

# U.S. Teen Demographics, Health, and Behaviors

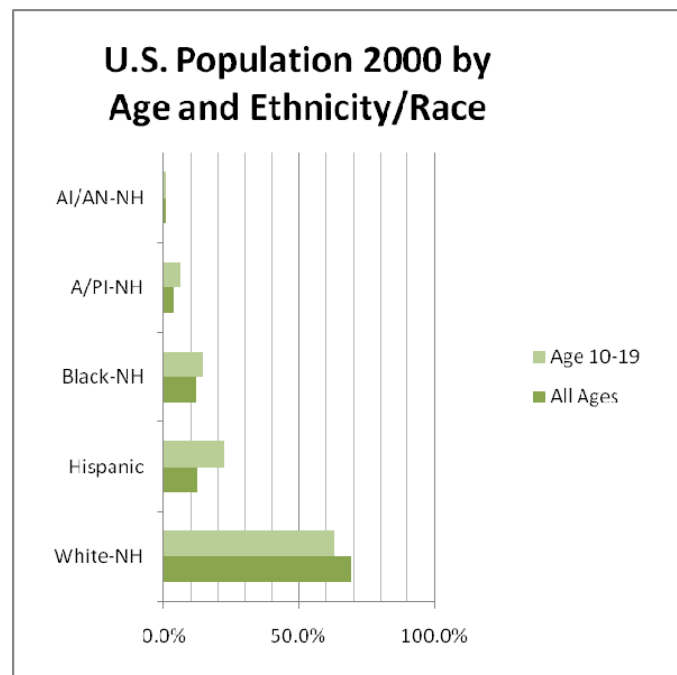
(with selected statistics for New York State youth)

## Demographics

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 40,747,962 youth age 10-19 in the United States, 14.5% of the total U.S. population. Estimates for 2009 by the Census Bureau put these figures at 41,511,401, or 13.5% of the total population ([Census Bureau: Annual estimates by sex and five-year age groups](#)).<sup>1</sup> In New York State, according to July 2009 Census estimates, youth age 10-19 make up 13% of the state's total population ([Census Bureau: State-Characteristics, Annual estimates by sex and age](#)).<sup>2</sup>

*Ethnicity, race, national origin.* Racial/ethnic diversity is greater in the adolescent population than in the adult U.S. population, and diversity among adolescents is increasing ([National Adolescent Health Information Center 2008 Fact Sheet on Demographics](#)).<sup>3</sup> Estimates suggest that by 2023, the percentage of white, non-Hispanic (NH) children will drop below 50%. By 2050, the percentage of Hispanic children is expected to reach 39%, overtaking the percentage of white-NH (38%) children ([ChildStats.gov: Demographic Background](#)).<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, 11% of U.S. adolescents (ages 15-24) were born outside of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-two percent of all children (age 0-17) are first or second generation immigrants (2009 numbers, here defined as living in the U.S. with at least one foreign-born parent). Among children age 5-17 in 2008, 21% of children did not speak English at home; however, only 5% of these children had difficulty speaking English ([ChildStats.gov: Family and Social Environment](#)).<sup>5</sup>



*Geographic settings.* In 2002, over half (54%) of adolescents lived in suburbs, 27% in rural areas, and 19% in central cities ([National Adolescent Health Information Center Fact Sheet on Demographics 2003](#)).<sup>6</sup>

*Family income.* The percentage of adolescents (age 12-18) living in families with low income has risen since 2000. In a span of seven years (2000-2007), the number of adolescents living in poverty increased by 21% while the number of poor children overall (age 0-18) increased by 15%. In 2007, 15% of adolescents lived in low-income families, while another 19% of adolescents lived in low-income households ([NCCP: Basic Facts About Low-Income Adolescents](#)).<sup>7</sup>

