



**The National Campaign**  
to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

## *With One Voice (lite)*

A 2009 Survey of Adults and Teens  
on Parental Influence, Abstinence,  
Contraception, and the Increase  
in the Teen Birth Rate

By Bill Albert

Spring 2009

[TheNationalCampaign.org](http://TheNationalCampaign.org)  
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# The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

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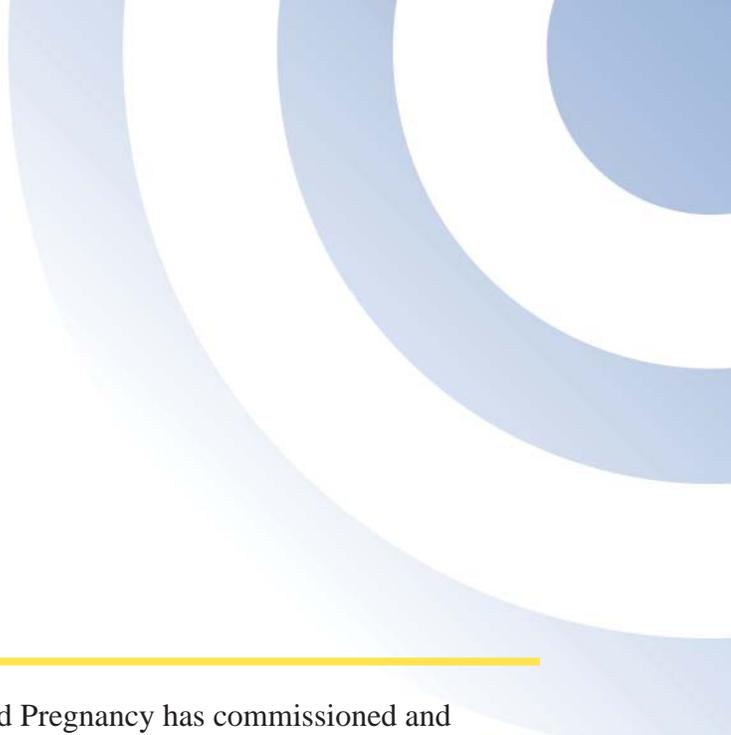
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## Introduction

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The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has commissioned and released survey data since the organization's inception in 1996. We believe that these periodic surveys of public opinion—a series we have called *With One Voice*—are an important supplement to the behavioral data collected regularly by the federal government through such surveys as the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG).

We hope that our surveys provide valuable insights for parents, practitioners, policymakers, funders, the media, and others about teen and unplanned pregnancy, about the factors that influence young peoples' decisions about sex, and about what might be done to help reverse the recent increase in the U.S. teen birth rate.

*With One Voice (lite)* is a short survey that addresses two primary topics: (1) parental influence on teens' decisions about sex, abstinence, contraception, and (2) the recent increase in the U.S. teen birth rate. The National Campaign expects to release a more comprehensive survey of teens and young adults later in 2009 that will further flesh out the topics discussed here and others as well.

## Findings

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### Teens continue to say that parents most influence their decisions about sex...

The National Campaign has commissioned many public opinion surveys over the past ten years. Among the most consistent findings from these surveys: Teens say that parents—not their friends, not their partners, not the media—most influence their decisions about sex.

- About one-third of teens (31%) say parents most influence their decisions about sex compared to 23% who cite themselves, 18% friends, 7% the media, 5% religious leaders, and 3% teachers and sex educators.
- Younger teens (34% of those aged 12-14) and older teens (28% of those aged 15-17) say parents most influence their decisions about sex. (Data not displayed in the following charts.)
- When asked who most influences their decisions about sex, teens are now more likely than in years past to cite themselves (23% in 2009 survey vs. 10% in 2007 survey).

### ..and adults continue to underestimate their influence.

Adults underestimate the influence they have over teens' decisions about sex and overestimate the influence of such sources as friends and the media.

- For their part, adults believe that friends (43%) most influence teens' decisions about sex (compared to 18% of teens who say friends are most influential).

- Only 24% of adults believe that parents most influence teens' decisions about sex (vs. 31% of teens).
- Some 13% of adults say the media most influences teens' decisions about sex (vs. 7% of teens).

### Adults and teens agree: Young people should be getting more information about abstinence *and* contraception.

Three-quarters of adults and a clear plurality of teens say they wish young people were getting more information about both abstinence and contraception, rather than either/or.

