

# Briefly...

## It's Your Responsibility to Talk to Youth: Pregnancy Prevention for Youth in Foster Care: A Tool for Caregivers and Providers

This tool is designed for caregivers and service providers to raise awareness; suggest ways to approach sex, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) with youth; and provide resources.

### Background

There are important reasons why people who care for and about children in foster care should place the prevention of early pregnancy high on their list of concerns. Teens in foster care, many of whom suffered abuse and neglect before leaving their homes, are more likely to get pregnant than teens outside the system. In fact, teen girls in foster care are 2.5 times more likely than their peers not in foster care to get pregnant by age 19 and half of 21-year-old men aging out of foster care report they had gotten someone pregnant compared with 19 percent of their peers who were not in the system.<sup>1</sup>

Early childbearing is also associated with negative consequences for the children born to teen parents. Children born to teen parents are more likely than those born to older parents to end up in foster care or have multiple caretakers throughout their childhood, and are at increased risk of being a victim of abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup> Compared with children born to adult mothers, they are also more likely to:

- Be born prematurely,
- Repeat a grade,
- Become teen parents, and
- End up in prison (for the sons of teen mothers).

Teen childbearing in the United States cost taxpayers (federal, state, and local) at least **\$9.1 billion** in 2004 alone. Most of the costs of teen childbearing are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers. These costs include \$1.9 billion for increased public sector health care costs, \$2.3 billion for increased child welfare costs, \$2.1 billion for increased costs for state prison systems, and \$2.9 billion in lost revenue due to lower taxes paid by the children of teen mothers over their own adult lifetimes.<sup>3</sup>

Youth who have ever lived in foster care tend to take more risks sexually and thus tend to experience a higher incidence of teen and non-marital births. It is also the case that youth who have lived in foster care tend to engage in other risky behavior (e.g. ever been arrested before age 18), more so than the rest of the population.<sup>4</sup> Here are some things for you to think about:

- Foster care youth, both boys and girls alike, are less likely to use contraception the first time they have sex, compared with their non-foster care peers. Only about half (56 percent) of youth in foster care used contraception the first time they had sex, compared with 72 percent of their non-foster care peers.<sup>4</sup>
- 41 percent of foster youth think the reason teen pregnancy is higher among their cohort is because they want to feel loved.<sup>4</sup>
- Nearly three out of four young women in foster care report being pregnant at age 21, compared with only one-third of young women not in foster care. Repeat pregnancies are common— almost two-thirds of the young women in foster care have more than one pregnancy by age 21.<sup>5</sup>

These data suggest that it is necessary to help youth in foster care and those transitioning out of foster care to avoid early pregnancy. It is important to help those who are already parents delay future pregnancies until they are better prepared to take on additional family responsibilities.

## Tips for Talking to Teens

Perhaps the most important life asset all teenagers need to avoid early pregnancy is a strong relationship with parents or other adults in their lives. Below are some tips to help you speak to youth about relationships, sex, and preventing pregnancy.

### 1. Help youth develop options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.

- Some youth have a strong desire to have a child as soon as possible. They may seek to create their own family as a source of stable relationships and unconditional love. Have a frank and detailed discussion about how they plan to support a baby through 18 years of life and provide the emotional and financial opportunities they want for their children. Youth often do not fully understand the true costs and emotional demands of raising a child. You can help give them a reality check.

### 2. Don't be shy about talking about sex. Youth want to talk to adults.

- All kids need a lot of guidance and information about sex, even if they sometimes don't appear to be interested in what you have to say. Remember to talk to both females and males. Remember too that both foster mothers and foster fathers should be involved in these conversations.

### 3. Stress the importance of healthy relationships.

- Trust is important in all types of relationships.
- Open and honest communication is a critical ingredient of any healthy relationship.
- No one has the right to treat anyone else with anything other than respect (provide examples of disrespectful and unhealthy behavior such as irrational jealousy, over-possessiveness, physical abuse, attempts to control every move their partner makes, and threats of physical violence.)

Remember you don't have to do this alone. Seek out the experts in your community, attend any available trainings and workshops, and obtain more resources. You can make a difference, and it is never too late to educate youth about relationships and pregnancy.

## Resources

For more information to help parents discuss these and other issues:

- The National Foster Parent Association: [www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org)
- The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/parents.aspx](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/parents.aspx)

To learn what youth in foster care think about this issue:

- *Our Story, Our Words: Youth Speak Out on Sex, Love, and Teen Pregnancy*: [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/OurStory\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/OurStory_FINAL.pdf)

For additional resources on teen pregnancy among youth in foster care:

- The National Campaign's Foster Care portal: [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/fostercare/default.aspx](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/fostercare/default.aspx)

For information about contraception and STIs:

- Planned Parenthood: [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- American Social Health Association: 1-800-227-8922 or [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)
- National HIV Testing Resources: [www.hivtest.org](http://www.hivtest.org)
- CDC/ AIDS National Hotline: 1-800-342-2437

For information about the legal rights of pregnant and parenting teens in foster care:

- Children's Law Center of Los Angeles: [www.clcla.org/facts\\_teens.htm](http://www.clcla.org/facts_teens.htm)

## Local Resources Information

Please use this template to develop a list of resources that are available within your community and state.

If you have additional questions about the following topics, these types of local organizations may be available to provide you with resources and services.

- **Birth control, family planning clinics, local health departments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **Health care information:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **Local or state teen pregnancy prevention organizations:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Mentoring organizations (someone to connect with):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Child welfare services:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Someone to talk to:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Child care options:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Education options:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Vocational counseling:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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- **Substance abuse issues:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- **Mental health issues (depression, services):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## References:

1. Bilaver, L.A., & Courtney, M.E. (2006). *Foster Care Youth. Science Says #27*. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. [http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/SS/SS27\\_Foster-Care.pdf](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/SS/SS27_Foster-Care.pdf)
2. *Why it Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Child Welfare*. Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC. [http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/child\\_welfare.pdf](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/why-it-matters/pdf/child_welfare.pdf)
3. Hoffman, S.D., (2006) *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy Washington, DC. <http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs/default.aspx>
4. *Fast Facts: Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Youth Who Have Ever Lived in Foster Care*. Washington, DC. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. [http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/FastFacts\\_FosterCare\\_Reproductive\\_Outcomes.pdf](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/FastFacts_FosterCare_Reproductive_Outcomes.pdf)
5. Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Cusick, G.R., Havlicek, J., Perez, A., & Keller, T. (2007) *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago: Chicago. [http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/docs/ch\\_midwest\\_study121207.pdf](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/docs/ch_midwest_study121207.pdf)