

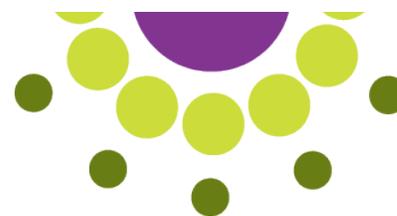


# Best Practices for Working with Teen Parents and Their Children

There is a consensus among professionals in the field about the types of services and practices that are critical to facilitate the long-term self sufficiency of young parents, build their parenting capacity, and ensure the healthy growth and development of their children.

The Center for Assessment and Policy Development's (CAPD) publication, *School-Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and their Young Children* identifies six core services for teen parents and their children<sup>1</sup>.

- 1. Flexible, quality schooling to help young parents complete high school or obtain their GED**
  - Provide flexibility in class schedules for medical and social service appointments and parenting responsibilities
  - Develop evening, weekend and summer classes for pregnant and parenting students
  - Appoint an advocate for pregnant and parenting teens in the school
  - Conduct student assessments, advise students on academic options and develop educational plans with students
- 2. Case management and family support services**
  - Build a trusting relationship with the young parent and his or her family
  - Assess the young parent's strengths and needs with an emphasis on strengths rather than problems
  - Provide appropriate referrals
  - Help the young parent identify, set and work toward obtaining goals
  - Follow up with the young parent and evaluate the client on agreed upon activities
- 3. Prenatal care and reproductive health services**
  - Ensure access to prenatal care and reproductive health services immediately and illustrate the importance of frequent subsequent visits
  - Connect the young parent with family planning services to postpone subsequent pregnancies
  - Provide preventive health care, development screens and links to appropriate follow-up health care
  - Offer transportation to the clinic and childcare during the parent's appointment
  - Engage fathers in prenatal care services
- 4. Quality child care for children with links to basic preventive health care**
  - Ensure child care centers are adequately staffed
  - Assign children a primary caregiver to assure that enduring child/adult relationships are developed
  - Require childcare professionals be trained in the field of early child development
  - Build on the values of diverse families and on the child rearing practices, learning styles and language used in the home
  - Employ good health, nutrition and safety practices
  - Enforce the child immunization schedule recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics
  - Provide access information to well-baby check ups and developmental screenings
- 5. Parenting and life skills education and support services**
  - Stress the following curriculum components: family planning, nutrition counseling, awareness of community resources, crisis or depression counseling and life skills counseling
  - Offer curriculum and activities that are sensitive to the adolescent parent's culture, religion and economic status
  - Engage fathers early in pregnancy



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- Develop separate programs for fathers which include curricula to prepare young men for responsible fatherhood and assistance in establishing paternity

## 6. Father involvement services and supports

- Adopt policies, outreach strategies and support services to facilitate relationships between fathers and their children
- Assume that all men want to be involved with their children; do not equate the father's absence with not caring
- Create a "father friendly environment" by employing more men on staff, displaying photos of men with children, listing fathers on program enrollment forms and adjusting program schedules to fit work schedules
- Provide fathers with peer support, family planning education, parent education and mediation services

**In addition to the six core services identified by CAPD, the following practices are likely to increase the effectiveness of adolescent parent programs**

### Gain community and community agent involvement

- Provide a comprehensive array of services including transportation, case management, and transition to post-secondary education or employment
- Use a local planning council and/or advisory council which consists of government and non-profit agencies, schools, businesses and parents to assess needs, modify existing programs and provide grassroots support for employers to adopt family-friendly policies such as flexible work schedules and subsidized and/or on-site child care
- Help the larger community understand teen parent programs and how they address other pressing community problems
- Engage community institutions in providing non-financial incentives such as gifts, trips or awards for such activities as job training, school attendance, etc.

### Pursue strategies that work

- Use multiple strategies to address the diverse needs of teens
- Use age-appropriate strategies
- Tailor strategies to the unique needs and experience of the individual parents
- Provide a continuum of services
- Provide culturally relevant services which build on an individual's strengths and
- Acknowledge and affirm cultural identity, values and beliefs

### Employ well-trained staff and give them reasonable workloads

- Provide staff training and on-going professional development
- Give staff reasonable caseloads
- Provide teens with caring adults who are mentors and advocates
- Ensure that staff are sensitive to the needs of teen parents

### Ensure a safe, nurturing and structured living environment

- Encourage adolescent mothers to live with their parents or other adults who can provide economic and social support
- Secure young families with stable and affordable housing when living at home is not an option

1. Batten, S. and Stowell, B. (1996). *School Based Programs for Adolescent Parents and Their Young Children: Guidelines for Quality and Best Practice*. Center for Assessment and Policy Development, [www.capd.org](http://www.capd.org).

~November 2006~