

Teen Dating on the Decline¹

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Figure 1.
Credits: Leonard McLane

Ah, the first date! This is coming up soon for some of my teenage friends. Chances are they will be excited—and nervous, too. And it's no wonder. Child and family experts say that dating is a major change and one of the more challenging adjustments teens face (Child Trends, 2006).

Today's teens describe a pattern of dating that progresses from “group outings, to pairing off within the group, to individuals going on dates with one another” (Child Trends, 2006, ¶ 2).

Interestingly, since the early 1990s, teen dating has been on the decline and “students in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades are less likely than they were in 1991 to date” (Child Trends, 2006, ¶ 3). The greatest change in behavior is most

“pronounced for twelfth-grade students, where the percentage of youth who did not date rose from 14% in 1991 to 27% in 2004” (Child Trends, 2006, ¶ 3). Also, twelfth-graders who went on dates were going out less often than in the past. Looking at the younger ages, the percentage of eighth-grade students who never date remained between 50 and 53% (Child Trends, 2006).

Dating can have positive or negative outcomes for teenagers, according to a recent research summary by Child Trends. “Teenagers who date frequently” have “slightly higher levels of self-esteem” (Child Trends, 2006, ¶ 2) and are more autonomous. However, these frequent daters also “have lower levels of academic achievement and academic motivation...and higher levels of “conflict with their parents” (Child Trends, 2006, ¶ 2). In addition, they are more likely to suffer from depression. So, parents may be uncertain about what impacts dating will have for *their* teen.

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1. This document is FAR1207, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Broadcast as program 443. Broadcast February 2009. Published on EDIS July 2012. In the interest of time and/or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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