



American College of Pediatricians®

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Patient Information Handout

Facts about Cohabitation for Teens & Young Adults

Parents' edition

Research shows that, rather than serving as a positive stepping stone to a healthy marriage, living together before marriage (cohabitation) can bring great harm to the relationship. Cohabitation makes it more likely that couples will break up, and more likely that they will divorce if they do marry. Partners who cohabit are also more likely to be unfaithful than are married spouses, and are more likely to be violent toward the other partner. Here are more facts to consider with cohabitation:

- Research shows that only a third of cohabiting couples will marry within 3 years and less than 60% by ten years.
- Couples who live together report higher levels of stress and depression than couples who are married. Children of cohabiting couples also have higher levels of depression and stress.
- Cohabiting couples are more likely to experience infidelity than married couples
- Poverty is more common among cohabiting women. Their male partners are less likely to work and more likely to spend their time on personal pleasure than do married men. Their children also experience more poverty.
- Cohabiting couples report higher levels of alcohol abuse.
- Cohabiting relationships experience violent aggression at 2 to 5 times the rate of married relationships.
- Those who cohabited are less likely to ever get married, and if they marry, are not as satisfied as those who marry without first cohabiting.
- Cohabiting couples have poorer communication with each other than married couples.
- Women in a cohabiting relationship are 10 times more likely to have an abortion than married women, and therefore suffer from its associated mortality and morbidity. Actually, of women who have an abortion, 89% have cohabited at

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one time or another (before, at the time of, or after the abortion) and over 40% had lived with at least 3 different men.

- Only 1 in 5 women who becomes pregnant while cohabitating will marry within the next 6 months.
- Couples cohabiting at their child's birth are more likely to break up than those who are married, and 50% separate or divorce by time the child is 3 years old.
- Children of couples who cohabit are at higher risk for:
 - Premature births
 - School failure
 - Conviction of crime and incarceration
 - Alcohol and drug abuse (both from exposure to it with their parents and from their own usage)
 - Child abuse, which is 8 times more common when the mother has a live-in boyfriend than when she is married
 - Early death:
 - A child conceived during cohabitation is 10 times more likely to be aborted than when conceived during marriage.
 - Children with cohabiting parents are 2 times more likely to commit suicide.
 - Girls living with one parent (more likely if parents cohabited) are 3 times more likely than girls living with married parents to die of drug or alcohol overdose and boys are 5 times more likely.

Children who are not raised by married parents are themselves more likely to cohabit and to divorce, repeating the cycle for multiple generations.

The doctors of the American College of Pediatricians urge their adolescent patients to avoid cohabitation and to recognize the life-long benefits of marriage. They also encourage parents to have those tough conversations with their teen children and educate them about the risks of cohabitation. Saving sexual relationships for marriage brings physical, emotional, and even spiritual benefits to a couple and to their children.