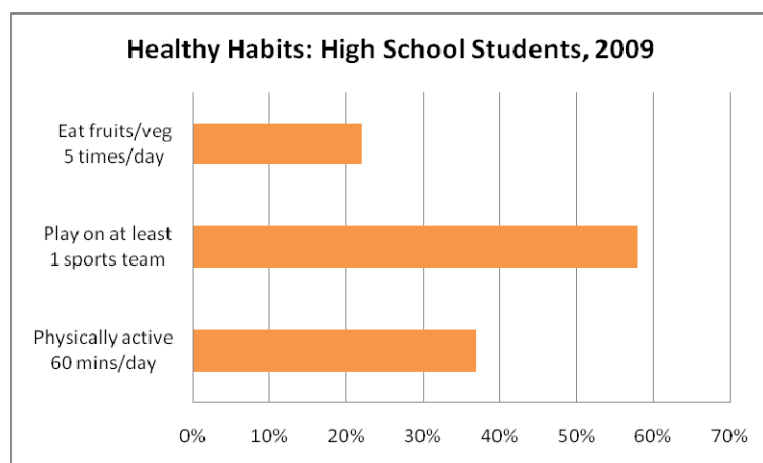
Of all children (age 0-17), 19% lived in poverty in 2008. Eleven percent of these children were white-NH, 31% were Hispanic, and 35% were black ([ChildStats.gov: Economic Circumstances](#)).<sup>8</sup>

*Homelessness.* Estimates of homelessness among adolescents vary a great deal. Estimates from 1998 and 1999 suggest that 1.6 – 1.7 million youth experience at least one episode of homelessness each

year. Homelessness estimates for youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) vary from 6 – 35%. Pregnant and parenting youth are also at high risk for homelessness; one study found that nearly half of youth living on the streets and 33% of youth in shelters had been pregnant or caused a pregnancy; and roughly 10% of homeless adolescent women are pregnant at the time they are homeless.<sup>9</sup>

## Health

*Insurance.* Of all children age 0-17, 10% (7.3 million) had no health insurance in 2008 ([ChildStats.gov: Health Care](#)).<sup>10</sup> In 2007, 8% of children under 19 years of age were without health insurance in the state of New York ([National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: State Profiles](#)).<sup>11</sup>



*Dietary behaviors.* Of all children age 0-17, 22% experienced food insecurity at times during 2008.<sup>8</sup> In the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)),<sup>12</sup> more than one in five (22%) high school students reported eating fruits and vegetables five or more times a day. Black students are more likely to eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables than are youth in other groups (27%). A downward trend has recently been seen in the number of high school students who tried to lose weight through vomiting or the use of

laxatives, from 6% in 2003 to 4% in 2009.<sup>13</sup> Of women in late adolescence and young adulthood, 10% have symptoms of eating disorders ([ACT for Youth: Eating Disorders](#)).<sup>14</sup>

In 2007-2008, 18% of adolescents age 12 to 19 were overweight, up from 5% in 1976-1980. Black girls were at particularly high risk (28%) of being overweight ([Child Trends: Overweight Children and Youth](#)).<sup>15</sup>

*Physical Activity.* Over one-third (37%) of high school students reported a high level of physical activity in 2009 (at least 60 minutes a day for five or more days in the week before the survey). There is a significant gender disparity: 28% of girls and 46% of boys reported this level of activity. A majority of youth (58%) play on at least one sports team ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>16</sup>

*Mental Health.* While most adolescents experience good mental health, 20% of youth report mental health symptoms. Depression, anxiety disorders, attention-deficit disorder, and substance abuse are the most common disorders experienced by youth ([NAHIC: Mental Health of Adolescents](#)).<sup>17</sup>

During 2004, 65% of high school students described themselves as happy every day or almost every day ([Freeze Frame: A Snapshot of America's Teens](#)).<sup>18</sup> In general, there is little research measuring adolescent life satisfaction.<sup>17</sup>

In 2009, 26% of all high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row in the last year (an indicator of clinical depression). More girls than boys reported feeling sad or hopeless (34% to 19% respectively) ([Child Trends: Adolescents Who Feel Sad or Hopeless](#)).<sup>19</sup>

