

Facts About America's Youth

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HELPING AMERICA'S YOUTH



Facts About America's Youth



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

The Impact of Caring Adults in Families

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

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

Statistics on Youth and Families

- The percentage of children younger than 18 living with two married parents has remained stable at approximately 68% since 1996, after a 16-year period of decline starting in 1970, when 85% of children lived with two married parents.^{viii}
- In 2003, 17% of children younger than 18 (12 million) lived in families with an income below the poverty threshold, and 7% of children lived in severe poverty, with family income less than 50% of the poverty threshold. Children living in households headed by unmarried women were more likely to be poor—42% compared to 9% of children living with two married parents. There are large disparities in poverty rates by children's race and ethnicity.^{ix}
- Approximately 2.6 million children living in rural areas are poor.^x
- Over 500,000 children and adolescents live in foster care. In 2003, nearly half (47%) of all children in foster care were adolescents ages 11 to 18 years, and an additional 2% were at least 19 years.^{xi} Youth who age out of the foster care system often have multiple problems: 38% have mental health problems, 50% have used an illicit drug, and 25% are already involved with the judicial system.^{xii} In addition, only 54% of youth graduate from high school up to four years following discharge from foster care.
- Child abuse and neglect affect 11 out of every 1,000 children between the ages of 12 and 15, and 6 out of every 1,000 children between the ages of 16 and 17.^{xiii} The psychological consequences of child abuse during early childhood can be long-lasting and affect the development, mental health, and behavior of adolescents.^{xiv}

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The Impact of Caring Adults in Schools

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

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

Statistics on Youth and Schools

- In 2003, 63% of 4th graders and 74% of 8th graders read at the basic level or higher. Conversely, however, 37% of 4th grade and 26% of 8th grade students' reading skills were below the basic level.^{xix} Students who have difficulty learning to read will have a greater chance of school failure and behavior problems such as aggression^{xx}
- More than 40% of students who dropped out of high school during the 2000 – 2001 school year were between the ages of 15 and 17 years. Students whose families are poor, live in rural areas or areas of urban poverty, and students who are Hispanic, American Indian or African American all have significantly higher dropout rates.^{xxi} The percentage of 16- to 24-year olds who are high school dropouts decreased from 15% in 1972 to 11% in 2002,^{xxii} and the high school completion rate among 18- to 24-year-olds has remained stable at 87%.^{xxiii}
- There is a higher dropout rate among rural students: 20% of rural students dropout, compared to 15% of urban students. There is less money per rural student spent on education. On average, urban school districts spend a total of \$7,010 per student; rural districts spend \$5,302—more than \$1,700 less.^{xxiv}
- In 2003, 7% of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school over the past year. Almost 13% of students reported being in a physical fight, and about 9% of students were threatened or injured by a weapon on school property during the past year. More than 5% of students in grades 9 to 12 had not gone to school on at least one day in the last year because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to and from school.^{xxv}



The Impact of Caring Adults in Communities

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

- A review of 55 evaluations of mentoring programs found that mentors can have a modest positive effect on youth outcomes, particularly for youth who do not already have significant personal problems.^{xxvi}
- A review of 10 evaluated mentoring programs concluded that mentoring programs can enhance positive youth development: mentored youth have shown evidence of significant reductions in school absence; higher college participation; better school attitudes and behavior; less drug and alcohol use (especially among minority youth); less likelihood of hitting others; less likelihood of committing crimes; more positive attitudes toward their elders and toward helping; and improved parental relationships and support from peers.^{xxvii}
- Research shows that youth who feel more supported and connected to staff at a community program are more likely to attend and to get more from the program.^{xxviii}
- Continuity of mentor relationships is important. Youth who were matched to one Big Brother or Big Sister mentor for more than 12 months compared to less than 12 months, reported significant increases in their self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, value of school, parental relationship quality, and significant decreases in drug and alcohol use.^{xxix}
 - Mentor matches were more likely to break up if youth were older (13-16 years old vs. 10-12), were referred for psychological or educational programs, or if they had sustained any form of abuse. Matches were also more likely to break up if the mentors were married between the ages of 26-30, or had a lower-income.
- In a study of approximately 800 mostly African-American teens in the Midwest, 52% of youth reported having a natural mentor, most often (36%) an extended family member such as an aunt, uncle, grandparent or cousin. Teens who had a natural mentor were less likely to use marijuana, participate in non-violent delinquency, and to have higher levels of school attachment, school efficacy, and a belief that it is important to do well in school.^{xxx}
- Mentoring relationships with non-familial adults may have benefits above and beyond supportive relationships with parents. For example, mentoring relationships with adults such as coaches, employers, teachers, guidance counselors, or clergy, have been linked to more favorable educational or physical health outcomes as compared to youth who categorized their mentors as family members.^{xxxi}
- Close connections with caring adults can foster improvements in adolescents' relationships with others. For example, volunteer mentoring relationships can lead to improvements in teens' perceptions of their relationships with their parents in terms of intimacy, communication, and trust.^{xxxii}

