA, those living with two biological parents, and those with healthy family relationships.

Overall, 27.8% of Washington teens spend time with a serious boyfriend or girlfriend “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds, those with a “C” GPA, those living with a single-parent, those who are non-Christian or atheist, those whose family relationships are not healthy, and those who did drugs/had sex/argued with parents in the past three months.

Overall, 15.8% of Washington teens have major arguments with their parents “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: those with a “C” GPA, those whose family relationships aren’t healthy, those who are not close to their mother and father, and those who did drugs/argued with friends in the past three months.

Overall, 34.0% of Washington teens spend time with other adults “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: 17-18 year olds.

⁴² Overall, 56.9% of Washington teens say they are “*religious*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, teens who live with two biological parents, youth with a stay-at-home parent, youth who say they are Christian, those who attend church regularly, those who are close to their mother, those whose parents are a role model and model marriage, and youth who volunteer regularly.

Overall, 42.5% of Washington teens self-identify as a “*committed born-again Christian*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, 12-14 year olds, middle-schoolers, those who live with two biological parents, those who have a stay-at-home parent, those with siblings in the home, those who attend church regularly, those who have healthy family relationships, those who are close to their mother and father, those whose parents are a role model for marriage, and those who are conservative.

Overall, 23% of Washington teens said they discuss their religious beliefs with other kids their age “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: girls, 17-18 year olds, those who don’t attend public school, those who are Christians, those who frequently attend church, and those who say they have a role model.

⁴³ Overall, only 4.8% of Washington teens cheat on a test “*frequently*.” Some subgroups were significantly more likely to respond this way: boys, those with a “C” GPA, youth with single parents, those who are non-Christians or atheists, those who aren’t close to their father, those with no role model, and those who did drugs or argued with their parents in the past three months.