

Selected Newspaper Articles (Sept - Dec 2007)

In the next 8 pages, you will see the Circle of Care's attempts at advertising our events and educating our community through our local newspaper. As you will see, the articles center around *Basic Training* and *Relationship Smarts*.

As with any communication, you need to personalize it. Obviously, replace direct references to the Circle of Care with your own information. Finally, feel free to edit them as you wish to meet the needs of your community.

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Strong Black Marriages

Historically, black marriages and families have been strong. From 1890 to 1940, African-Americans had a higher marriage rate than whites. In 1940, the illegitimacy rate among African-Americans was only 19 percent. A study by Herbert Gutman determined that in Harlem between 1905 and 1925 eighty-five percent of black children lived in two-parent families.

Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, says "The Black family has been preserved through history because of the hard work of committed and determined Black adults. We Black adults today need to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, and community values, place our children first again in our lives, and model the behavior we want our children to learn ... The Black family has been the strongest defense Black children have had throughout our history and must become so again."

The Circle of Care is partnering with Rev. Michael & Cheryl Stiggers to present "Black Marriage Education" September 28-29, 2007 at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in LaFayette. Call 334.768.4091 for more information.

Black Marriages Matter

According to a 2005 report published by the Institute for American Values, research confirms that marriage matters in the African American community. Studies "consistently find that married Black adults, compared to those who are unmarried, have more income, are less likely to face poverty, and are more likely to be happy. Marriage also appears to promote better family functioning for African Americans. Black children of married parents typically receive better parenting, are less delinquent, have fewer behavioral problems, have higher self-esteem, are more likely to delay sexual activity, and have moderately better educational outcomes. *Marriage itself* appears to be generating strong positive results for African American children. In areas including parental support, delinquency, self-esteem, and school performance, having one's father in the home, and particularly one's *married* father, appears to be a crucial determinant of better outcomes for young Black males."

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Teen Attitudes about Marriage

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, professors at Rutgers University, say "The current cultural climate in the United States is not conducive to strong, lasting marriages and childrearing by stable two-parent families. If we hope to overcome the increasing social and economic impoverishment of our nation's young people, the tide of divorce, fatherlessness, and out-of-wedlock childbearing must be stemmed. As a first step, it is critical that we listen to what our young people are saying." So, what are Chamber County teens saying about marriage and family? Here are the results from over three hundred local teens who responded to an anonymous survey developed by the Circle of Care Center for Families:

Today's young people hold marriage and family in high regard. Ninety-three percent say that family is the main building block of a healthy community. Eighty-four percent realize that children are affected by their parents' marriage relationship. Three out of every four local teens say children are better off when they are raised by a married mother and father. Two-thirds of teens believe that individuals should wait until married to have sex. Eighty-three percent realize that community beliefs about out-of-wedlock births have shifted in the last 20 to 30 years. In addition, three-fourths say that it is better for people in unsatisfying marriages to remain married and try to work it out than to get a divorce.

Yet there is reason for concern. Two-thirds of teens do not believe it is realistic for marriages to last a lifetime. Over half say that cohabitation (living together without being married) is a good way to determine if a couple should get married.

Chambers County teens are not that different from other teens. Whitehead and Popenoe say "In the final analysis, then, the surveys point up a growing disparity between teens' ideals of marriage and family life—which, if anything, are stronger than ever—and their pessimism about actually achieving those ideals. In part, this disparity may reflect the teens' own life experiences in growing up with divorce, single parenthood and cohabitation. It also surely relates to the general cultural shift towards tolerance of alternative views and choices. Teens seem to be very unwilling to condemn their peers' choices of single parenthood and cohabitation, even if they personally would not make these choices."

For more information, call the Circle of Care at (334) 768-4091 or visit healthymarriagesmatter.com.

How Can Single Parents Prepare Children For Marriage?

John Mayer sings "Fathers, be good to your daughters / Daughters will love like you do / Girls become lovers who turn into mothers / So mothers, be good to your daughters too." He points out the obvious but often overlooked fact that parents affect children's future relationships. This becomes very complicated and confusing for children from single parent homes because they often grow up without one of their parents involved. While there are many reasons people become single parents, many of these children have seen first-hand the devastating results of out-of-wedlock births and divorce. Even so, over 90% of teens and young adults want to get married one day. How can single parents prepare their children for marriage? Here are a few suggestions:

Be positive about their other parent. Single parents need to speak positively about the other parent to avoid hurting the child, to encourage the child to love both of his or her parents, and to treat the other parent with respect and courtesy so the child will do the same.