Statistics on Youth in their Communities

- At least one-quarter of 8th and 10th grade students and almost one-third of 12th grade students volunteer in community service at least once a month.^{xxxiii}
- In 2001, 38% of children in kindergarten through 8th grade participated in one or more organized activities after school.^{xxxiv}
- Since 1990, there has been a modest increase in the percentage of students who report that religion plays a very important role in their lives, so that in 2003, about one-third of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders reported this connection. About 35% of students planning to complete four years of college but less than 25% of students with lower academic aspirations reported this connection.^{xxxv}

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Increased Risk Factors for Boys

Mortality and Victimization

- Death rates are more than twice as high for adolescent males compared to adolescent females.^{xxxvi}
- An estimated 1,600 persons under age 18 were murdered in the U.S. in 2002. About two-thirds (64%) of these juvenile murder victims were male.^{xxxvii}
- Rates of suicide for adolescent males (12 per 100,000 youth) are more than five times the rate for adolescent females (2 per 100,000 youth).^{xxxviii}
- From 1993 through 2003, the nonfatal violent victimization rate for males ages 12–17 was about 50% greater than that for females.^{xxxix}
- In 2002, 1.6 million youths, or 7% of 12- to 17-year-olds, ran away from home and slept on the street during the past 12 months. About 55% were male.^{xl}

Juvenile Delinquency

- In 2003, 71% of all juveniles arrested (2.2 million) were boys and boys represented 85% of juvenile offenders in residential placement.^{xli}
 - Youth younger than 15 years comprised about 32% of juvenile arrests in 2003. About 4% of juvenile arrests were for violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault), 10% were for other assaults, 21% were for property crimes, 9% were for drug abuse violations, 6% were for liquor law violations, 1% were for driving under the influence, 9% were for disorderly conduct, and 12% were for status offenses (curfew and loitering, runaways).^{xlii}
- In 2003, the male juvenile Violent Crime Index arrest rate was 4.2 times the female rate compared to 8.3 times the female rate in 1980. The gender disparity between male and female violent crime arrest rates has decreased, reflecting an overall 26% decline in the male rate coupled with a 47% increase in the female rate.^{xliii}

Substance Abuse

- According to the 2004 Monitoring the Future Survey, the proportion of 12th graders who had ever used marijuana is higher among males than females (37% versus 31%) along with the proportion using marijuana daily (7.7% versus 3.1% for females). This gender difference is also true among 8th- and 10th-grade students.^{xliv}
- The annual prevalence-of-use rates on most other illicit drugs tend to be at least one and one-half to two times higher for males than females in the 12th grade. For many of these drugs, however, there is little gender difference in use among 8th and 10th graders; the differences between boys and girls seem to emerge over the course of middle to late adolescence.^{xlv}
- Boys are also more likely to use alcohol frequently. For example, daily alcohol use is reported by 4.1% of the 12th-grade males versus 1.4% of the 12th-grade females. Males are more likely than females to drink large quantities of alcohol in a single sitting: 34% of 12th-grade males reported drinking five or more drinks in a row in the prior two weeks versus 24% of 12th-grade females. These gender differences become considerably larger at the upper grade levels.^{xlvi} In the last two years, 8th grade girls actually had a higher binge drinking rate than 8th grade boys—11.8% vs. 10.8%.^{xlvii}

Education

- 70% of female kindergartners know their letters at school entry, compared with 62% of males.^{xlviii}
- Boys are more than twice as likely as girls to receive special services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In 2003, 9% of boys in kindergarten through grade 3 had an IEP compared with 4% of girls in the same grades.^{xlix}
- Girls performed better than boys at every grade level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) writing assessment in 2002.^l
- In 2004, 12% of males ages 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, compared with 9% of females. Although males comprise one-half of the population, they make up 57% of the dropouts in this age group.^l

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