- Fully 73% of adults and 37% of teens say they wish young people were getting more information about abstinence and contraception, rather than either/or.
- Only 11% of adults and 7% of teens think teens should be getting more information about abstinence alone.
- Just 8% of adults and teens think teens should be getting more information about contraception alone.
- Surprisingly, one-third of teens say they are already getting enough information about abstinence and contraception and 12% simply “don't know” if they should receive more information about the topics.

### Does a “don't have sex but use contraception if you do” message inadvertently encourage teens to have sex?

Our 2009 survey posed the following question to adults and teens: “Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teen: ‘I don't want you to have sex. In fact, not having sex is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. But, if you do end up having

sex, be certain to use birth control or protection.’ Does this message encourage sexual activity?”

- More than six in ten adults (64%) say this message does *not* encourage sexual activity among teens. Thirty percent believe that the message does encourage teens to be sexually active.
- Three-quarters of teens (75%) say that the message does *not* encourage sexual activity. Twenty one percent reported that the message does encourage teens to be sexually active.

**Parents, sex and relationship education, and the media might all help to reverse the recent national increase in the teen birth rate.**

Teens and adults think that (1) conversations between parents and teens, (2) more frequent and better quality sex and relationship education, and (3) seeing the consequences of teen pregnancy realistically portrayed in the media would all help young people avoid teen pregnancy.

When asked to choose what would be most helpful among the three options:

- 51% of adults and 42% of teens cited more open conversations with parents.
- 30% of adults and 37% of teens cited seeing the consequences of teen pregnancy realistically portrayed in the media.
- 16% of adults and 17% of teens cited more frequent and better quality sex and relationship education.

When asked to provide their number two choice among the same list of options:

- 36% of adults and 34% of teens cited more frequent and better quality sex and relationship education.
- 34% of adults and 32% of teens cited more open conversations with parents.
- 27% of adults and 32% of teens cited seeing the consequences of teen pregnancy realistically portrayed in the media.

## Methodology

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Data in this document are drawn from two national surveys—one with adults (18 years and older) and one with teens (ages 12-17). Both surveys were conducted by International Communications Research (ICR), an independent research company ([www.icrsurvey.com](http://www.icrsurvey.com)).

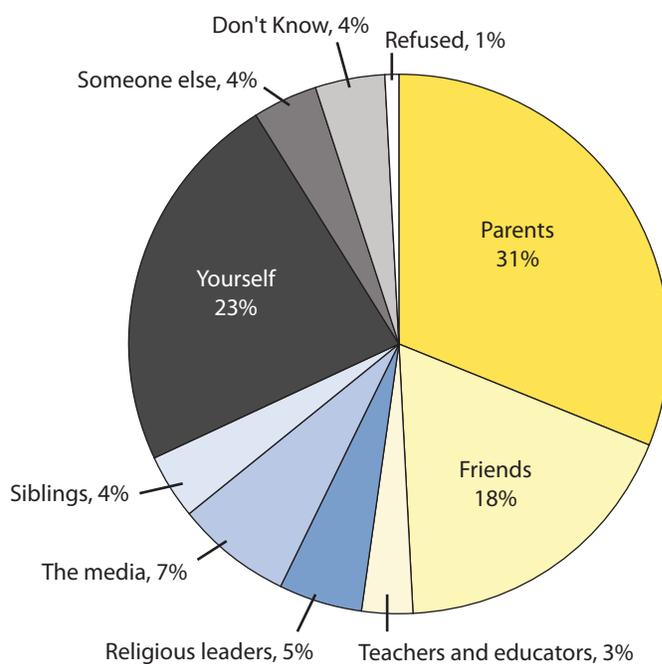
The adult survey was conducted by telephone using a random digit dial process and was weighted to provide a nationally representative estimate of the adult population, ages 18 and older. The survey took place between January 29 and February 2, 2009 and included 1,008 respondents. The margin of error is +/- 3.09 at the 95% confidence level.

