



A CRUCIAL CONNECTION

Working Together to Address Teen Pregnancy
Among Youth in Foster Care
Discussion Guide

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Girls in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to get pregnant than girls in general. Almost half of girls in foster care have been pregnant at least once by age 19 and nearly one-third have at least one child. The statistics speak for themselves.

It is also the case that daughters of teen mothers are three times as likely to become teen mothers themselves compared to those born to adult parents. Moreover, children born to teen parents are significantly more likely than children born to adult parents to enter the foster care system.

In addition to the personal costs of too-early pregnancy and parenthood, there are important public costs: teen childbearing costs taxpayers \$9.1 billion annually. Fully \$2.3 billion of these costs can be attributed to increased child welfare costs from foster care and Child Protective Services.

Certainly research should drive policy making and program development. Yet it is also important to listen to what young people themselves have to say and find ways for them to be a part of the solution. This DVD features teens and young adults speaking candidly about their experiences with the foster

care system as well as various professionals discussing why it is important to address teen pregnancy among youth in foster care. It is our hope that the insights and ideas featured in this DVD will help educate staff, caregivers, parents, and youth in foster care about the effects of teen pregnancy on the health, education, and social and economic well-being of youth and families and provide an opportunity to learn more about some of the issues raised in the DVD.

In order to make healthy decisions, young people need support from the adults in their lives. While each teen's situation is unique, young people repeatedly express a desire for open and honest discussions about sex, love, and relationships with foster parents, birth families, group home staff, case workers, healthcare providers, teachers, and the faith community. The young adults and professionals in the DVD show how everyone has a role to play in preventing teen pregnancy.

This guide was developed to encourage discussion of the issues raised in the DVD among child welfare and public health professionals, biological and foster parents, and teens. The guide is broken into three parts: 1) questions for child welfare and health professionals; 2) questions for caregivers and foster parents; and 3) questions for youth in foster care.

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Discussion Guide for Child Welfare and Health Professionals

All sectors—from health and child welfare services to schools and faith communities—can play a role in preventing teen pregnancy. The more teens hear about delaying pregnancy until they have accomplished other important goals, the greater the likelihood that they will pay attention and make smart decisions. The teen pregnancy prevention, child welfare, and juvenile justice professionals featured in the accompanying DVD make clear that progress in preventing teen pregnancy will only be successful if multiple agencies with diverse goals can find innovative ways to collaborate on this issue. They note that consistent messaging and complementary and supportive programs are the keys to success.

The following questions are meant to encourage professionals to think about this issue and to guide a discussion about preventing pregnancy among youth in foster care in your state or community. We encourage you to examine whether this is an issue you can address in the work you are doing. No single message will work for everyone; if you are working with a group, we urge you to help your group identify its own priorities, views, and expectations—and ideas for

how to prevent teen pregnancy in the first place. Our goal is to help generate ideas for making progress on reducing teen pregnancy by taking stock of what is already available, encouraging collaboration across agencies, inspiring new ideas, and determining next steps to better serve youth in foster care.

Discussion Questions

1. In the beginning of the DVD, Sarah Brown says that the United States' population does not know how prevalent teen pregnancy is within the foster care community. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. In your community (or state), do you think teen pregnancy among youth in foster care is a big deal?
3. Do you have any teen pregnancy or related data specifically for youth in foster care at the state, community, or organizational level?
4. Has your program/organization considered ways to increase the pregnancy prevention skills of adults who work with youth in foster care? For example, by providing information on how to talk to teens about healthy decision-making and pregnancy prevention or sponsoring trainings and workshops. What other things might be useful?
5. Does your organization currently do anything to address teen pregnancy among youth in foster care? And what more can you do?

6. What are some resources or services that you can offer youth in foster care to help them avoid pregnancy?
7. In the DVD, Angel Nash says that conversations on this issue should occur among a diverse range of actors (community networks, social service providers, elected officials, and foster parents). Who are some other groups of people working on this issue in your community that you can involve as you move forward with this conversation? What are some strategies you can use to bring more people to the table?
8. Have you (yourself, your program, or your agency) thought about working collaboratively with other organizations to address this issue? How can you work to advance collaboration between partners?
9. Have you considered opportunities to address this issue as part of the Fostering Connections to Success Act? (For more information, see http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_Youth_Foster_Care.pdf)
10. Raymond Torres says that young people come into the foster care system for a number of reasons (like safety issues) and that becoming parents at an early age often perpetuates and adds to those problems. Given the need to address a number of other areas with youth in foster care including education, housing, health, and other areas, how much of a priority is pregnancy prevention?

11. In the DVD, youth formerly in foster care also share their thoughts about early pregnancy and parenthood. Jonnie Hill and Rob Hilla both make the point that becoming parents is continuing the cycle of poverty. Have you thought about teen pregnancy prevention in terms of poverty reduction?
12. Do you plan on doing anything differently after watching the DVD and participating in this discussion?

For more information, please visit The National Campaign's foster care web portal at www.TheNationalCampaign.org/fostercare.