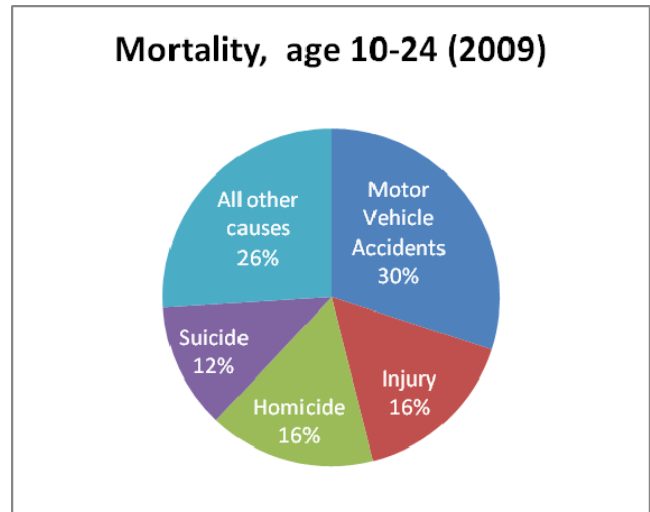
The number of high school students who report serious thoughts of suicide dropped dramatically—from 29% in 1991 to 14% in 2009; however, the prevalence of reported suicide attempts has been fairly consistent ([Child Trends: Suicidal Teens](#)).<sup>20</sup>

- Hispanic (8%) and black-NH (8%) students were more likely than white-NH (5%) students to have attempted suicide.<sup>20</sup>
- Among high school students, girls (17%) seriously considered suicide more often than boys (11%). However, historically boys have completed suicide more often than girls.<sup>20</sup>

## Violence and Mortality

*Mortality.* Motor vehicle accidents (30%) are the leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults age 10-24 overall, followed by other unintentional injuries (16%), homicide (16%), and suicide (12%) ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>21</sup>

Among adolescents and young adults age 10-24, males are far more likely than females to become homicide victims (86% vs. 14% in 2007) ([Youth Violence Facts at a Glance, 2010](#)).<sup>22</sup> In this age group, gun violence was the cause of death in 84% of cases. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans age 10-24.<sup>22</sup>



*Fighting.* The number of youth who report having been in at least one physical fight in the past year decreased from 43% in 1991 to 32% in 2009 ([YRBSS Trends in Violence](#)).<sup>23</sup> In New York State this figure is slightly lower: 30% of the youth reported having been in a physical fight ([High School YRBS: New York Results](#)).<sup>24</sup>

*Weapons.* In 2009, 6% of high school students reported having carried a weapon on school property within the last 30 days.<sup>23</sup> The number is lower in New York State: 4.8% for the entire state, 5.2% for the state excluding New York City, and 3.8% for New York City (see [CDC Youth Online](#) interactive tables).<sup>24</sup>

*Violent crime.* Juvenile arrests for violent crime peaked in the early 1990s, declined each year to its lowest level in 2004, then began to rise again. Although the rate of juvenile arrest is increasing, numbers remain significantly below the peak. In 2006, one in 10 arrests for murder involved a juvenile; the figure was one in four arrests for weapons violations and for robbery. In that same year, 29% of juvenile arrests involved females ([Models for Change: National Snapshot](#)).<sup>25</sup>

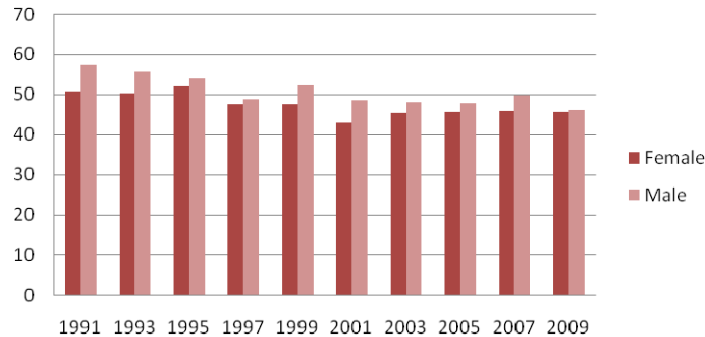
In 2009, 11% of female high school students and 5% of male students reported having been raped at some point in their lives ([High School YRBS: United States Results](#)).<sup>26</sup> In New York State, the figures are 8% for girls and 7% for boys.<sup>24</sup>

*Dating violence.* One out of every 10 high school students (9.8%) was a victim of dating violence in 2009, with 9% of girls reporting having been hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a romantic partner in the 12 months preceding the survey, and 10% of boys reporting the same.<sup>26</sup>

## Sexual Health

*Sexual orientation.* Sexual orientation appears to be determined very early in a child's life, and awareness of attraction begins at about age 9 or 10 ([Advocates for Youth: GLBTQ Youth](#)).<sup>27</sup> Most gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender students experience harassment at school. In 2009, 85% of GLBT middle and high school students reported verbal harassment, and 40% reported physical harassment ([GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey](#)).<sup>28</sup>