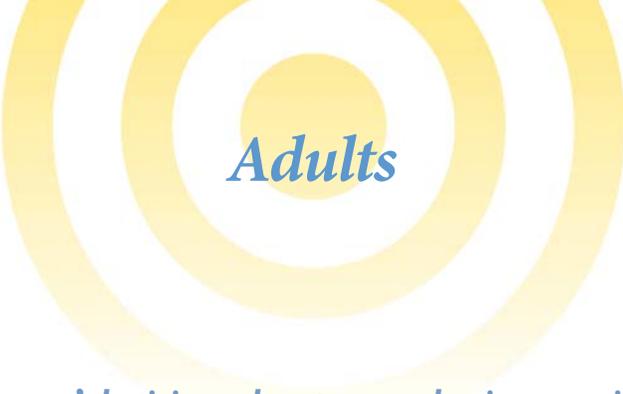
The teen survey was also conducted by telephone using a random digit dial process and was weighted to provide a nationally representative estimate of the teen population ages 12-17. The teen survey took place between January 30 and February 3, 2009 and included 513 teens. The margin of error is +/- 4.33 at the 95% confidence level.



**CHART I**

**When it comes to your decision about sex, who is more influential?**

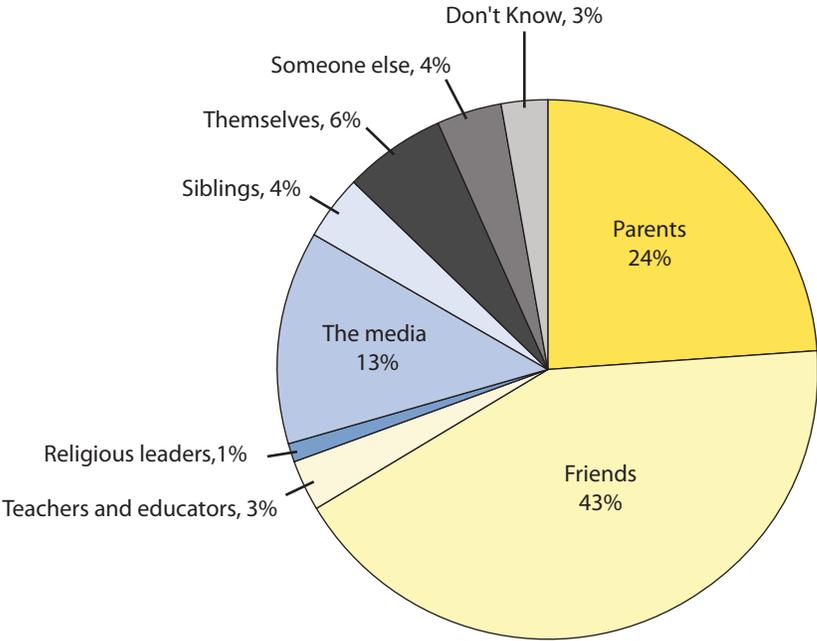


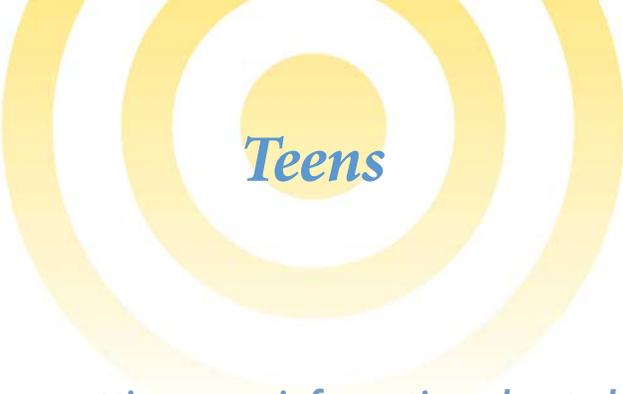


# Adults

## CHART I

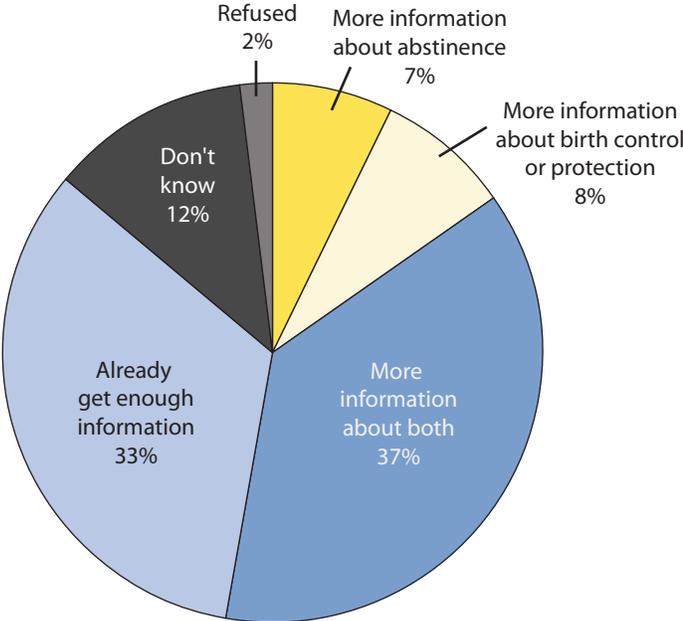
When it comes to teens' decision about sex, who is more influential?

