

THE DATING DECADE

Hooking Up, Hanging Out, and Swiping Right

TOP TAKEAWAYS

Family formation is high stakes. And it is complex. Today, in some ways, it may be more complex than it needs to be. And it certainly takes longer than it did for previous generations. Many young adults will spend a decade—or more—navigating romantic relationships before saying “I do,” and this presents challenges. We can respond to these challenges and do more to support all young people during their dating years and promote happy, healthy lives.

We should pay closer attention to this extended time period in early adulthood before marriage.

- Health experts, economists, and think tanks have given significant attention to [another period of life](#) that has lengthened—the time between retirement and death.
- But less attention has been given to the [increasing time](#) that Americans spend *dating* before forming families of their own.

We can be more honest.

- In our effort to avoid coming across as judgmental toward certain [sexual choices and behaviors](#), we have, as a society, sent young people a message that these choices don't matter. This is wrong.
- A longer time period between embarking on [one's romantic \(or sexual\) journey](#) and [arriving at marriage](#) represents an increased opportunity for young adults to gain sexual experience before marriage.
- But social science shows that [sexual inexperience](#) upon marriage is linked to stronger and [more satisfying unions](#).
- [Pornography use, cohabitation, sleeping around](#) ... these things aren't just bad ideas because they conflict with some Americans' religious beliefs.
- They are bad ideas because they are often destructive to the people who do them. Young adults deserve to know this.

We can be more encouraging.

- Negative voices and messages about family life often resonate loudest, but the truth is that marriage and parenthood are still deeply rewarding and fun.
- We don't need to talk young people into marrying; most of them still say they want to. But we can stop talking them out of it.

We can focus on forming good future spouses and parents.

- In our education system, in our society, and even in our families, we put enormous emphasis on [career preparation](#). We constantly ask children, "What will you be when you grow up?"
- The expected answer to this question is a profession (e.g., "doctor," "lawyer," "gymnast"). But many girls and boys will also grow up to be wives, husbands, mothers, and fathers.
- To excel at these roles, young people [need modeling and training](#) in communication, conflict resolution, respect for others, and working toward shared goals. They also need to develop the social skills to navigate dating.
- They need less screen time, healthy bodies, and healthy minds. They need to become responsible adults in order to attract, commit to, and support a mate.
- This training starts at home, and early.

We can reduce political animosity.

- The [political fault lines](#) in Gen Z, often drawn between men and women, are representative of political divisions throughout our population.
- Gen Z's [longer period](#) of pre-marriage singleness has increasingly contributed to shaping young adults' political identities, and in polarizing directions.
- A healthier political climate, where Americans of all ages and family backgrounds can relate to one another in respectful ways, would make dating easier.

We can foster a more family-friendly culture and improve public policy.

- [Schools](#), [workplaces](#), and [religious institutions](#) can all work toward greater family-friendliness while also being fair and inclusive toward people who remain single.
- Our [governmental policies](#) should never punish people for getting married or having children.
- But [incentivizing marriage and fertility](#) and fertility, while often a noble goal, is not easily achieved through legislation, new programs, or even subsidies.

Modern life poses complicated challenges for human relationships, but human relationships have survived in the face of many changes in our history and our world.

Life finds a way. Love does, too.

Click [HERE](#) to read the full report.