### Percentage of HS Students Who Have Ever Had Sexual Intercourse



*Sexual experience.* Half of all teens have dated, and close to one third have been in a relationship they describe as serious ([ACT for Youth: Adolescent Romantic Relationships](#)).<sup>29</sup> In 2009, just under half (46%) of high school students reported having had sexual intercourse at some point in their lives<sup>26</sup> (42% in New York State),<sup>24</sup> and 34% were sexually active (had sexual intercourse at least once in the 3 months before taking the survey).<sup>26</sup> Most youth in the U.S. first have sexual intercourse at age 17 ([Guttmacher Institute: Facts on Sexual and Reproductive Health](#)).<sup>30</sup>

Research findings on the prevalence of oral and anal sex among adolescents vary widely. Studies indicate that 63-93% of sexually experienced (non-"virgin") youth and 9-56% of sexually inexperienced ("virgin") youth engage in oral sex.<sup>31</sup> Among sexually experienced youth, studies have found that 16-21% report having had anal sex (1% among otherwise sexually inexperienced youth).<sup>31</sup> A Guttmacher Institute study of a 2002 survey indicates that of all adolescents age 15-19, 54% of females and 55% of males have had oral sex and 10% have had anal sex. Youth who are white or have a higher socio-economic status are more likely to engage in oral or anal sex ([Guttmacher Institute: Non-coital sexual activities among adolescents](#)).<sup>32</sup>

*Condoms and contraceptives.* Among sexually active students, condom use at most recent sexual intercourse increased from 46% in 1991 to 61% in 2009<sup>26</sup> (68% in New York State).<sup>24</sup> Most high school teens use condoms the first time they have sexual intercourse (66% of sexually experienced females, 71% of males).<sup>30</sup> Among sexually active students nationally, in 2009, black males reported the highest levels of condom use (73%) ([Youth Online: High School YRBS: Used a Condom](#) – select "race" in row variable 1).<sup>33</sup> In that same group, 10% of females and 8% of males reported using condoms together with either oral contraceptives or Depo-Provera ([Youth Online: High School YRBS: Dual birth control](#)).<sup>34</sup>

*Risky behaviors.* Male adolescents are more likely than females to be exposed to or engage in certain risky sexual behaviors, including sexual intercourse before age 13 (as reported by high school students: 8% males and 3% females in 2009), having four or more sexual partners in their lifetime (16% male high school students; 11% female high school students).<sup>26</sup>

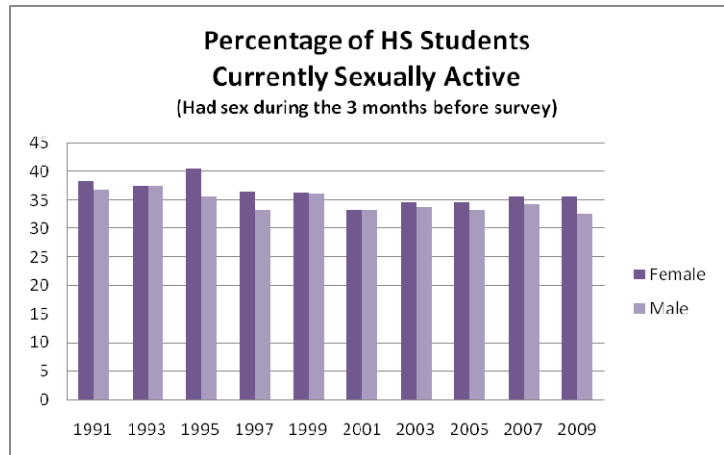
*Adolescent pregnancy and birth rates.* Adolescent pregnancies are largely, but not entirely, unplanned: 82% are unintended.<sup>30</sup> In 2007 there were 444,899 births to teens age 15-19 (17,621 in New York) ([National Campaign: State Profiles: New York](#)).<sup>11</sup>

The teen birth rate peaked in 1957, then dropped through the 1960s, '70s, and the first half of the 1980s. It rose abruptly between 1986 and 1991, then reversed again, falling 34% by 2005 ([National Campaign: National Birth Rates for Teens](#)),<sup>35</sup> a decline that is attributed primarily to better, more effective contraceptive practice, together with some reduction in sexual activity.<sup>36</sup> Between 2005-2007 the birth rate once again increased by 5%, decreasing slightly (2%) in 2008.<sup>35</sup>