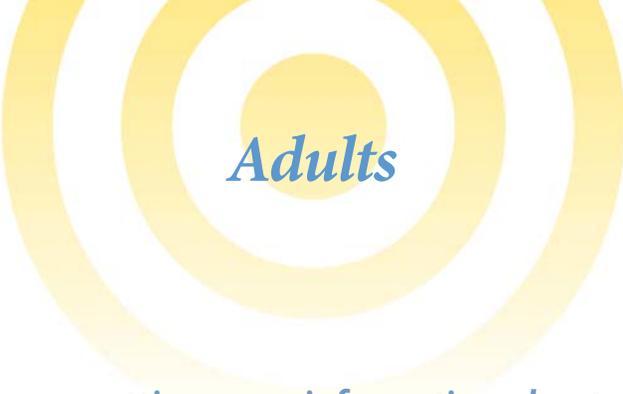




**CHART 2**

**Do you wish you were getting more information about abstinence, more information about birth control or protection, or more information about both?**

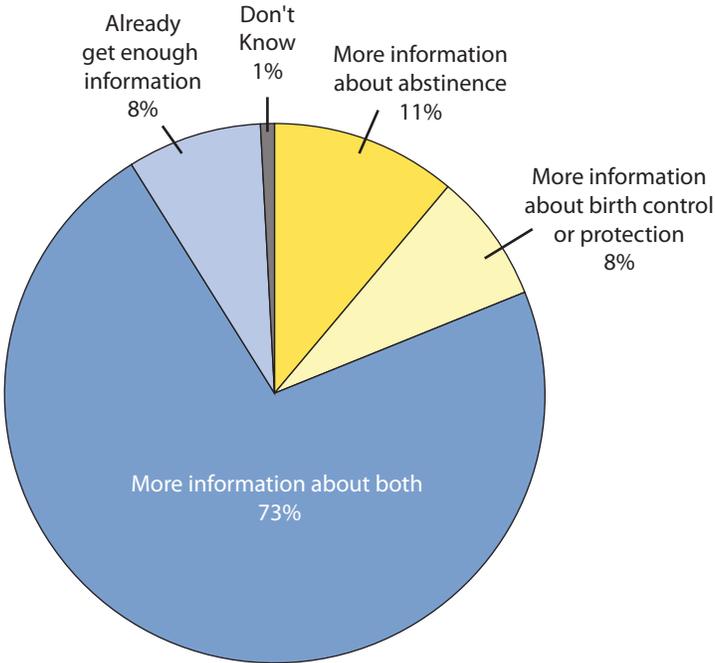




# Adults

## CHART 2

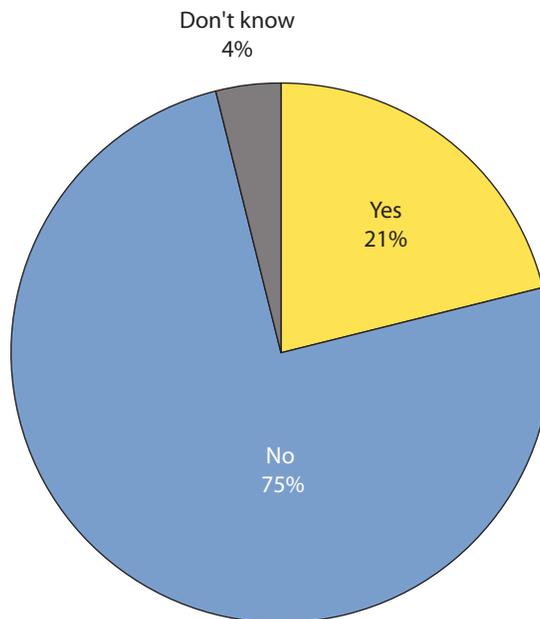
**Do you wish teens were getting more information about abstinence, more information about birth control or protection, or more information about both?**



