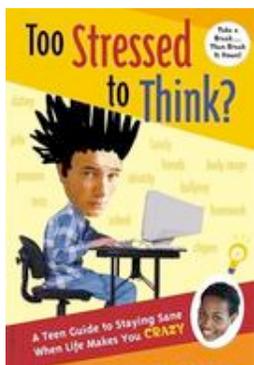
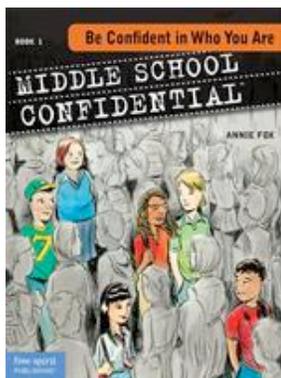


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## August 2008

Annie is the author of [Be Confident in Who You Are](#), book 1 in the new Middle School Confidential™ series for tweens, and (with Ruth Kirschner) [Too Stressed to Think? A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy](#).



### A teen pregnancy pact?!

Editorial by Annie Fox, M.Ed.

Last month's widely reported spike in the pregnancy rate at a Massachusetts high school stunned many folks. But the 10th-grade moms-to-be weren't among them. Why? Because apparently most of the seventeen sophomores who got pregnant at Gloucester High did it *intentionally*. You heard it right. The girls were trying to get pregnant!

The school nurse reported that the girls repeatedly marched together into her office for pregnancy tests. They comforted each other when the tests were *negative* and positive results were met with squeals of delight and hugs all around. On hearing her positive test results, one girl loudly proclaimed "Sweet!"

What?! Turns out that this group of friends actually *pledged* to get pregnant ASAP and to raise their babies together. Sweet, huh?

What happened in Gloucester, and may be happening still, is not an anomaly (though the pledge part may be). According to the National Center for Health Statistics, teen pregnancy is up by 3 percent this year (the first increase since 1991). It's not clear if this is the beginning of a disturbing trend; but one thing's for sure, when school budgets are slashed, sex education classes (along with other electives) are deemed "frills" that we can't afford. We can't afford *not* to provide students with sex education because it is education for life!

As for the pregnant Gloucester girls, any sane adult has to wonder, "WHY would they do that?" I wondered, too. Where did those girls get the idea that being a teen mom would be like...awesome?

Maybe we could blame the media. Recently, it's been shining awfully bright lights on pregnancy, depicting it as glamorous and trendy. In the hugely popular movie *Juno*, the lead character is a very hip, smart, and pregnant 16-year-old. Coincidentally, the day the Gloucester story broke, media outlets blasted the news of the birth of a baby to Brittany Spears' little sister, Jamie Lynn, who is 17. For months, paparazzi photographed her growing "bump," as teens around the nation watched Jamie smiling, waving, and wearing totally

cool clothes.

But could media coverage cause an otherwise mentally stable 15-year-old to believe that getting pregnant now is a great idea? I don't think so. Not any more than playing violent video games is going to turn an emotionally healthy 15-year-old into a mass murderer.

Movies and celebrity lifestyle choices may contribute, but they aren't the cause of a deliberate teen pregnancy.

So, what is the answer?

Maybe it's because Gloucester has been hit really hard economically, and these girls may be seeing their parents struggling, depressed, and stressed about the family's prospects. The girls may be feeling like their own future prospects are limited. They may never have been told that they're good at anything. They may have thought, on some level, that if they got pregnant, then they wouldn't have to worry about what they were going to do in the future. They'd have a baby...and they'd have a ready-made job! Something they're sure they'd be good at. *"I'll be a mom! Problem solved!"* Of course you and I know that's an incredibly short-sighted perspective, but the teen brain has zones that are still under construction. One such area is dedicated to "impulse control," another to "long-term planning."

Maybe these girls haven't experienced enough love, support, or encouragement from the adults in their lives. Maybe their parents aren't emotionally available. Maybe their teachers are overworked, underpaid, and dealing with their own family struggles. Maybe that leaves a girl with a hole in her heart, searching for unconditional love. The kind you get from a puppy or a baby.

We could play Dr. Freud all we want. But more important than figuring out why these girls chose to get pregnant, is the task of developing strategies at home and at school to help young people develop a sense of self and purpose. That's the only way they'll begin to make choices that reflect who they really are and where they want to go in life.

[Annie Fox](#) is an educator, writer, and online advisor for tween, teens, and their parents. In 1996, Annie dreamed up the idea for The InSite ([www.TheInSite.org](http://www.TheInSite.org)), a place for youth to turn their world around. She has served as creator, designer, writer, and executive producer of the award-winning site. One of The InSite's most popular features is Hey Terra! (a.k.a. Annie Fox), an online advice resource.

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