Recognize limitations. Most single parents do a heroic job raising their children. Yet, they can't do everything especially when it comes to relationship issues. A professional singer once said to his single mother, "Thanks for everything you did for me. Thanks for teaching me everything you did. But, there's one thing you couldn't teach me and that's how to be a man." Therefore, it is important for single parents to surround their children with many positive adult role models.

Be honest and give hope. Single parents need to communicate to their children the realities of being a single parent. Discussions need to take place about the real struggles involved in trying to raise a family by oneself. Yet, discussions also need to focus on children's dreams and futures. Single parents should not speak doubt and despair into their children's future relationships. Parents should say they believe their children can have good marriages.

Learn about healthy marital relationships. Single parents can provide their children great relationship resources. There are a variety of classes, retreats, websites, and books that teach people how to have good healthy marriages. Single parents can also learn themselves and begin modeling the behavior and skills of good relationships. Visit www.healthymarriagesmatter.com for more information.

Promote the importance of marriage. Research has shown that adults in healthy marriages are physically healthier, have greater financial well-being, have lower job turnover, and have better job performance. Research also shows that children from healthy marriages perform better in school, are emotionally healthier, and have lower rates of risky behaviors such as substance abuse, pre-marital sex, and criminal activity.

Chambers County has to begin reversing its current trends. According to the 2006 Alabama Kids Count Data Book, 40% of Chambers County families are single-parent families with children. Chambers County ranks in the top 25% in the state and in the top 12% nationally in single-parent households. The reversal must begin with the children.

The High Risks Associated With Teen Sex

The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion includes sexual activity among a long list of teen risky behaviors that it monitors. It may be easy to identify the risks involved in teen behaviors such as drug use, violence, and suicide. But, what exactly are the risks involved with teen sexual activity?

Health Risks

The most recognized risks of teen sex are sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. STIs can be passed from one person to another through intercourse, oral sex, and intimate touching below the waist (skin to skin contact). The American Social Health Association estimates that one in four sexually active teens contracts an STI each year. An October 2000 article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* states that by age eighteen, one out of every five girls will have been pregnant. While most people believe these health risks can be eliminated by using condoms, research says this belief is false. A 2001 study by the National Institutes of Health found that condoms only reduce the risks of getting two STIs: gonorrhea (only for males, not females) and HIV/AIDS. They found no evidence that condoms protect against the other 25 STIs, including common diseases like HPV, chlamydia, and herpes. They also found that if a teen girl uses condoms in a typical manner over her four years in high school that she would have over a 50% chance of becoming pregnant.

Emotional Risks

According to Bruce Cook, author of *The Big Talk Book*, "One of the most overlooked risks of sexual activity involves the teen's emotions." Some of the emotional consequences suffered by sexually-active teens include worry, guilt, fear of future relationships, and loss of self-respect. In a February 2007 article in *Pediatrics*, teens reported that they felt "used" and "bad about themselves" after having sex. Most teens who have had sex wish they had waited: 81% of middle school students, 63% of female high school students, and 53% of male high school students. According to *No Apologies*, a young adult woman stated "Sex before marriage for me meant that I would never know if a guy really loved me. I would never know what it meant to be chosen, and not lusted after ... and the difference between those two has haunted me for my entire life." The heartbreak surrounding teen sexual behavior is very painful.

Social Risks

When two teens engage in sexual activity, it is very common for rumors to spread around school and sometimes to even spread around the whole community. While some teens tell about their sexual experiences to impress friends or to gain a good reputation, it often backfires. Dr. Pepper Schwartz of the University of Washington-Seattle says "You can't get a reputation as a boy who just plays girls. You have got to be in a relationship, be going with somebody." Carrie Pirrotta, 17, agrees "A bad reputation just steers you away, rather than making the guy more sought after. Girls respect guys who are a little more prudent, more reserved." According to a University of Minnesota study, 55% of teen girls who were virgins said they refrained from sex because they didn't want "to get a bad reputation."

Future Marriage Risks

Teen sexual activity can affect future relationships. Research shows that those who have premarital sex tend to have less happy marriages, are more likely to divorce, and are more likely to cheat on their marriage partners. According to *Out of Wedlock*, teen girls who have a baby have a decreased likelihood of ever getting married.

Legal Risks

According to the laws of Alabama, it is a felony for any teen 16 years old and up to have sex with another teen if the younger teen is at least 2 years younger and under 16 years of age. A teen is deemed incapable of consent if he or she is less than 16 years old. Therefore, it would be illegal for a 17 year old girl to have sex with a 14 year old boy and illegal if a 18 year old boy had sex with a 15 year old girl.

