



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 children¹.

- 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.

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