Between 1990 and 2005, black adolescents led the way with a 45% decrease in pregnancy rates.<sup>36</sup>

The teen abortion rate declined by 56% between 1988 and 2005, before rising 1% in 2006 ([Guttmacher Institute: U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions](#)).<sup>36</sup> In New York State, over half of teen pregnancies end in abortion.<sup>36</sup>

STDs. Among the roughly 19 million new STD infections reported every year, nearly half are found among young people (ages 15-19) ([CDC: Sexual Risk Behaviors](#)).<sup>37</sup> In 2008, girls between the ages of 15 and 19 had more reported cases of gonorrhea and Chlamydia than any other age group. Racial disparities characterize all three reportable STDs. Young black women are at especially high risk for contracting both gonorrhea and Chlamydia ([CDC: Sexually Transmitted Diseases Surveillance, 2008](#)).<sup>38</sup>



HIV. Fourteen percent (5,259 cases) of people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 2006 (among the 33 states reporting to the CDC) were between the ages of 13 and 24,<sup>37</sup> and 60% of those newly diagnosed in this age group were African Americans.<sup>39</sup> Nearly 46,000 U.S. youth age 13-24 were living with HIV that same year.<sup>39</sup>

## Substance Use

Overall, adolescent use of illegal drugs has declined since the mid- to late-1990s. Increasing numbers of high school seniors report abstaining from cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana. However, drug use remains quite common. Through the high school years, the prevalence of substance use increases, doubling between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade ([NAHIC: Substance Use](#)).<sup>40</sup>

*Cigarettes.* In 2009, close to half of high school students (46%) reported having tried cigarettes, while 11% reported having smoked cigarettes daily at some point in their lives. One in five students smokes at least occasionally (smoked cigarettes on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey), and half of this group had tried to quit smoking at some time during the last year ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>41</sup>

*Alcohol.* Use of alcohol is also common:

- In 2009, 42% of students reported having had at least one drink during the 30 days before the survey ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>42</sup>
- Nearly one in four students (24%) had engaged in binge drinking (5 or more drinks in a row in previous 30 days).<sup>42</sup>
- Driving while drunk has declined among youth; however, in 2009, 10% of high school students reported having driven while drinking at least once in the last 30 days, and 28% of students rode in a car driven by someone who had been drinking ([YRBSS Trends in Behavior](#))<sup>43</sup> (In New York State, 8% drove while drinking).<sup>24</sup>
- Asian (4%) teens are the least likely to drive while drinking, followed by black (6%) teens; white (11%) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (11%) teens are the most likely.<sup>44</sup>

*Marijuana.* For many years, marijuana has been the most widely-used illegal drug among adolescents.<sup>45</sup> One in five students (21%) reported having used marijuana during the month before completing the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>46</sup>

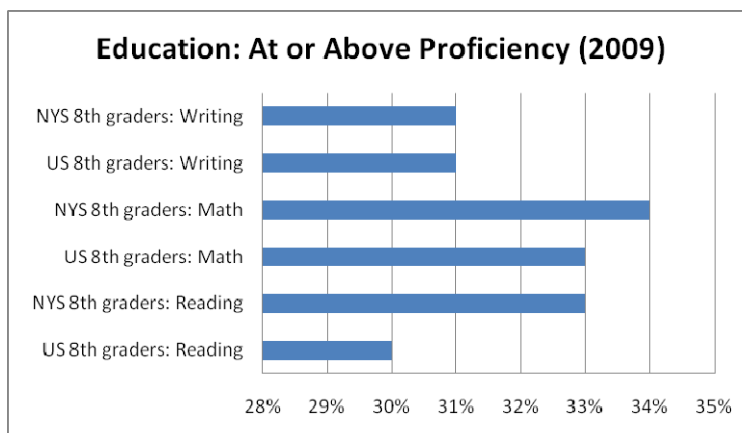
*Other substances.* Vicodin<sup>®</sup> was the prescription drug most widely used in 2009, with 8% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 10% of high school seniors reporting use ([Monitoring the Future: Narcotics other than Heroin](#)).<sup>47</sup> In general, use of prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription is widespread; in 2009, 20% of students reported having used these drugs at least once in their lifetime. Additional 2009 figures for lifetime use

