

# Creating a Responsible Climate

DR. MICHAEL CARRERA

DIRECTOR, THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY  
ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAM



Personal responsibility within the context of pregnancy planning and prevention is not a stand alone, separate concept or set of behaviors centering on sexual expression and a reproductive health choice. Responsible sexual and reproductive behavior is informed by our overall core values as they apply to all dimensions of our life. As such, personal responsibility as a driver in life is vitally conditioned by spiritual, cultural, intellectual, and emotional dimensions as well as the biological. Accordingly, while pregnancy planning and prevention are important ways of expressing responsible sexuality, this behavior represents only one aspect of a much wider human expression.

The development of a personal sense of responsibility is informed and influenced by numerous factors. Family, in particular a parent or other present, caring adult, significantly helps individuals develop responsible, equitable, caring values. These values underlie choices and decision-making of all kinds throughout early development, the teen years, and on to adulthood.

Specifically, family influences foster the healthy development of self esteem in females and males.<sup>1</sup> When a young person feels valued and prized as a person and family member, and experiences emotional safety, those feelings increase their belief that their destiny is in their own hands, and that life and relationships are not simply

a series of things that just happen: it helps them understand that certain behaviors result in certain outcomes; that there are causes and effects over which they have control; and that not hurting themselves or others is a personal responsibility that contributes to the common good of family and society.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, in the realm of making choices that are not risky and conveying respect, responsibility, and equity in relationships, appropriate self esteem development looms as essential in the hierarchy of a young person's thoughts and behavior.

Parents and family members have no choice about their influence in helping develop the self esteem of their children and family members — their only choice is whether they do it well or poorly.

In summary, a fundamental understanding for all of us, parents, educators, and policy makers is that we do not prevent unplanned pregnancies, risky, or irresponsible sexual behavior — young people do. What we do is create a climate, an atmosphere in our homes, communities, and in our country where young men and women believe that a joyful, gratifying life is ahead of them, and they possess the capacity to achieve fulfillment. This understanding by young men and women increases the odds that personal responsibility within the context of pregnancy planning and prevention is more likely to be realized.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carrera, Michael. *Lessons For Lifeguard*, New York, Donkey Press 1996

<sup>2</sup> Classroom Management Resources Site, California State University, EDE1414 EDSE 415 March, 2009

*Dr. Michael A. Carrera is Director of The Children's Aid Society Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program. For 25 years this program has served thousands of young people in New York City and other geographies around the country. The Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program is a term evidence-based program serving adolescent boys and girls.*