



# Marriage



**ESPECIALLY FOR THE KIDS**

**MARRIAGE IS MUCH MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER.** Marriage is about building a common life together, forming an exclusive emotional, sexual, and spiritual bond, forging a shared financial future, taking care of your spouse in “sickness and health,” and providing a stable and loving home for any children that you have. Marriage can be tough, especially since nearly every husband and wife struggles with periods of disappointment, resentment, or anger in their marriage—not to mention the stresses of losing a job, facing the death of a loved one, or parenting a child with emotional problems. But couples who manage to forge a lifelong marriage give their kids, themselves, and their communities a priceless gift.

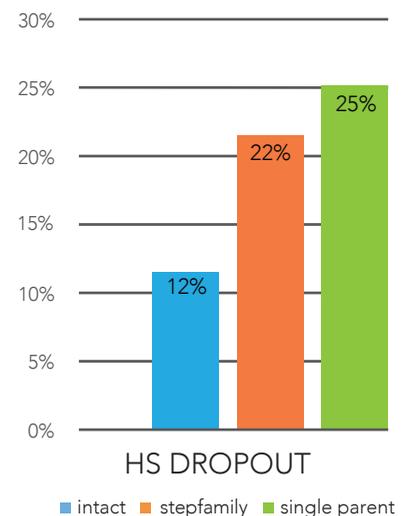
## How Marriage Matters for Your Children

Parents who are able to get and stay married are more likely to have children who flourish in life, and who avoid the detours that can derail their futures, compared to children raised in other types of families. Princeton sociologist Sara McLanahan put it this way: “Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents... regardless of whether the resident parent remarries.” This does not mean children who are raised in single-parent or step-families necessarily do badly; many turn out fine.

But the social science is clear: children who are raised by their own married parents are more likely to thrive. That’s because they tend to enjoy more stability, more money, more consistent discipline, and more attention than their peers in other families. How does this play out in the real world?

## Graduating from High School

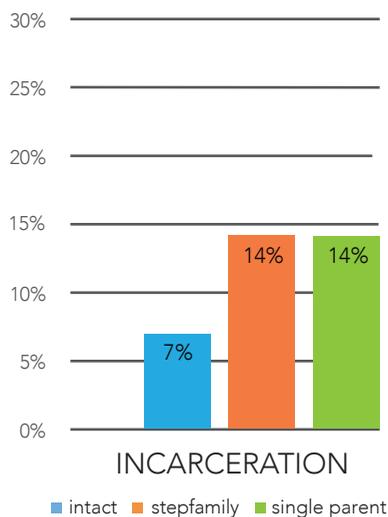
This figure shows that children from intact, married family are about half as likely to drop out of high school, compared to children from single-parent and step-families. Not surprisingly, when they enter into adulthood they are also more likely to work full-time and to succeed in the workplace.



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. Note: figure adjusted for maternal education, race, ethnicity, and mother’s age at birth.

## Avoiding Jail

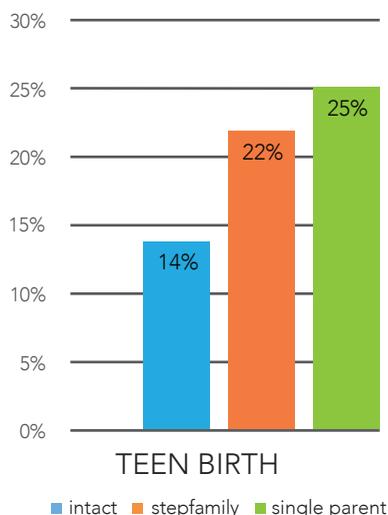
Or take incarceration. Boys who are raised by their own married parents are half as likely to end up in jail or prison by the time they reach 30, as this figure details. Clearly, boys who have the benefit of the presence, attention, and oversight of both their parents are less likely to run afoul of the law.



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. Note: figure adjusted for maternal education, race, ethnicity, and mother's age at birth.

## Teen Pregnancy

Or take teen pregnancy. Girls who are raised in a home with their father and mother are significantly less likely to end up pregnant as a teenager. They are also less likely to be sexually active when they enjoy the stability, attention, affection, and monitoring associated with growing up in an intact family.



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. Note: figure adjusted for maternal education, race, ethnicity, and mother's age at birth.

## HOW MARRIAGE MATTERS FOR YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY

It's not just children who benefit from marriage, it's also the adults. Women and men who get and stay married tend to be healthier, happier, and better off, compared to their peers who never marry, who divorce, or marry and remarry. Men, for instance, live about nine years longer if they get and stay married. Women are "much better off" in retirement if they are married, rather than divorced or single, as a recent report from the U.S. Department of Labor noted. And communities with a greater share of married parents tend to be safer and more likely to promote economic opportunity for poor children in their midst.

## HOPE FOR THE HURTING

But let's be clear: marriage can be difficult and even dangerous at times. Spouses facing domestic violence should seek immediate help, for instance by calling 800-799-7233; they should also consider separating. But husbands and wives facing difficulties in their marriage—as do many over the course of their married lives—should not despair. There are now good resources for couples looking for help on the internet (e.g., <http://www.exceptionalmarriages.com>). And most couples who experience a spell of unhappiness but remain married see their marriages improve. One study found that "Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later." So, if you are struggling in your marriage, seek help from a marriage-friendly counselor, clergy member, or wise friend. The odds are that you, your community, and especially your kids will be the better for it.

For more info please visit us at our website:  
<http://ifstudies.org>