# Teens

## CHART 3

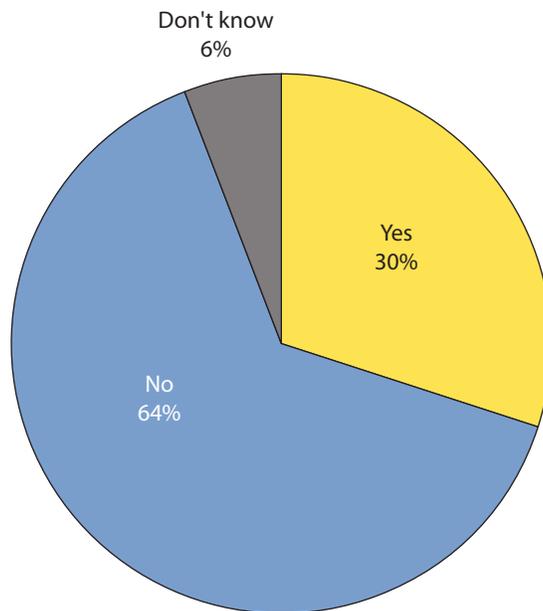
**Suppose a parent or other adult tells you the following: “I don’t want you to have sex. In fact, not having sex is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. But, if you do end up having sex, be certain to use birth control or protection.” Does this message encourage sexual activity?**

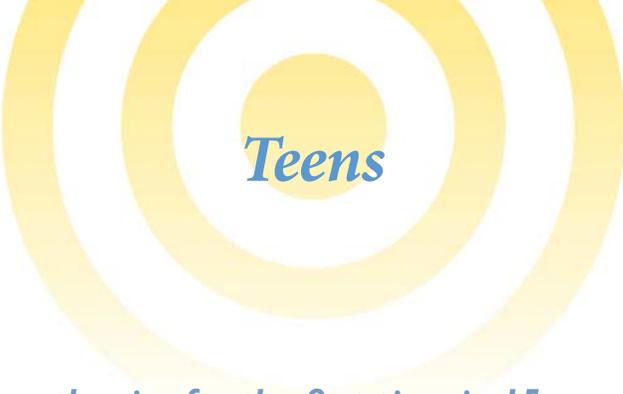


# Adults

## CHART 3

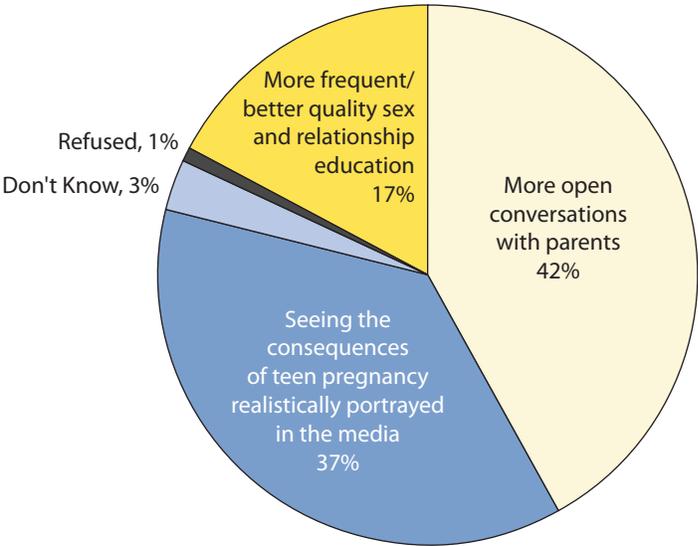
**Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teen the following: “I don’t want you to have sex. In fact, not having sex is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. But, if you do end up having sex, be certain to use birth control or protection.” Does this message encourage sexual activity?**





