

* Avoid risky behaviors

Why is it important to avoid risky behaviors?

Alcohol or drug use, teen pregnancy and even obesity are barriers to graduating from school. We are reviewing the issues surrounding the choices that teens make in order to understand where we can collectively have the biggest impact to help them avoid these risky behaviors.

Research shows that students are more likely to stay in school:

- if they avoid risky behaviors (such as drinking or using drugs)
- if they have critical math skills by ninth grade so they don't fall behind their peers
- if they are reading well in third grade

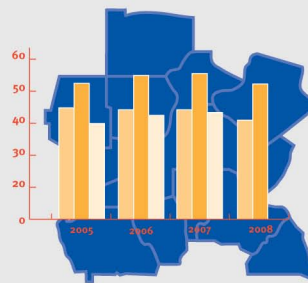
Teenage risky behaviors in Georgia (ages 15-19)



Births to teens ages 15-19

(live births per 1,000 population)

Regional U.S. Georgia



In Georgia, 17,211 teens gave birth in 2008.

To help youth avoid risky behaviors, we are focused on these key strategies.

- Provide resources and support for youth, families and schools around childhood obesity reduction, teen pregnancy and STD prevention, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use awareness and juvenile justice avoidance
- Improve the quality of out of school time experiences, youth leadership opportunities and youth volunteer experiences
- Provide families, schools and youth service providers with youth development resources; improve youth development professionals knowledge of program practice grounded in human development, scientifically-based research and proven best practice
- Engage and educate the public and policymakers about the many ways to support and engage youth

We believe in having all of the stakeholders at the table, and our work on helping teens make good choices is no different – except that getting teens to the table requires some special effort. That's why United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta is partnering with The Gallup Poll and The Forum for Youth Investment to pilot the Gallup Student Poll, a free, online survey for public schools that tracks the hope, engagement, and well-being of students in grades 5-12 across the United States annually for 10 years. The pilot started in fall 2010 and is administered in Butts County Public Schools and in targeted community-based organizations.

United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta received \$10,000 from America's Promise Alliance to conduct youth focus groups in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club. These focus groups laid the foundation for the development of a Youth Leadership Council, which works in partnership with the Youth Avoid Risky Behaviors leadership council to advance this work.