(percentage of high school students who have used a particular substance once or more at some point in their lives) are: inhalants (12%), hallucinogenics (8%), ecstasy/MDMA (7%), cocaine (6%), methamphetamine (4%), illegal steroids (3%), heroin (3%) ([MMWR Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance](#)).<sup>48</sup>

*Substance-free.* In 2008, 50% of high school seniors and 80% of eighth graders reported being substance-free (did not use cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the 30 days prior to the survey) ([Child Trends, Substance-Free Youth](#)).<sup>49</sup>

## Education

*Academic proficiency.* Proficiency or above in reading was demonstrated by 30% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders (33% in New York) in 2009 ([Kids Count Data Center: 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading 2009](#)).<sup>50</sup> That same year, proficiency or above in mathematics was demonstrated by 33% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and in writing by 31%.<sup>51, 52</sup>



The percentage of high school students completing advanced academic courses steadily increased between 1982 and 2004, and appear to level off or decline slightly in 2005. Half of students who graduated in 2005 completed an advanced math course (above Algebra II), 63% had taken an advanced science course, and 31% had taken honors-level English courses ([Child Stats: High School Course Taking](#)).<sup>53</sup>

Middle school students (48% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders) are more likely to be involved in music and performing arts in school than are high school students (37% tenth graders, 41% 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 2008 data).<sup>54</sup>

*Completing school.* In 2009, of youth age 15–19 years, 94% were either enrolled in school or were part of the labor force ([Census Bureau: Characteristics of Teenagers](#)).<sup>55</sup> In 2008, 90% of young adults (18-24 years old, excluding those currently enrolled in school) had completed high school ([Child Stats: Education](#)).<sup>56</sup>

Dropout rates are measured as percentages of the non-institutionalized, civilian population of young people, and thus do not reflect incarceration and military service. According to Child Trends ([Child Trends: High School Dropout Rates](#)),<sup>57</sup> in 2008, of the *civilian, non-institutionalized population* of youth age 16 to 24 the overall dropout rate was 8%, and:

- Hispanic youth were the most likely to drop out of school. Eighteen percent of Hispanics age 16-24 were not enrolled or did not complete high school, versus the 10% of black N-H students and 5% of white N-H students who dropped out.
- Males accounted for 53% of those who dropped out of high school, females accounted for 47%.

## Volunteerism, Civic Engagement, Religion

*Volunteering and civic engagement.* In a 2006 survey, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) found that youth age 15-25 across all ethnic groups engage in community change: volunteering, participating in civic groups and activities, electoral work, lobbying, and protesting. Black youth demonstrate the highest levels of political engagement, while Asian American youth volunteer and engage in community problem-solving in significantly higher numbers than any other group ([CIRCLE: Trends by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender](#)).<sup>58</sup>

According to data collected in 2008 by Volunteering in America ([Volunteering in America: Research Highlights](#)).<sup>59</sup>

- 22% of youth age 16-24 volunteered in 2008 (26% of adults volunteered).
- 70% of first-year college students believe that it is "essential or very important to help others in need."

According to a 2009 survey of teens and "tweens" by the Girls Scout Research Institute, 79% of 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders (girls and boys) plan to volunteer. Among all children and youth surveyed (3<sup>rd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades), the vast majority intend to vote in the future (84%), and give to charity (76%) ([Good Intentions](#)).<sup>60</sup> The same study found that many middle and high school youth value people who are racially or ethnically different from them (59%) and are becoming more accepting of gay and lesbian relationships (59% overall; girls 65%).

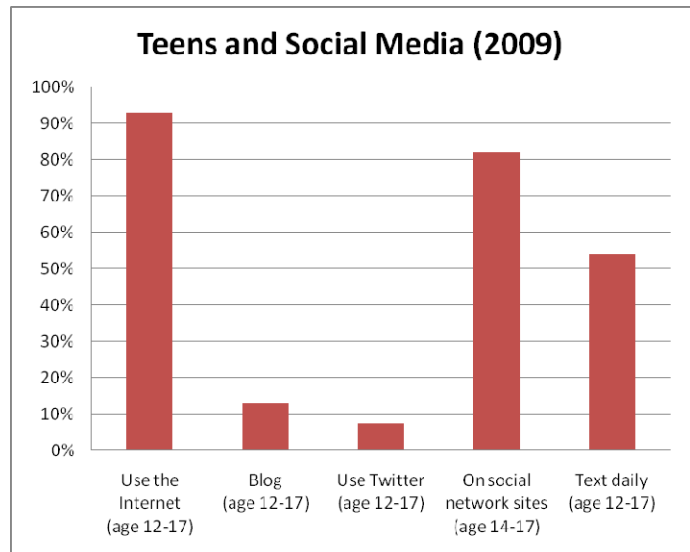
*Religion.* In 2008, 27% of high school seniors reported that religion played a very important role in their lives. Religion tends to be especially important to black youth; 48% of 12<sup>th</sup>-grade black students and 22% of white high school seniors rate religion as very important ([Child Trends: Religiosity](#)).<sup>61</sup>