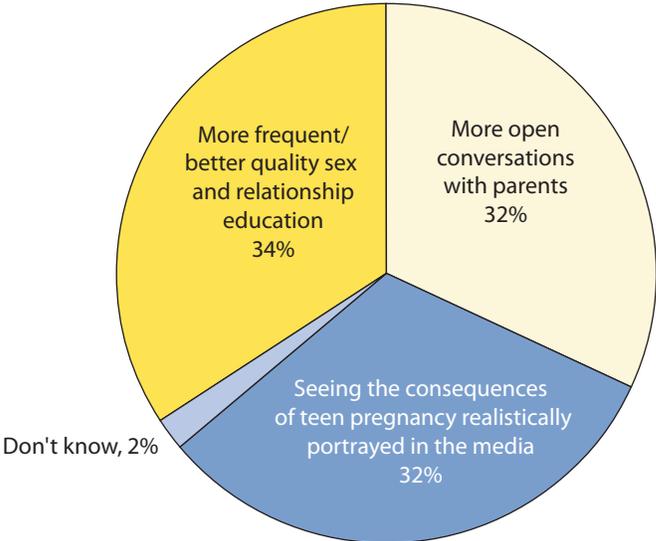
**CHART 4**

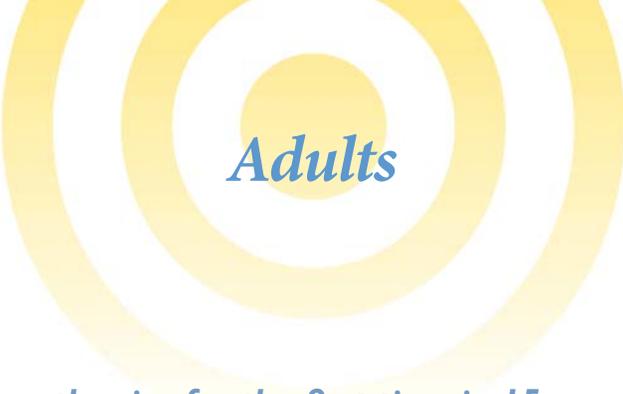
*Births to teens are on the rise for the first time in 15 years. What do you think would be most effective in helping teens avoid pregnancy?*



**CHART 5**

*Now, among that same list, what is your number two choice?*

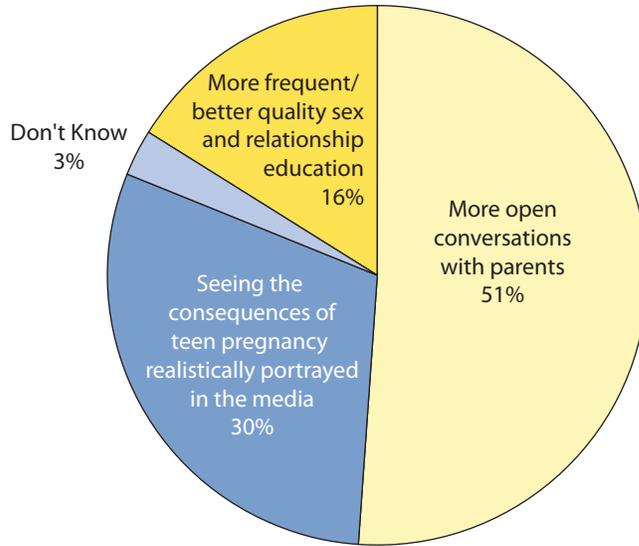




# Adults

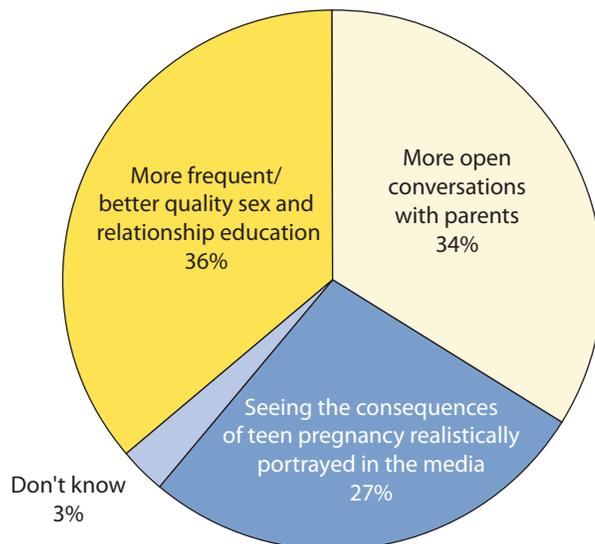
## CHART 4

*Births to teens are on the rise for the first time in 15 years. What do you think would be most effective in helping teens avoid teen pregnancy.*



## CHART 5

*Now, among that same list, what is your number two choice?*





The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy seeks to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

If we are successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.

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