

study finds TV sex promotes teen sex

TRENDS

Sometimes conventional wisdom is more than conventional—it's dead-on right. Researchers with the RAND Corporation tracked almost 1,800 teenagers' TV viewing habits for a year, then compared what they discovered with changes in those teenagers' sexual activities. They found that the teenagers who watched the most sex on TV were twice as likely to be sexually active as those who watched the least sex.

The study found that fully two-thirds of all TV shows include sexual content, and that dialogue about sex is just as powerful as actual explicit content. RAND Corporation behavioral scientist Rebecca Collins says TV "sends the message that everybody's having sex and nobody's thinking about responsibility and nothing bad ever happens." Now we know one powerful reason why almost half of all American teenagers (47%) say they've had sex.

Meanwhile, in the one-two punch category, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health studied more than 1,900 films released between 1992 and 2003 and found evidence of significant "ratings creep." That means the ratings board has gradually, and significantly, allowed more and more violent and sexually explicit content into films. One of the study's co-authors, Kimberly Thompson, says, "When you look at the average, today's PG-13 movies are approaching what the R movies looked like in

1992. Today's PG is approaching what PG-13 looked like a decade ago."

Rick Schatz, president and CEO of the National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, says, "The good news is that by helping their kids think critically about what they see on TV, parents can actually play an important role in helping prevent their kids from making some bad choices." The problem is that only half of all adolescents say they've had a "good talk" about sex with their mother in the past year, and less than a third said they've had a "sex talk" with their father.

Also: A study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) found that teenage girls who date boys who are at least two years older than them are

much more likely to make risky, damaging choices. "We found a tight connection between teen sexual behavior and dating and teen risk of smoking, drinking, and using illegal drugs," says CASA chairman Joseph Califano.

truths and lies about teenagers

Do your kids fear bad grades above all else? Do parents know their kids hunger for more time with them? A Family Circle survey of more than 1,000 young people and almost 3,500 parents found a significant gap between what kids say is true and what their parents believe.

Here's a rundown of what's gospel and what's not.

● **Kids' greatest fear (51% said so) is "Mom or Dad getting sick," but less than a third of parents (29%) guessed this was a top fear.** "Terrorism" (40%), "School violence" (34%), "National disasters" (29%), and "Bullies" (25%) rounded out the top five fears of teenagers—parents guessed low in each case.

● **Less than half of all parents surveyed by Family Circle (46%) thought their kids wanted more time with them, but more than three-quarters of teenagers (77%) said they do.** And half of kids (49%) say they admire their parents more than anyone, but only a third of parents (32%) think so.

● **Almost two-thirds of parents (62%) say their teenagers eat three well-balanced meals a day, but less than half of kids (46%) agree.** Almost three-quarters of kids (71%) say they eat too much junk food.

● **Half of all young people say they've been bullied at school, but just 40% of all parents think so.** And one in six teenagers (16%) say a boyfriend or girlfriend has hit them, but just 3% of parents think so.

"PARENTS AREN'T THE ONLY INFLUENCE IN THEIR KIDS' LIVES, SO THEY NEED TO BE THE BEST, THE LOUDEST, THE CLEAREST, AND THE CLOSEST."

—DR. PHIL MCGRAW, TV talk-show host and author of the new book *Family First*, quoted in Time Magazine