There are so many risks involved in teen sexual behavior. Even other consequences could be mentioned such as the risks to a teen's relationship with a parent or the teen's spirituality. To encourage abstinence and healthy relationship skills, the Circle of Care will be presenting an upcoming teen conference called "**Love Waits**" for all 7th-12th grade students on Saturday, December 8th at Faith Congregational Church in Valley. The conference will be from 9:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. EST. The conference is free and will include lunch. To register, call Faith Boyd at (706) 773-6669 or Joanne Kehoe at (334) 768-4091. Adults, please encourage your teens and youth groups to attend.

Teens Building True Intimacy: It's More Than Physical

Many people think about physical or sexual involvement when they hear the word intimacy, but in fact, it is about so much more. Too often, teens can think that physical attraction or desire means love. However, true intimacy means linking of heart, mind and spirit over a long- period. *Sex can fool people into believing they are close when in fact all they really have is a physical connection.* Getting out of balance and rushing into a physical connection can leave anyone feeling burned and betrayed when it's discovered that there is little emotional connection, trust, and commitment in the relationship. *Premature sexual involvement cannot only stunt the development of a teen relationship; it also can stunt a teen's development as a person.* Just as some young people handle anxieties by turning to drugs and alcohol, others handle them by turning to sex. Sex becomes an escape. They are not learning how to cope with life's pressures. Nor are they learning how to build healthy long lasting relationships, which will enrich their lives with joy, love, and support. "Looking for love in all the wrong places", as the saying goes.

According to *Relationship Smarts*, teens can be taught that genuine closeness and intimacy develops by connections made in several key areas, which include:

- Verbal = talking
- Emotional = feelings
- Social = activities and interests shared
- Spiritual = values and beliefs
- Commitment = loyalty, trust, couple centeredness
- Physical = affection, touch, sex

Conversations connect one to another. When two people share their thoughts, feelings, interests, dreams and goals, they feel close. When partners are interested and stimulated by conversations with each other, they share a bond. Likewise, couples make **emotional connections** when they share feelings and respond with empathy. Early in a relationship, feelings are often dominated by infatuation and the chemistry of attraction. Although these feelings are very real and powerful, it takes time for true emotional intimacy to develop. This process is complicated for teens that are going through puberty and struggling with peer pressures. The **social dimension** is about togetherness. It is the activities a couple enjoys doing together and the interests they have in common. When a couple shares core values and beliefs, it is the **spiritual connection**, which enhances a relationship tremendously. Core values relate to church, family, work ethic, and responsibility. Trust, faithfulness, and reliance, grounded in true knowledge and understanding of each other, result in a long- term view of a relationship or **commitment**.

Teenagers should be forming new friendships, joining clubs and teams, developing their interests and skills, taking on bigger social responsibilities. All of the things are important nutrients for a teenagers' development as a person. The skills they finely tune and the decisions they make will affect them all of their lives. If young people do not put these years to good use, they may never develop their full potential. If you have a desire to learn more and support teens in building the skills they will need to have healthy relationships, please contact the Circle of Care (334-768-4091) or Faith Boyd (706-773-6669) concerning the upcoming "**Love Waits**" conference for 7th-12 graders at **Faith Congregational Church** in Valley on **Saturday December 8** from **9:30 a.m.-2:00p.m. EST**. The conference is free and open to the public.

Seven Principles of Smart Teen Relationships

Adolescence is an ideal time for teens to learn and practice healthy relationship skills while getting to know themselves and others. It is our role as parents, teachers, and mentors to talk with them and listen, while guiding them on the road to adulthood. The following seven principles from *Relationship Smarts* are important nutrients as teenagers explore relationships:

1. **Seek a good match.** Look for common interests. Great relationships are built on common ground. Do you have similar interests and enjoy doing things together?
2. **Pay attention to values.** Are the values and beliefs you hold most dearly shared or respected by the other person. It starts by knowing ones own values about God, family, education, work, responsibility, children, and parenting.
3. **Don't try to change the other person into someone they are not.** Also, don't be so desperate to be in a relationship or friendship that you fool yourself about who this person really is. Support someone in making the changes they desire for themselves.
4. **Don't try to change yourself just to get someone's attention, friendship or love.** Healthy relationships are not based on phony fronts. Recognize and build on your strengths and work to make the changes and improvements you have identified for yourself. Be real and be yourself!
5. **Expect good communication and don't run away from problems.** Explore your differences and pay attention to how you both deal with conflicts. Is there a willingness to improve communication skills? How you handle conflicts say a lot about your future happiness in this relationship.
6. **Don't play games, pressure, or manipulate someone.** A worthy and equal relationship is not one based on inequality, power, or control. Respect one another's values, choices, and opinions.
7. **Expect RESPECT and have a bottom line.** Have a standard for how you want to be treated and how you want to be talked to. Expect respect from your partner for your boundaries and values regarding drugs, alcohol, and sex. Never tolerate disrespectful or abusive behavior.

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