*Government and elections.* A Child Trends review notes research findings that one-third of high school students do not understand the basics about how government works, and that youth do not see a connection between the things they care about and government/elections. However, youth participation in presidential elections is on the rise. In the 2008 presidential election, 44% of young adults age 18-24 reported voting, their highest participation rate since 1976 ([Child Trends: Youth Voting](#)).<sup>62</sup>

## Youth, the Internet, and Communication Technologies

The vast majority of young people—93% of youth age 12-17—spend time online ([Pew Internet & American Life Project: Teens and Social Media](#)).<sup>63</sup>

- Teens frequently use the Internet for creative work. According to a 2009 Pew survey, 39% of online teens (e.g., teens who use the Internet) share content such as photos, videos, and stories online ([Social Media and Young Adults](#)).<sup>64</sup>
- Blogging has declined among online (Internet-using) teens to 14% in 2009 from 28% in 2006.<sup>64</sup>
- In 2004, 45% of youth age 12-17 reported that they have friends who regularly view pornography on the Internet ([CASA: Teen Dating Practices and Sexual Activity](#)).<sup>65</sup>
- Chatroom use declined from 55% of online teens in 2000 to 18% in 2006.<sup>66</sup>
- Among online teens age 14-17, 82% use social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.<sup>64</sup>
- Among online teens of high school age, only 10% use Twitter (2009 data; 9% of all teens of high school age).<sup>64</sup>



(Note: graph depicts percentages for teens overall rather than "online teens").

*Peer communication.* Email is not a popular method for teens to reach their peers; in 2006, just 14% of youth age 12-17 said they email their friends daily.<sup>66</sup> According to the Pew Internet & American Life

Project, texting is now the foremost communication tool for American teens ([Teens and Mobile Phones](#)); 75% of teens (12-17) own their own cell phones, 54% of teens text friends daily, and one-third of teens send over 100 texts a day.<sup>67</sup> Social networking sites offer another popular vehicle for communication; among teens who use social networking sites, 58% send instant messages or texts through the sites.

*Cyberbullying.* Some teens use social media (texting, blogs, social networking, etc.) to harass, threaten, or embarrass a peer. Studies on prevalence vary. One 2009 study by Cox Communications found that 15% of teens age 13-18 had been bullied online at some point in their lives. Another 2009 study by Hinduja and Patchin found a similar number -- 17% -- had been bullied online at some point, while 9% had been bullied within the previous 30 days.<sup>68</sup>

## **Family Relationships**

A Child Trends fact sheet notes that most parents feel very close to their children (87%, 2003 data), feel that they communicate very well with their children (75%), and have met most or all of their children's friends (84%). While all of these indicators gradually decline as children grow, the percentages remain very high into adolescence ([Parent-Child Relationship](#)).<sup>69</sup>

From adolescents' perspective, parents are very influential. While parents tend to believe that peers influence teens' decisions about sex, for example, teens cite parents' influence more often than friends' ([With One Voice](#)).<sup>70</sup>

The National Adolescent Health Information Center ([2008 Fact Sheet on Demographics](#))<sup>3</sup> reports that 65% of adolescents age 12-17 lived with both parents in 2006, and:

- About 80% of Asian and 73% white-NH youths age 12-17 lived with both parents, as did 63% of same-age Hispanics.
- Fewer than half (35%) of black adolescents lived with both parents; 48% lived with their mother only.

Fully 90% of high school students reported in 2005 that they have at least one family member they can talk to and confide in ([Freeze Frame: A Snapshot of America's Teens](#)).<sup>71</sup>



## Endnotes

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