Discussion Guide for Foster Parents and Caregivers

As a foster parent or caregiver, you have a lot on your plate. Preventing teen pregnancy may not be the first thing you think about every morning when you wake up. Or maybe you keep putting off having the “sex talk” with your teen. The good news for foster parents is that there is a lot you can do to influence your children’s decisions about sex and relationships, and to help them make wise choices.

The following questions are meant to guide discussions among foster parents, relative families, and caregivers about teen pregnancy. Because no single message will work for everyone, we urge you to identify your own priorities, views, expectations, and ideas for how to prevent teen pregnancy in the first place. If nothing else, we hope that this discussion puts teen pregnancy on your radar screen. We also hope that it provides you with ideas of what you can do in your own home, the child welfare system, and in the broader community to help teens lead healthy lives.

Discussion Questions

1. How concerned are you about the teen(s) in your life becoming pregnant or getting someone pregnant?
2. What is the youngest age you think it’s okay for someone to become a parent? How important do you feel it is for young people to delay pregnancy until this age? Do you think that young people should reach particular goals before they start a family (for example, getting some post-high school education or getting married)?
3. Is early pregnancy different for youth in foster care than for other youth? What about the factors that might lead to teen pregnancy?
4. In the DVD, Jonnie Hill says that she became pregnant as a teen because she didn’t have a family and felt like she could make a family with the father of her child. Have you encountered this mindset in your role as a foster parent or caregiver?
5. What factors do you think help protect young people from teen pregnancy?
6. Judge Mary Mikva notes in the DVD that caseworkers, foster parents, and youth in foster care all need to start talking to each other about pregnancy prevention. Do you find it difficult to talk to the kids in your life about sex, relationships, and preventing teen pregnancy?

7. What do you feel is the proper role of foster parents and caregivers in preventing teen pregnancy?
8. Does the teen in your life know your thoughts on becoming sexually active as a teen?
9. What kind of information on teen pregnancy do you need in order to help the teen(s) you are caring for? Tips on how to talk to teens about this issue? Programs in your community?
10. Do you think there are ample opportunities for teens and foster parents to discuss their thoughts and opinions about teen pregnancy?
11. What kinds of support would you like from child welfare agencies and case managers to help your teen avoid pregnancy?
12. What advice would you give to other foster parents on helping the teens in their lives avoid pregnancy?
13. Do you plan on doing anything differently after watching the DVD and participating in this discussion?

For more information, please take a look at:
Ten Tips for Foster Parents to Help Their Foster Youth Avoid Teen Pregnancy
http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/10TipsFoster_FINAL.pdf.

Discussion Guide for Youth In and Transitioning from Foster Care

Teens are often lectured about preventing pregnancy, but rarely are they asked to offer their own opinions and advice. This is your opportunity to talk openly about teen pregnancy in your community. Because no single message will work for everyone, we urge you to help your group identify its own priorities, views, and expectations—and ideas for how to prevent teen pregnancy in the first place.

We hope this guide will help you start a conversation with your friends and classmates about sex and pregnancy, how these issues affect your lives, and inspire ideas for prevention in your community.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think teen pregnancy is a problem in your community? What about the young people you know personally?
2. In the DVD, Sarah Brown says that teens in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to get pregnant than teens not in foster care. Does this shock you? Why or why not?
3. From whom do you get information on sex, love, and relationships?

4. In the DVD, Raymond Torres says that becoming a young parent at a point when youth are preparing to transition to adulthood makes this transition more complicated. Why do you think this might be?
5. Raymond also says that becoming a parent at a young age adds to the issues that youth in foster care already have. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
6. In the DVD, Renée Wilson-Simmons says that teen fathers earn less than their peers who are not teen fathers and teen parents on a whole have less schooling than teens who are not parents. Do you think most teens know this?
7. Whose responsibility is it to prevent pregnancy? The girl's or the guy's? Is it shared?
8. What are some reasons to not get pregnant or cause a pregnancy when you are a teen? What are your life goals? Do you think pregnancy can affect those goals?
9. In the DVD, Jonnie Hill says that she became pregnant as a teen because she didn't have a family and felt like she could make a family with the father of her child. Rob also expresses this when he says that teens in care have a baby to fill a gap. Do you think there are any advantages to becoming pregnant as a teen in foster care?

10. How do you feel about the way that Jonnie talks about her experience in foster care with a baby of her own?
11. What would get youth to think about the consequences of sex? What would get them to think that pregnancy can happen to them?
12. What's the most important piece of information that youth need to hear about preventing teen pregnancy?
13. What would you do to prevent teen pregnancy in your community?
14. Both Rob Hilla and Angel Nash speak about people having kids to fill a gap—what other ways could we help young people fill that gap without having a family?
15. Do you plan on doing anything differently after watching the DVD and participating in this discussion?

For more information, please take a look at:
Our Story, Our Words: Youth Speak Out on Sex, Love, and Teen Pregnancy,
http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/OurStory_FINAL.pdf,
a brochure written for teens and by teens about preventing pregnancy.
Also check out our website www.StayTeen.org for more information for teens.

For more information, please visit The National Campaign's foster care web portal at www.TheNationalCampaign.org/fostercare.

The National Campaign seeks to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

TheNationalCampaign.org
SexReally.com
blog.TheNC.org
StayTeen.org



The National Campaign
to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy