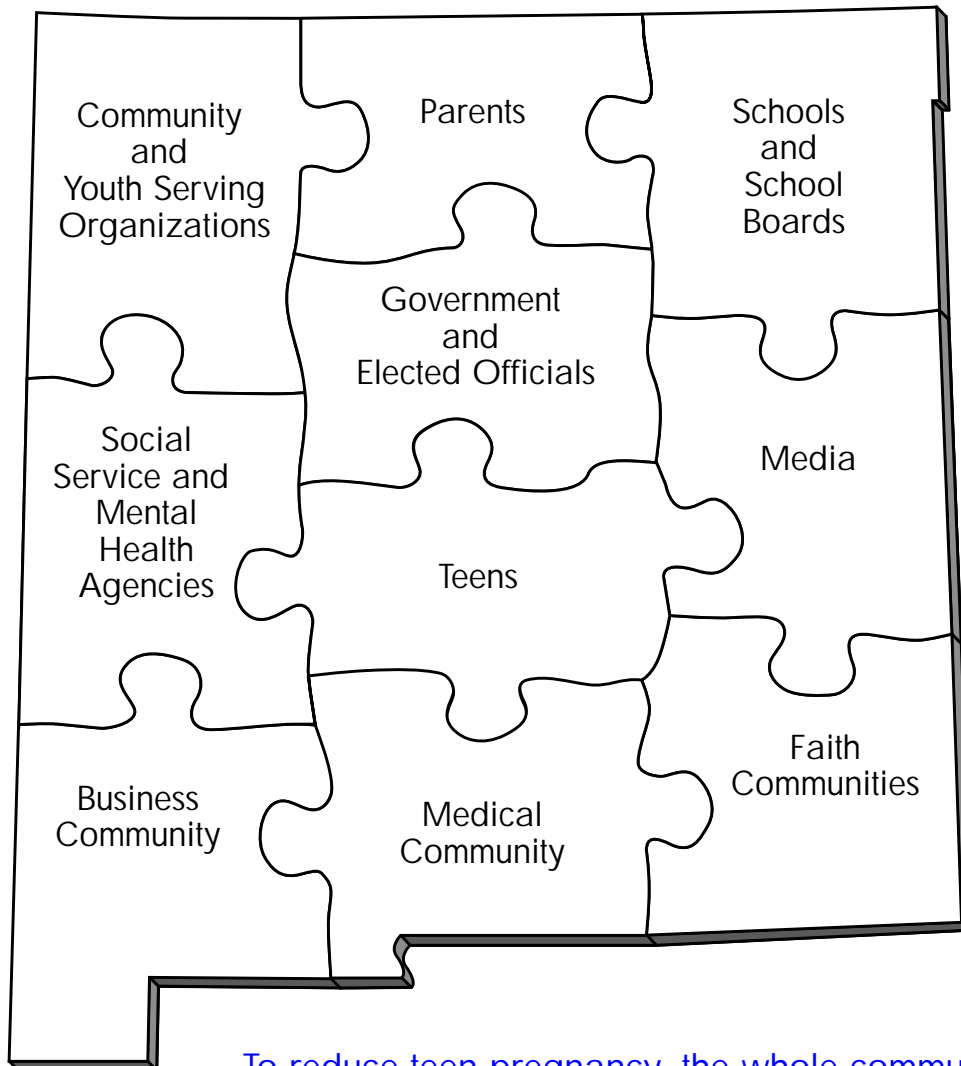


Meeting the Challenge

How to Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community

The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle

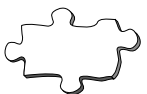


To reduce teen pregnancy, the whole community must work together in a collaborative manner. With everyone involved, interventions will fit together like puzzle pieces.

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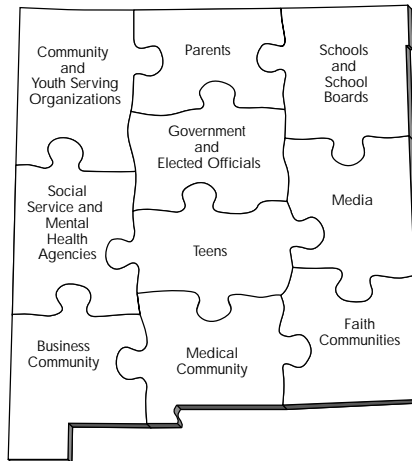
Acknowledgments

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The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition
would like to express sincere appreciation to the
New Mexico Department of Health
for its long-term commitment to reducing teen pregnancy.

The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle



We would also like to acknowledge the following national organizations for their support
in writing this manual and in our on-going efforts.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Washington, DC



Advocates for Youth
Washington, DC

Meeting the Challenge: How to Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community
is dedicated to all the committed and caring adults who work
to insure a better future for New Mexico's children and families.

April, 2001

Promising Approaches to Teen Pregnancy Prevention

1. Teen pregnancy is the result of multiple and complex social problems. It will take equally complex and long-term interventions to achieve real reductions in teen pregnancy.
2. All kids are at risk of being involved in a teen pregnancy, but not all kids are at equal risk. The most consistent indicators (precursors) of teen pregnancy are: early school failure, early behavioral problems, distressed families, and poverty.
3. Young people who have a strong sense of connection to their families and their schools are least likely to be involved in a teen pregnancy.
4. No single intervention will work for all teens (forget cookie-cutters or magic bullets).
5. No single intervention will work for all the teen years (forget vaccines).
6. Young people need both the capacity (ability) and the motivation (desire) to prevent a teen pregnancy.
7. The programs and curricula that are demonstrating success are those that include emphasis on information *and* skill building. Information-giving alone is not sufficient.
8. Programs and curricula demonstrating success provide both support and encouragement for abstinence *and* provide information on contraception. This approach is strongly supported by parents.
9. Family planning services must be easily accessible (both physically and psychologically) to teens. Most of the recent decline in teen births is due to better contraceptive use among sexually active teens.
10. Promising prevention strategies also include:
 - Strong one-on-one support from a responsible adult
 - Attention to basic cognitive skills and educational achievement
 - Attention to the world of work
 - Service learning
 - Youth development programs that address the “whole child”

The Basics

The Issue

There's good news to celebrate! Teen pregnancy has been declining since the early 1990s. However, it's critical that we not allow a sense of complacency to settle in. The overall number of American teens is increasing and will continue to grow for several more decades. We will need to work hard in order to continue this recent decline. We must also take into consideration that Hispanic youth are the fastest growing major racial/ethnic group and these young people currently have the highest teen birth rates.

Teen pregnancy often results in decreased life opportunities for both the mother and father — but the negative consequences most severely impact the child. Children born to teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty, suffer poor health, grow up in homes without fathers, become runaways, experience abuse and neglect, be placed in foster care, and fail in school. Boys born to teen mothers are more likely to spend time in prison and girls are more likely to repeat the pattern of teen childbearing.

Poverty is both a cause and effect of teen pregnancy. Early childbearing compounds the socioeconomic disadvantages that poor teens already face. It places teenage mothers and

their children at greater risk of physical, emotional, and economic difficulties. These outcomes create economic consequences that will require major long-term investments from our social structures.

Teen pregnancy prevention is not just one of the many societal problems worthy of our attention. It is a core issue. If we are successful in reducing teen pregnancy, we will also impact poverty, child abuse, dysfunctional families, and reliance on public assistance. Less teen pregnancy will mean fewer incarcerated males and more fathers at home.

In order to maintain the declining trend of the last decade, the whole community must be involved in and committed to implementing and maintaining multifaceted approaches. There are no quick fixes or silver bullets. Our interventions must be as complex and long-term as the conditions that set the stage for the problem. But it's well worth our time and resources, because reducing teen pregnancy will strengthen New Mexico's families, communities, and economy. These efforts are a true investment in our future.

Teen pregnancy creates economic consequences that will require major long-term investments from our social structures.

Statistics

Teen Pregnancy and Birth in the United States

- Almost a million teens become pregnant each year.
- Since 1991, the US teen pregnancy and birth rate has declined, however, our rates are still the highest of the industrialized nations.
- About 4 in 10 teen females will have at least one birth by age 20
- The federal government spent over \$38 billion in 1996 to provide services and support to families that began with a teen birth.

Teen Pregnancy and Birth in New Mexico

- New Mexico has the 5th highest teen birth rate in the nation. While our rate is declining, it is occurring more slowly than the nation as a whole.
- In 1998, the teen birth rate in New Mexico was 68 births per 1,000 girls (15-19 years). Preliminary 1999 rates are reported to be 63.7 per 1,000.
- There are almost 5,000 births to teens in New Mexico each year.
- In New Mexico, teen pregnancies result in 62% live births, 23% abortions, 15% miscarriages.
- Approximately 1/3 of all New Mexico families begin with a birth to a teen mother.
- Approximately 80% of births to teens in New Mexico occur outside of marriage.
- About 20% of births to teens in New Mexico are repeat births.
- Hispanic teen females make up a disproportionately high percent of births to teens. Hispanic girls make up about 44% of the population but deliver about 63% of the babies born to teens in New Mexico.

Teen Sexual Behavior in the United States

- Half of all 9-12th grade students have had sexual intercourse, reflecting a decline during the last decade from 54 percent in 1991 to 50% in 1999, according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In 1999, 65% of 12th graders reported having had sexual intercourse.
- Reductions in teen pregnancy are due mostly to an increase in the use of contraception by sexually active youth, but also as a result of more teens choosing abstinence.
- Among 9-12 grade students who have had sexual intercourse, more than 1 in 4 (27%) say they are currently abstinent.
- Condom use among 9-12th grade students increased over the last decade, however, the rate of increase has slowed in recent years.
- Among 15-19 year-old girls who have had sexual intercourse, 69% describe their first time as “voluntary and wanted”, 24% as “voluntary but unwanted”, and 7% as “non-voluntary.” The younger the age at first intercourse, the greater the likelihood the experience was unwanted and/or non-voluntary.

In fiscal year 1996, the federal government spent over \$38 billion to provide services and support to families that began with a teen birth.

This includes families headed by adult females who were teens when they gave birth.
— *Advocates for Youth, Washington, D.C.*



Promising Approaches to Teen Pregnancy Prevention

1. Teen pregnancy is the result of multiple and complex social problems. It will take equally complex and long-term interventions to achieve real reductions in teen pregnancy. Multiple strategies are necessary, including some that begin very early.

There's a phrase that has become popular in the prevention arena. "Start Early, Stay Late" refers to beginning interventions when a child is young and continuing on with age-appropriate strategies throughout the teen years. Information, skills, guidance and caring adults are essential for everyone to have throughout childhood and adolescence.

2. All kids are at risk of being involved in a teen pregnancy, but not all kids are at equal risk. Young people most likely to become involved in a teen pregnancy are those experiencing:

- early school failure
- early behavioral problems
- distressed families
- poverty.

Addressing the needs of those youth who are most likely to be involved in a teen pregnancy is essential to achieving our goal of reduced teen pregnancy rates.

It may be helpful to use a common medical analogy when discussing the interventions that young people need. Think of this like a "dose" of medicine." Not everyone needs the same dose of intervention. Some kids just need a light touch to keep them on the right track. Other kids need a strong dose because life circumstances have created a risky environment for them. It is our most at-risk, least prepared and most disadvantaged young people who are the most likely to become teen parents.

3. Young people who have a strong sense of connection to their families and their schools are least likely to be involved in a teen pregnancy. These are powerful protective factors.

This is truly hopeful news because it gives us a more doable goal than, for example, reducing poverty.

Continued on next page

D*esign your interventions around promising approaches. Time and resources are in short supply — use them wisely, but creatively.*

Programs that provide parents with skills and strategies to talk with their children are demonstrating success at improving communication and transmitting the family's own values. Supporting school connectiveness doesn't necessarily mean that the students get honor roll level grades. Sometimes a young person can be closely connected to their school because of their love of sports, art, or music. Or maybe it's the secretary, cafeteria or maintenance employee who makes a point to chat and see how the student is. Caring adults come in many disguises. Also, some research indicates that involvement in a faith community can play a role in pregnancy prevention.

4. No single intervention will work for all teens (forget cookie-cutters or magic bullets).

Just as different kids need different doses, kids also require different types of interventions. Although age-appropriateness is always important to take into consideration, programs must also be experience-appropriate. You can't deliver the same intervention to your church group and then to the kids in the juvenile detention center, even if they are the same age. Their life experiences have probably been extremely different. Also, males and females don't have *all* the same needs. For example, boys need help working through

issues like, "What does it mean to be a man?" and "What is a sexually responsible man?" Interventions must also be culturally appropriate in order to be successful. If you are not familiar with the culture of the young people you work with, it is essential that you become educated in this area. It would also be best to work closely with adults from that culture so they can guide your efforts.

5. No single intervention will work for all the teen years (forget vaccines).

Interventions must be age, experience, and culturally appropriate. Young people are very sensitive to people who talk down to them, don't understand or respect their life experiences, culture or faith. If we are "Starting Early, and Staying Late" then we must be sure that our programs are addressing the real needs of our young people as they grow into adults. Don't forget to ask the kids what they need! Adults are often reluctant to believe that kids are in need of (what we consider) "advanced" information and skills. Young people are exposed to lots of sexual messages at such very young ages. We may not like it — but we have to deal with it.

Continued on next page

R*esearch indicates that the consistent indicators (precursors) to teen pregnancy are:*

- *early school failure*
- *early behavioral problems*
- *distressed families*
- *poverty.*

Promising Approaches

Continued from page 2

6. Young people need both the capacity (ability) and the motivation (desire) to prevent a teen pregnancy.

A young person has the capacity (or ability) to prevent a pregnancy when they have adequate information about sexuality, good relationship skills, and access to family planning services. But without the motivation (or strong personal desire) to do so, they are more likely to become involved in a pregnancy. Likewise, a teenager with the motivation to prevent a pregnancy but without adequate information or access to services is more likely to become involved in a pregnancy.

Capacity can be fostered by providing education and skills related to the physical, mental, and social aspects of sexuality. Access to family planning services is also an important piece of capacity building. Motivation can be fostered by helping young people believe that a positive future is possible for them. Making that positive future a reality is a job for the adults of the world.

7. Programs and curricula demonstrating success are those that include emphasis on information *and* skill building. Information-giving alone is not sufficient. Attention must be given to the specific skills necessary to avoid pregnancy.

Although information alone is not a strong enough tool to reduce teen pregnancy, it's still an essential part of the solution. (You can't kill a bear with a fly swatter either!) Young people need a vast array of life skills to successfully navigate the 21st century. Specific skills necessary to avoid pregnancy include communication/refusal/negotiation skills and also skills related to consistent and correct use of contraception. Skill building usually can't be achieved through paper and pencil work, this falls into the area of information building. Skills must be practiced and rehearsed repeatedly with real people.

8. The programs and curricula that are demonstrating success provide support and encouragement for abstinence *and* provide information on contraception.

Continued on next page

- I**nterventions must be:
- *age-appropriate*
 - *experience-appropriate*
 - *culturally-appropriate*

Recently, a representative survey of adult New Mexicans indicated overwhelming support for sex education that provides a strong abstinence message along with information about contraception and condoms. This support was particularly strong for parents of school-age children. See the *School Chapter* for more information on this survey. As of this date, abstinence-only curricula have not demonstrated success in any scientific evaluation.

9. Family planning services must be easily accessible (both physically and psychologically) to teens. Most of the recent decline in teen births appears to be a result of better contraceptive use among sexually active teens.

True access to family planning services means that the staff and office procedures are teen-friendly and the clinic is convenient in its

location and hours of operation. We also must be willing to subsidize the cost of these services. The other alternative is to subsidize the cost of the pregnancy and child.

10. Promising prevention strategies also include:

- Strong one-on-one support from a responsible adult
- Attention to basic cognitive skills and educational achievement
- Attention to the world of work
- Service learning
- Youth development programs that address the “whole child”

NOTE: An abbreviated version of *Promising Approaches* is included in the Handout Pocket of this Manual. It is designed as a single-page handout.

There is a growing body of knowledge about teen pregnancy interventions that are proving successful. More research is expected to be published in 2001.



Emerging Answers in Teen Pregnancy Prevention

In May of 2001, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy released the acclaimed report, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings in Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. This is the latest publication of author Douglas Kirby, Ph.D. Dr. Kirby has spent over 22 years studying a variety of teen pregnancy prevention and youth programs.

Emerging Answers is a comprehensive review of evaluation research on programs designed to prevent teen pregnancy. It provides the latest information on “programs that work.” In addition to examining traditional sex education, the study covers abstinence-only education programs for teens, contraceptive and family planning services, early childhood programs, youth development, and service learning.

“The report offers good news for communities working to prevent teen pregnancy,” said Sarah Brown, Director of the National Campaign. “Clearly there is an ever-widening group of activities that communities can put in place that may help convince teens that pregnancy and parenthood are not in their best interest.”

Key Findings:

- Several programs have now shown sustained positive effects on delaying the onset of sex, improving contraceptive use, or preventing teen pregnancy. There are eight programs identified as having strong evidence of success. Five of these are sex education programs, two are service learning programs, and one is an intensive program that combines sex education, comprehensive health care and youth activities.

- The overwhelming weight of evidence reviewed in the report shows that sex education that discusses contraception does *not* hasten the onset of sex, increase the frequency of sex, or increase the number of sexual partners. To the contrary, some sex and HIV education programs delay the onset of sex, reduce the frequency of sex or reduce the number of sexual partners.

- Effective programs share two common attributes: (1) being clearly focused on sexual behavior and contraceptive use and (2) delivering a clear message about abstaining from sex as the safest choice for teens and using protection against STDs and pregnancy if a teen is sexually active.

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- The jury is still out about the effectiveness of abstinence-only programs. At this time, there is no evidence of any overall effect on sexual behavior from abstinence-only programs. However, very little rigorous evaluation of these programs has been completed; only three studies met the criteria for this review. There is currently a federally-funded evaluation underway and more definitive results will be available in the future.

- The research indicates that encouraging abstinence *and* urging better use of contraception *are* compatible goals.

- Service learning programs may have the strongest evidence of any intervention that they reduce teen pregnancy rates, at least during the time that youth are participating in the program.

- The programs that have changed teens’ sexual behavior share ten necessary characteristics. The absence of even one of these characteristics appears to make a program appreciably less likely to be effective. (See page 8)

- Family planning clinics probably prevent a large number of teen pregnancies – although there is remarkably little evidence to support this common-sense view. However, several rigorous studies have indicated that clinics can increase contraceptive use when they provide high-quality education about abstinence and

contraceptives, discuss the adolescent patient’s sexual and contraceptive behavior, and give a clear message about sex and contraceptive use.

- Many studies of schools with health clinics – and schools with condom-availability programs – have consistently shown that the provision of condoms or other contraceptives does *not* increase sexual activity. However, studies show mixed results about whether they increase contraceptive use.

- Early childhood programs may have an impact on teen pregnancy but only one evaluation study met the criteria for this review. The children in this program delayed childbearing by more than a year, in comparison with the control group.

- Effective teen pregnancy prevention programs *do* exist and should be expanded, but it’s unrealistic to assume that community programs will solve a problem of this magnitude. All young people live in a larger culture that is influenced by such disparate forces as parents, peers, schools, the economy, faith institutions, and the entertainment media.

So what should New Mexico communities do with this information?

Emerging Answers suggests three strategies for employing promising approaches.

Continued on next page

1. The best option is to replicate with fidelity (that is, carefully copy) programs that have demonstrated effectiveness.
2. The next best option is to select or design programs that have the common characteristics of programs deemed effective.
3. If # 1 or # 2 are not possible, use a careful and deliberate process to select or design new programs and not just rely on accustomed ways of doing things. Development of a logic model is strongly recommended. Kirby details this process.

A logic model (also called a causal or program model) is a concise, causal description of exactly how certain program activities can be expected to affect particular behaviors by teens. At minimum, a logic model requires that we be specific about what behavior we want to change. A logic model identifies in the following order:

- (a) the behaviors to be changed
- (b) the precursors or antecedents of these behaviors (the individual, family, social and community factors that predispose teens to risky behaviors).
- (c) the particular program activities designed to change these antecedents.

This way of thinking and planning usually results in programs that have clear goals with orderly and plausible plans for reaching those goals.

What is Service Learning?

Two of the eight programs that were identified as having strong evidence of success are service learning programs. These programs combine the familiar concept of community service with group discussion and reflection. We're not really sure why service learning appears to be so successful, but several possibilities seem plausible. First, participants develop relationships with program facilitators, they gain a sense of autonomy, and feel more competent in their relationships with peers and adults, and they feel empowered by the knowledge that they can make a difference in the lives of others. These factors may help increase motivation to avoid pregnancy. Also, participating in supervised activities, especially after school, may reduce the opportunity to engage in risky behaviors. All the service learning programs that were evaluated are intensive programs that lasted for months. Service learning does not necessarily focus on sexual issues.

Continued on next page

10 Characteristics of Effective Sex and HIV Education Programs

The most effective sex and HIV education curricula share ten common characteristics. The absence of even one of these characteristics appears to make a program appreciably less likely to be effective. These programs:

1. Focus on reducing one or more sexual behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancy or HIV/STD infections
2. Are based on theoretical approaches that have been demonstrated to influence other health-related behavior and identify specific important sexual antecedents to be targeted
3. Deliver and consistently reinforce a clear message about abstaining from sexual activity and/or using condoms or other forms of contraception. This appears to be one of the most important characteristics that distinguishes effective from ineffective programs
4. Provide basic, accurate information about the risks of teen sexual activity and about ways to avoid intercourse or using methods of protection against pregnancy and STDs
5. Include activities that address social pressures that influence sexual behavior
6. Provide examples of and practice with communication, negotiation, and refusal skills
7. Employ teaching methods designed to involve participants and have them personalize the information
8. Incorporate behavioral goals, teaching methods, and materials that are appropriate to the age, sexual experience, and culture of the students
9. Last a sufficient length of time (i.e. more than a few hours)
10. Select teachers or peers who believe in the program and then provide them with adequate training

See *Emerging Answers* for detailed descriptions of these characteristics.

Copies of the full, 200-page report, which includes the summary, are available from the National Campaign for \$15 plus shipping and handling. A separately-bound summary is available for \$5 (plus shipping and handling), or can be downloaded for free from the National Campaign's website. All publications can also be ordered online at www.teenpregnancy.org

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
1776 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 478-8500



Community and Youth Serving Organizations

Teens Need Something To Say YES To!

Although they may not be obvious at first, there are probably a number of organizations in your community that can play an active role in reducing teen pregnancy. There is an important place at the table for everyone. Seek to involve civic organizations (Rotary, Kiwanis), sports related organizations (local youth or adult teams), business groups (Chambers of Commerce), support groups (Alanon), cultural groups (LULAC), and faith-based organizations. Don't forget about Maternal and Child Health Councils, Safe and Drug Free School Committees.

The youth serving organizations are probably easier to identify in your community. They offer youth a variety of engaging and constructive activities that develop their interests, talents, and skills and provide opportunities for social interactions. These constructive activities enhance life experiences and opportunities for young people.

The Search Institute has found that in communities where youth are provided opportunities for structured activities, fewer youth are engaged in risk-taking behavior (Blyth, 1992). Well structured activities are particularly powerful for young people who are vulnerable and who live in

unstable families and communities. Among girls, playing sports has been found to relate to a reduced risk of teen pregnancy.

Community and youth serving organizations have tremendous potential to reach some of our highest risk youth, like teens in out-of-home care (group homes and foster care), those involved in the juvenile corrections system, and youth who are not in school.

All the primary indicators of teen pregnancy fall within the areas of interest of these diverse organizations.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

Youth Development Programs

Some programs for youth are holistic in their approach and have come to be known as youth development programs. Nationally, these organizations have a long and successful track record for attending to the needs of the whole child. They include the YMCA, YWCA, Scouts, Girls/Boys Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and Campfire. Most youth

Teens need something to say YES to!

Continued on next page

development programs promote good health behaviors, even if they don't specifically address sexual issues. Some programs are demonstrating success in reducing teen pregnancy. Many of these programs could address the needs of youth more successfully if they incorporated initiatives to specifically address sexuality.

Youth development programs have the potential to support both the capacity (ability) and the motivation (desire) to prevent teen pregnancy. By their very nature, these holistic programs address the motivation aspect because they expose kids to the possibilities in life. But most programs could do more to build capacity by incorporating initiatives to address sexuality and pregnancy prevention. Youth serving programs could play an even more powerful role in teen pregnancy prevention if they expand into these subjects.

Service Learning

Exposure to community service engenders a sense of belonging and "connectedness" to the larger community. Although this is particularly important during adolescence, a critical time for identity development, service to the community can also benefit younger children.

Service learning is like community service but with the additional component of reflection. In this approach, young people talk or write about their meaningful projects before and after they carry them out. This enhances the experience and takes it to a deeper level. For more information on Service Learning, contact The National Helpers Network, Inc., 875 Sixth Ave., Suite 206, New York, NY 10001.

Community and Youth Serving organizations are very important players in the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle. Bring them to the table to help you assess existing services and gaps. Then begin a joint exploration of how their organizations can play a more active and effective role in teen pregnancy prevention.

*Y*outh development programs have the potential to support both the capacity (ability) and motivation (desire) to prevent teen pregnancy.



Where and How to Start

WHERE do I start?

This one is easy. Anyplace! You can choose to address teen pregnancy anywhere along the continuum presented here. At one end of the continuum is an opportunity to offer interventions designed to help young people delay the initiation of sexual intercourse. In the middle of the continuum there is a need to help sexually active youth prevent a pregnancy. At the other end of the spectrum are pregnant and parenting teens in need of assistance in order to reduce the negative consequences of their situation.

Of course, the full continuum needs to be addressed, but don't let your inability to do everything at once stop you from getting started.

Preventing Early
Sexual Intercourse

Preventing Pregnancy
in Sexually Active Youth

Preventing Negative Consequences
in Pregnant and Parenting Teens



With that said, it's still best to start with a comprehensive plan like the one suggested below.

HOW do I start?

1. Community Assessment

Start by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of your community. You have to figure out what services and interventions you already have and what you need to start developing.

A very simple needs assessment can be implemented using the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle. This puzzle depicts the 10 community entities that should play a role in preventing teen pregnancy. To reduce teen pregnancy, the whole community must work together in a collaborative manner. With everyone involved, interventions will fit together like puzzle pieces. The Resource Pocket of this notebook will provide you the tools for this exercise.

Here's how to proceed.

- Get together a group of at least 30 people from your community who are "in the know." Identify your potential partners by looking at the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle. Refer to the *Collaboration Chapter* for more assistance.

Continued on next page

1. Assess Your Community
2. Develop a Plan
3. Form a Local Council
4. Implement Your Plan
5. Evaluate

- Divide your participants into 10 groups and give each group a sheet of paper with an individual puzzle piece. The pocket in the back of this manual contains handouts that can be copied. Ask them to brainstorm about what the specific entity on their puzzle piece can do to actively participant in teen pregnancy prevention. Have them write ideas on their puzzle piece sheet.
- After they have completed this step, have the small groups report back to the larger group. After each report, invite everyone to add their ideas.
- The next step is to take a look at what you came up with and decide how you want to proceed. You can do this at the same meeting or you can schedule another meeting and write up all the ideas and have them ready for a second meeting.

2. Develop a Plan

Set doable goals and objectives. If you have not already researched the teen pregnancy problem in your community, your next step will be to collect local data.

3. Form a Local Council

Or if that's not possible, form a committee to address teen pregnancy as part of another group (like MCH). What's important is that you create a vehicle for an on-going process with people who are comfortable being champions for teen pregnancy prevention.

4. Implement your chosen goal(s)

Remember to give your members tasks that match their capabilities, time, and spheres of influence.

5. Evaluate your efforts for the first year or some shorter time frame

See the *Evaluation Chapter* for assistance.

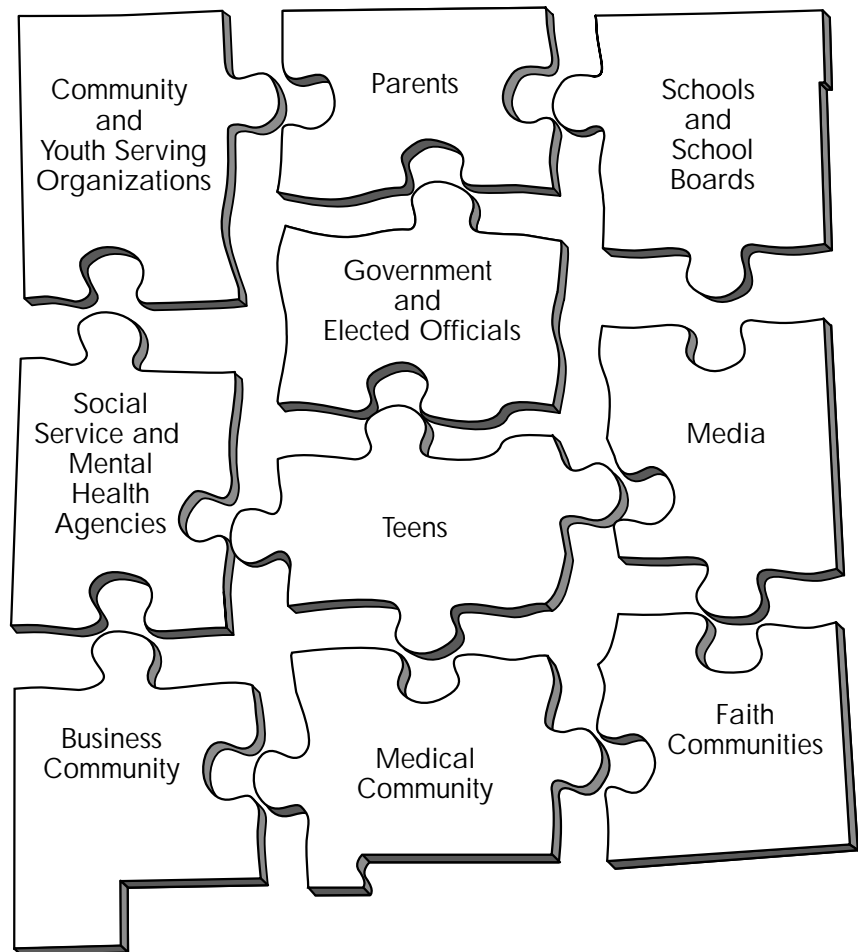
Individuals can
address teen pregnancy
anywhere along the
continuum based on their
skills and comfort.



Collaboration

To reduce teen pregnancy, the whole community must work together in a collaborative manner. With everyone involved, interventions will fit together like puzzle pieces.

Who should you be collaborating with? How do you get these people to see themselves as partners? How do you keep them at the table?

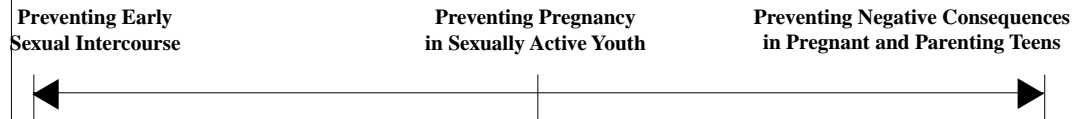


Teen pregnancy often has a negative impact on the greater community; this makes it everyone's problem.

Put These Puzzle Pieces Together!

Identify your “partners” in each of the 10 entities in the puzzle. Bring them to the table. Help them understand how teen pregnancy is a shared concern. Help them understand how working together will advance *their* agenda.

Your Goal: A community-wide ongoing, coordinated, well planned teen pregnancy prevention effort. Everyone can work on the part of the continuum that they are most skilled in or comfortable with – just as long as the entire continuum gets addressed.



Consider inviting a knowledgeable person to make a community presentation for the purpose of educating everyone together. This will help get people on “the same page.” If you need assistance, the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition will help you find a qualified presenter. Don’t forget to collaborate with statewide entities also. Familiarize yourself with the various State departments and organizations that work in teen pregnancy or in closely related areas. This chapter includes a list of New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Prevention Partners.

Everyone can work on the part of the continuum that they are most skilled in or comfortable with.

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Partners New Mexico

1. NMDOH/Family Health Bureau/
Family Planning Program
Office of Adolescent Pregnancy
Prevention
Sophia Thomas
525 Camino de los Marquez,
Suite 2-A
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 476-8595
(505) 476-8584 Fax
2. NMDOH/Family Health Bureau/
Abstinence Program
Abstinence-Only Program
Marie Di Bianco-Eik
1190 St. Francis Drive, N-3150
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 827-1630
(505) 827-0097 Fax
3. NMDOH/Family Health Bureau/
Maternal and Child Health
County Maternal and Child Health
Victoria Parrill
1190 St. Francis Drive
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 827-2352
4. NMDOH/Office of School Health
Laurie Mueller
1190 St. Francis Drive
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 827-2377
(505) 827-1606 Fax
5. GRADS Program
Sharon Waggoner
1013 Calle del Sol
Socorro, NM 87801
(505) 835-1785
(505) 835-1505 Fax
6. Teen Parent Programs
(non-GRADS)
NM Department of Children,
Youth & Families
Barbara Otto
3401 Pan American Frwy NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
(505) 841-4840
(505) 841-4839 Fax
7. Teen Residence
NM Children, Youth & Families
Barbara Otto
3401 Pan American Frwy NE
Albuquerque, NM 87107
(505) 841-4840
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Social Service and Mental Health Agencies

Reviewing the list of primary indicators of teen pregnancy will make it abundantly clear that social service and mental health agencies have an important role to play in preventing teen pregnancy.

At least three out of the four primary indicators of teen pregnancy fall within the arena of these agencies.

Early School Failure

- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

There are other important factors associated with teen pregnancy that can be addressed by social service and mental health agencies. These professionals are uniquely qualified to deal with the following realities.

- A very large percentage of teen mothers were sexually abused, most at a young age.
- Girls whose mothers were teen parents are very likely to repeat the cycle.
- Research indicates a relationship between low self-esteem and depression and sexual risk-taking.
- Alcohol use is very often connected to unprotected intercourse among teens.

- Youth in out-of-home care (foster care, group homes, and residential treatment centers) are at a high risk of becoming involved in a teen pregnancy.
- Youth involved in the juvenile justice or corrections system are at a high rate of becoming involved in a teen pregnancy.

Behavioral problems need to be addressed early – before they result in referrals to the juvenile justice system or require more serious mental health interventions. Resolving behavioral problems will also increase the chances of success in school – which in turn reduces teen pregnancy.

Families who are struggling with serious problems require support and guidance so that more stability can be created for the children. This may involve providing services to support the mother and/or father in their parenting role or addressing other personal issues that interfere with their ability to parent.

The extremely high poverty rates in New Mexico often leave us feeling overwhelmed and unable to make a difference. But because poverty is both a cause and effect of teen pregnancy, it is essential that we confront this one

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Poverty is both a cause and effect of teen pregnancy.

head-on. There are things that we can do to improve the lives of children and families – one child or family at a time. Connecting them with appropriate social service agencies is a start. Then we must follow up to be sure they are getting served properly.

In addition to working with individual children and families, it's necessary for us to look outside of our own communities to advocate for the reduction of poverty. The New Mexico Advocates for Children & Families is actively involved in efforts to reduce poverty in our State. Find out what you can do to support the recommendations that they are making to State government. The New Mexico Advocates for Children & Families can be reached at 244-9505 or www.nmadvocates.org.

The special expertise of social service and mental health agencies is critical to preventing teen pregnancy and the negative consequences for pregnant and parenting teens. Bring these professionals to the table to explore how to increase services and accessibility to our most needy kids – they are the teens most likely to become involved in a pregnancy. Social service professionals are trained to work with at-risk kids and can sometimes offer the strong one-on-one support many kids need. Explore how to tie these services to your schools to provide a strong early preventative approach.



Business Community

Why do we need the business community involved in teen pregnancy?

Teen pregnancy is a complex social problem that requires equally complex solutions. Having all sectors of the community participate in solutions creates a multi-faceted intervention that can make a real difference. Businesses may not realize that teen pregnancy affects them or that they have an important role to play in its prevention. But, teen pregnancy affects *everyone* – including business. Businesses are part of our community and have responsibilities just like the rest of us.

The business community can assist in addressing at least two of the four primary indicators of teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- Poverty

Supporting schools is an easy match for business. They can contribute money, supplies, mentors, or be a school-to-work partner. Well-educated and trained young people make good employees and good employees contribute to a successful business – and thriving businesses do help alleviate poverty.

Businesses can help create one of the most effective deterrents to too

early childbearing – the hope for a promising future. This hope may be the best contraceptive available.

How do we get the business community involved?

First, carefully consider your business community and create a list of prospective contacts. Who might be receptive? Perhaps a health care company or a business leader who has been personally affected by teen pregnancy. Or maybe you want to go directly to business groups like Kiwanis Clubs, Rotary, or the Chamber of Commerce.

Second, decide what role you want the business community to play in the collaborative effort. Develop a list of suggestions about how they can become involved in their own community. Since most New Mexico businesses are small, it's important to be realistic and suggest doable initiatives. Give them concrete options to consider; don't make them guess about what you need from them. Depending on the needs of your community, you may also want to prioritize your suggestions. Here are some possible roles/tasks for local businesses.

- Mentor a young person
- Provide summer employment
- Become a School-to-Work Partner

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***B**usinesses can help create one of the most effective deterrents to too early childbearing – the hope for a promising future.*

***B**usiness has a vested interest in working to prevent teen pregnancy because of the financial, social and workforce related consequences, all of which affects the for-profit world.*

- Make presentations to teens in schools or community programs that will excite them about their future employment possibilities
- Support a local youth development program with money, supplies or time
- Provide workshops for your employees to assist them with parent/child communication skills
- Join the local teen pregnancy prevention work group
- Sponsor a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month event (in May)
- If you employ teens, help spread the word about the importance of pregnancy prevention
- Create workplace release policies that promote and support parental involvement in schools and other community programs for youth

Employment opportunities, during the summertime or school year, can encourage a young person to stay in school. However, employers must be cautious about the number of hours that students are working. Working more than 15 hours per week is usually detrimental to a student's academic success.

Third, you must educate the business community. Becoming involved in teen pregnancy prevention

may feel like quite a stretch for business. They may not be aware of how teen pregnancy affects their business world; it's our job to bring them up to speed on the issue. Distribute the fact sheet from this manual and point out the financial cost that we all share as a result of teen pregnancy. New Mexico has not calculated the cost of teen pregnancy for over 10 years, but in 1990 the amount was \$88 million per year.

Business has a vested interest in working to prevent teen pregnancy because of the financial, social and workforce related consequences, all of which affects the for-profit world. Teen pregnancy leads to lost productivity, retarded economic growth, and increased government spending (read, higher taxes). Teen parents are more likely to drop out of school, live in poverty, be unemployed, and have children who suffer the same fate. This means a less competitive and productive workforce for employers to choose from. It also means fewer people with money to spend at local businesses. Help businesses to understand that poverty is both a cause and effect of teen pregnancy – and poverty is not good for business!

Teen pregnancy can directly impact those employers who rely on the teenage workforce. Pregnancy results in lost workdays and high turnover of employees; both of these are expensive for the employer. An adult woman who must assist with childcare for her

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*Everyone benefits
from a strong healthy
community –
including business.*

teenage daughter or son's baby may also have to interrupt employment to care for a grandchild.

Many businesses will be concerned that this can be a controversial subject. But you can remind them that just about everyone agrees that teens should finish high school and be able to support a child before undertaking parenthood. Introduce them to the continuum concept and make it clear that there is a comfortable place for everyone to participate.

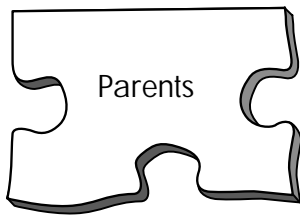
There are many non-controversial ways to participate, especially through schools and youth programs. Supporting youth development programs may appeal to businesses that understand the importance of investing in the future work force but don't want to limit their focus to teen pregnancy. If a business is already involved in some school or community effort, ask them to be an advocate for teen pregnancy prevention efforts within that setting.

Once business leaders understand the importance of preventing teen pregnancy, they may be willing to take on the role of spokesperson. This can

generate interest from other business leaders.

Educate businesses by making a presentation during a time when they normally come together. Try to piggyback on an event that's already happening. Everyone can do something – no matter how small the budget or how little time they have. Let them know that you need them as part of the team. Show them the puzzle and reassure them that they'll be part of a collaborative that's working toward strengthening your community. Everyone benefits from a strong healthy community – including business.

Fourth, cultivate and groom your business contacts. Stay in touch with them regularly so they know that they're important members of the teen pregnancy prevention effort. Make sure they get plenty of public recognition for their involvement, in addition to personal satisfaction. The challenge is to convince them that they're important and then make it easy and rewarding for them to be long term partners.



Parents

Parents play *the most* important role in teen pregnancy prevention and we need to let them know how powerful they really are! Teens who report feeling highly connected to their parents are more likely to delay engaging in sexual intercourse and using contraception when they did have sex.

Parents can make an impact on all four indicators, or risk factors, for teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

Parents are powerful! They can do a great deal to foster talents, skills, and character in their children. This can be achieved by playing a strong and consistent role in their children's lives and by staying connected with them throughout the ups and downs of adolescence. Playing an active role in their children's education will support academic success – a very strong factor in avoiding involvement in a teen pregnancy. If children are experiencing behavioral problems or the family needs support from social service agencies, parents can seek out the necessary assistance. Parents can also shape the community where their children grow up, by interacting with schools, religious institutions and

community organizations.

The journey from childhood to adulthood is a challenging transition for both parents and teens. It's also greatly complicated by the many powerful influences of life in the 21st century. Because the power of media and peers seems so overwhelming, many parents believe they've lost their ability to influence their children once they've reached the teen years. But teens say that's not true. In numerous surveys, teenagers have said that they want and need to hear from their parents regarding sexuality and the many other important issues in their lives, such as school, relationships, drugs, alcohol, and smoking. A 1999 survey showed that teens ranked parents as the biggest influence in their decisions about sex.

There are certain factors that can actually protect our youth from teen pregnancy. The most consistent protective factor is a teen's feeling of being loved and cared for by parents and family members. When teens understand there are parental expectations of behavior, school achievement, family involvement, and future success, they are less likely to be involved in risky behaviors. A solid relationship between a teen and his or her parents is consistently related to healthy emotional functioning and self-esteem. Parents are encouraged

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In numerous surveys, teenagers have said that they want and need to hear from their parents regarding sexuality and the many other important issues in their lives.

to strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, rich in communication and emphasizes mutual trust and respect.

Teenagers need support, guidance, and caring from their parents — just as much as young children do. They need limits, supervision and monitoring, but also age-appropriate autonomy and independence. Parents should discourage early steady dating and romantic relationships with older partners.

Studies have shown that involved, “hands-on” parents are much more likely to have an excellent relationship with their teens than parents with a “hands-off” style. Involved parents establish a household culture of rules and expectations for their teen’s behavior. They monitor what their teens do, including what the kids are watching, listening to, and reading. These teens are at 1/4 the risk of smoking, drinking, and using drugs than teens with “hands-off” parents.

Talking with your children about sexuality can be a challenge. Parents sometimes feel fearful about saying too much too soon, but there’s really no evidence that this needs to be a concern. Research clearly demonstrates that talking to kids about sex, either at home or in school, does *not* encourage sexual activity. Start the conversation about sexuality when children are very young using the simple practice of naming and respectfully acknowledging all body

parts. Answer questions simply and accurately. Make sure that you’re giving the message that you are willing to discuss this subject whenever they have a question or concern. Don’t forget the boys! They need this talk just as much as girls. It’s more important that your children see you as being “askable” than whether or not you know every answer to all their questions. You can always research the answer together.

Teenagers need to know what their parents believe about the circumstance under which sex is appropriate. Conveying values and morals is a primary responsibility of parenthood. Teens also need to have full and accurate information about contraceptives, including condoms. Not because you think it’s okay for them to have sex – but because someday they will become sexually active and you want to be sure that they know how to protect themselves. As parents, we hope that this decision is a long way down the road, but since the reality is that they will make this choice on their own, knowledge can go a long way to keep them safe.

Some people believe that it’s a “mixed message” to encourage abstinence and also provide information about birth control, but a large majority disagree with this view. A New Mexico survey done in 2000 clearly indicated that parents of school-age children want their children to receive both – support and

A New Mexico survey done in 2000 clearly indicated that parents of school-age children want their children to receive both – support and encouragement for abstinence and information about contraception.

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*Parents are powerful
in teen pregnancy
prevention!*

encouragement for abstinence *and* information about contraception.¹

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy conducted a national poll of adults and teens in 2001 and asked this question. *Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teenager the following: "I feel very strongly that not having sex at all during your middle and high school years is your best option and the right thing to do. I also think it is important for you to receive information about birth control or protection. But, again, I think not having sex is your best option." Do you think this is a clear and specific message or do you think this is a confusing or mixed message?* The results were that 75% of teens and 71% of adults think that this is a clear and specific message, 24% of teens and 28% of adults think this is a confusing or mixed message.²

It's important for parents to talk about sexuality within the context of their own personal and moral beliefs. This may involve a specific religious perspective or it may involve an ethical value system that is separate from religion. It's absolutely critical for parents to practice what they preach. Acting on your values and being a good role model are powerful messages for your children, especially when it comes to sexuality. This can be especially challenging for single parents who are dating or in a

relationship. However, since children in single parent homes are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy, they are in need of extra role modeling and guidance.

The conversation about sexuality must begin at a very early age and continue throughout adolescence – it's definitely not a one-shot talk. It's the ongoing conversation that helps prevent teen pregnancy. Many topics will require more than one discussion to really sink into the mind of a child or teen. In a recent survey, 72% of mothers claimed they had talked with their teen about sex but only 45% of their teens felt their mothers had done so!

Parents can participate in community programs designed to foster parent/child communication about sexuality and other related topics. Check with your local churches, health department, hospital, school, or Planned Parenthood to see what they offer. If they aren't providing this service, request that they develop a program for the community.

Children need parents to be parental — they don't need you to be their pal. Being their mom or dad is the most important relationship of all.

¹ *TUNE IN: New Mexico Attitudes on Sex Education*, 2001, the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition

² *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*, April 2001, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

1. Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes. Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you are certain in your own mind about these issues.

2. Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific. Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents. Start the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open, and respectful. If you can't think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Tell them candidly and confidently what you think and *why* you take these positions; if you're not sure about some issues, tell them that, too. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture. Ask them what *they* think and what they know so you can correct misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.

3. Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents. Establish rules, curfews, and standards of expected behavior, preferably through an open process of family discussion and respectful communication. If your children get out of school at 3 pm and

you don't get home from work until 6 pm, who is responsible for making certain that your children are not only safe during those hours, but also are engaged in useful activities? Where are they when they go out with friends? Are there adults around who are in charge? Supervising and monitoring your kids' whereabouts doesn't make you a nag; it makes you a parent.

4. Know your children's friends and their families. Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents of teens even arrange to meet with the parents of their children's friends to establish common rules and expectations. It is easier to enforce a curfew that all your child's friends share rather than one that makes him or her different-but even if your views don't match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children's friends into your home and talk to them openly.

5. Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating. Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Let your child know about your strong feelings about this

Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents.

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Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

throughout childhood-don't wait until your young teen proposes a plan that differs from your preferences in this area; otherwise, he or she will think you just don't like the particular person or invitation.

6. Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is. And don't allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is. Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl-sometimes they even have money and a car to boot! But the risk of matters getting out of hand increases when the guy is much older than the girl. Try setting a limit of no more than a two-(or at most three-) year age difference. The power differences between younger girls and older boys or men can lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection.

7. Help your teenagers to have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood. The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright. This means helping them set meaningful goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future

plans come true, and helping them reach their goals. Tell them, for example, that if they want to be a teacher, they will need to stay in school in order to earn various degrees and pass certain exams. It also means teaching them to use free time in a constructive way, such as setting aside certain times to complete homework assignments. Explain how becoming pregnant-or causing pregnancy-can derail the best of plans; for example, child care expenses can make it almost impossible to afford college. Community service, in particular, not only teaches job skills, but can also put teens in touch with a wide variety of committed and caring adults.

8. Let your kids know that you value education highly. Encourage your children to take school seriously and set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood. Be very attentive to your children's progress in school and intervene early if things aren't going well. Keep track of your children's grades and discuss them together. Meet with teachers and principals, guidance counselors, and coaches. Limit the number of hours your teenager gives to part-time jobs (20 hours per week should be the maximum) so that there is enough time

The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright.

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Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

and energy left to focus on school. Know about homework assignments and support your child in getting them done. Volunteer at the school, if possible. Schools want more parental involvement and will often try to accommodate your work schedule, if asked.

9. Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to.

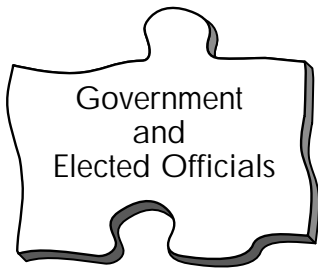
The media (television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are chock full of material sending the wrong messages. Sex rarely has meaning, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few people having sex ever seem to be married or even especially committed to anyone. Is this consistent with your expectations and values? If not, it is important to talk with your children about what the media portray and what you think about it. If certain programs or movies offend you, say so, and explain why. Be “media literate”—think about what you and your family are watching and reading. Encourage your kids to think critically: ask them what they think about the programs they watch and the music they listen to.

If certain programs or movies offend you, say so, and explain why.

10. These first nine tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age. Strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, and rich in communication, and one that emphasizes mutual trust and respect.

Taken from *Ten Tips For Parents To Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy* by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. The full eight page brochure is available through their online store, www.resourcecatalog.org or visit the website at www.teenpregnancy.org





Government and Elected Officials

The citizens of New Mexico depend on government and elected officials to take a leadership role and to stay focused on the big-picture approach to teen pregnancy prevention. Because of its complex and long term consequences to families and the economy of our State, teen pregnancy prevention requires a long-term commitment on the part of government and elected officials. After careful examination of issues related to teen pregnancy, legislative decisions can be made which not only affect the individual teen but the larger society.

Faced with the 5th highest teen birth rate in the nation, the Department of Health and the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition have challenged the citizens of our State to reduce teen birth rates by 20% by the year 2005. Government and elected officials must all accept and do their part to help our State meet this challenge because reducing teen pregnancy will strengthen our families, communities, and economy.

Government and elected officials can make an impact on all four primary indicators, or risk factors, for teen pregnancy, as they determine funding priorities and resource allocation.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

“Preventing teen pregnancy is an effective way to improve overall child and family well-being and, in particular, to reduce child poverty and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Policymakers dedicated to such goals as better schools, a more productive work force, less poverty, and fewer out-of-wedlock births should recognize that reducing adolescent pregnancy and childbearing is a highly leveraged and cost-effective way to achieve these broader social objectives.”

— *Halfway There:*

A Prescription for Continued Progress in Preventing Teen Pregnancy, 2001, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

The negative impact of teen pregnancy on the State of New Mexico can be measured in both human and economic terms. In addition to the direct impact on the individuals involved, there are a variety of costs

Faced with the 5th highest teen birth rate in the nation, the Department of Health and the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition have challenged the citizens of our State to reduce teen birth rates by 20% by the year 2005.

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that are shifted either to the public sector or elsewhere in the economy. The result is an impact on numerous state systems and services. Just a sample of these include: neonatal intensive care and other medical services for low birth weight babies, WIC, Medicaid, subsidized housing, increased education services needed for the mother and her children who commonly experience learning difficulties, welfare, child abuse and neglect services, child support enforcement, and increased demands on the correctional system. Teen pregnancy is a major cause of the serious poverty in our State, but it's also the result of poverty. This is a vicious circle that we must break.

Over ten years ago a study done by the DOH estimated the cost to New Mexico to be \$88 million for teen child bearing. What might the costs be today? Given New Mexico's limited resources, the importance of prevention initiatives can not be overemphasized. The fiscal well being of our State and all its' citizens are dependent upon our willingness to effectively address our adolescent pregnancy problem.

Government and elected officials can play a leadership role in teen pregnancy prevention through the following actions.

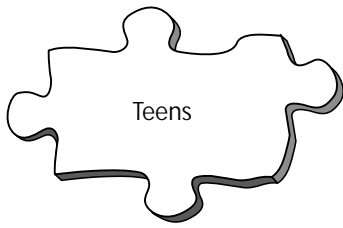
1. Use your visibility and leadership position to create public awareness regarding the long-term consequences of our high teen birth rate.
2. Improve interdepartmental collaboration among the State departments on teen pregnancy prevention.
3. Support funding for primary prevention initiatives that utilize a science-based approach.
4. Utilize TANF dollars for teen pregnancy interventions that have research-based evidence of success.
5. Invest in programs for pregnant and parenting teens in order to mitigate the negative consequences to families and society.
6. Support funding for initiatives that strengthen families, such as counseling services to distressed parents and children.
7. Increase the availability of programs that address the needs of our highest risk youth.
8. Focus on creating an educational system that meets the needs of all students, especially those most likely to fail.

Teen pregnancy is a core problem that contributes to many other social problems.

Reducing teen pregnancy is a means to a larger end—an end with broad social and economic benefits.

9. Actively address the problem of poverty in New Mexico.
10. Support a major media campaign to prevent teen pregnancy.
11. Ensure the timely publication of the statistical data needed to address and track this issue.
12. Determine the cost of teen childbearing to New Mexico.
13. Implement a range of strategies targeted to teens, utilizing research-based approaches, including:
 - a) Increase health services, including reproductive health care
 - b) Provide teens with sexuality education that supports and encourages abstinence and also includes complete and medically accurate contraceptive information
 - c) Support youth development programs to ensure healthy development of the “whole” child
 - d) Promote programs that address the needs of young males and young fathers
 - e) Increase the availability of mental health services

Teen pregnancy is a core problem that contributes to many other social problems. Reducing births to teens will also reduce low birth-weight babies, school dropouts, child abuse, poverty and dysfunctional families. Fewer births to teens will translate into less reliance on welfare, fewer incarcerated males, out-of-wedlock births, and more fathers at home. Reducing teen pregnancy is a means to a larger end – an end with broad social and economic benefits.



Teens

Young people have their own important role to play in teen pregnancy prevention. They can help us address at least one of the four primary indicators, or risk factors, for teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- Early Behavioral Problems
- Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- Poverty

Teens can help themselves and other students avoid early school failure in several ways.

First, teens must attend to their own school success by seriously accepting the responsibility of their most important “job” – getting an education.

Secondly, they can support the school success of other youth with a “leave no student behind” approach to school.

Peer-to-Peer Programs

Teens can support the school success of other students by tutoring or mentoring their peers and younger children. It’s wonderful for a teen’s sense of self-empowerment to learn that they have something important to give; and it often makes them better students themselves. All teens can find a way to support another student; this isn’t just for the academically successful. Some of the most dramatic changes occur when “high-risk” teens

are matched with very young or disabled youth. There are always children who can benefit from the assistance of another student, even when the helper is also struggling with their own personal challenge. Both students “win” in these situations!

Teen leaders have particular credibility with their peers on relationship issues, although teens say they find adult educators better at delivering fact-based information. Teens can be successful in changing social norms in the direction of more support for succeeding in school and less support for pregnancy. Youthful leaders can make it “cool” for everyone to do well in school and can also influence their peer’s use of the drugs and alcohol that set them up for poor choices about sex. Also, teen boys can have a powerful impact on other young males.

Teens can deliver the message that, despite what many believe, all teens are *not* having sex. According to the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), about 50% of 9-12th graders have had sexual intercourse. (Although, the survey also shows that by 12th grade almost 2/3 have had sex). Still, teens overestimate how many of their peers are having sex.

Teens can also spread the word that those who have had sex often regret their decision. A National Campaign

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Teens can be successful in changing social norms in the direction of more support for succeeding in school and less support for pregnancy.

Teen voices, views, and perspectives are critical to developing strong effective programs that are relevant to what's really happening in the lives of teens today.

to Prevent Teen Pregnancy survey showed that 8 in 10 girls and 6 in 10 boys wish they had waited longer to have sex.

There are many types of peer leadership programs, such as peer educators, peer mentors, peer mediators and counselors. These initiatives draw on the credibility young people have with other youth and utilize the power of role modeling. Research suggests that people are more likely to hear and personalize messages if they believe the messenger is similar to them and faces the same concerns and pressures. As powerful as these programs are, it's important to acknowledge up-front that peer leaders need continual support and ongoing training. This is a staff-intensive project! But without adult guidance and accurate information, the influence of peer leaders can be more harmful than helpful.

Nationally, there are many examples of creative ways that teens are influencing their peers to delay pregnancy. Drama, peer-to-peer programs, journalism, music, and art can all be used to deliver the message. Whenever possible, encourage teens to make the message positive, i.e., "look at all the opportunities that are open to you if you postpone childbearing until you're older." Or, "Consider how much healthier your baby will be and how much better off your family will be if you wait until you're mature and capable of supporting a child." This is not to say that the negative

consequences shouldn't be discussed – they absolutely should – it's just a caution about making everything sound negative. At least try to end on an "up beat."

Since peer leadership programs are most beneficial for the peer leaders themselves, it is critical to include high-risk youth in leadership roles.

Adults must also take the responsibility to teach teens to be respectful of other people's values and beliefs. We are a society with diverse cultural and religious values. If teens are delivering an abstinence message they must learn how to deliver their message without being judgmental about teens who are sexually active or those already pregnant or parenting. Supporting and encouraging abstinence is an important means of preventing teen pregnancy, however, it does not meet the needs of all youth and will not be effective for many of our highest risk youth. Therefore, teens who take this approach must also be willing and able to provide full and medically accurate information about birth control.

Youth Advisory Committees

Is your community starting a teen pregnancy prevention initiative? Or maybe you already have such an effort. Either way, you will improve your likelihood of success if you create a youth advisory committee to work with you in both the planning and implementation process.

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Teen voices, views, and perspectives are critical to developing strong effective programs that are relevant to what's *really* happening in the lives of teens today. Recruit an ethnically and economically diverse group of teens from local organizations, schools, and faith communities. If you don't include the higher-risk youth on your committee, you won't have the advantage of their wisdom about what works for the kids *most* likely to be involved in teen pregnancy. You can reach these young people through alternative schools and programs. Don't forget to include teens who have dropped out of school.

Most adults underestimate the inequity of life experience that results from vast differences in socioeconomic status. In real life, the kids who live in two-parent, economically-secure families live in entirely different worlds from poor kids with little or no family support. This is a reality of life many of us never observe, even though it takes place right in our own community. It's important for us to understand the needs of all our youth and include them all in the process of creating a better society – as people with the ability to both give and receive.

Youth advisory committees exist in a variety of settings including churches, schools, and youth serving organizations. There are even several mayors in New Mexico who have youth advisory committees.

Youth Panels and Speaker's Bureaus

Teens can be powerful and persuasive speakers. One way to capitalize on this is to form a teen speaker's bureau to address teen pregnancy and a variety of other topics relevant to their lives. Presentations can be made to adults or other youth. An example of this type of activity is the presentations that the NM GRADS teens make to our state legislature. These teen parents often make the best advocates for continued funding of the programs that serve them. They can also be effective in presenting the realities of life to non-pregnant and parenting teens.

Caution! *Really* involving youth is demanding. Having young people as true partners means active engagement, not just having them rubberstamp our ideas. It means making them part of the team. Often, adults err by going to one extreme or the other when involving teens. Some adults really just want them to be present for "window dressing" so they can say that teens are involved. Others treat young people like they have all the answers or are always correct just because they're teens. There is a middle road here. Listen openly to what youth have to say by withholding judgement for a while. Open communication with teens creates the opportunity for us to learn more about their world and for them to get

Caution!

Really involving youth is demanding. Having young people as true partners means active engagement, not just having them rubberstamp our ideas.

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experience in the adult world and learn responsibility and leadership.

Although this chapter is about what teens can do to prevent too-early pregnancy, it must be acknowledged that adults are responsible for creating the opportunity for them to do so.

8 Reasons to Involve Youth in Pregnancy Prevention Programs

1. Youth involvement itself can help prevent teen pregnancy.
2. Teens can design authentic programs that speak to their real needs.
3. Teen involvement may create a favorable reputation for a program among teens.
4. Teens themselves often are the best recruiters for a program.
5. Teens can help develop messages that young people can relate to.
6. Teens can help you hire the kind of staff that young people will respond to.
7. Teens can help design an accessible program. Teen suggestions for sites, activities, and hours of service will help create a program that works.
8. Teens can help keep a program strong. Regularly asking teens for feedback can help staff make the ongoing, small improvements that maintain a successful program.

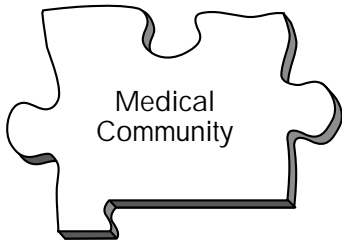
—Adapted from the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*

Resources for Involving Teens

- The resource pocket in the back of this notebook contains a handout, *What Youth Can Do to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, designed to help young people explore ways they can actively participate in teen pregnancy prevention.
- Advocates for Youth of Washington, DC is a good source of material on youth involvement. Among other materials, they have a fact sheet titled *Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming*. Check out their web site at www.advocatesforyouth.org or contact them at 1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20005
- The organization Youth on Board is an excellent resource for adults who want to include youth on their board or committee. Ask about their book, *Youth Governance: 14 Points to Involving Young People Successfully on Boards of Directors*. Contact Youth on Board at 58 Day Street, 3rd Floor, Somerville, MA 02144, (617) 623-9900

Although this chapter is about what teens can do to prevent too-early pregnancy, it must be acknowledged that adults are responsible for creating the opportunity for them to do so.





Medical Community

The medical community includes a wide range of health care professionals and organizations, including health care providers, hospitals, clinics, private sector providers and HMO's. They can all be important assets in a community's efforts to prevent teen pregnancy and can assist with at least three of the four primary indicators, or risk factors, of teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- Poverty

Health care professionals can contribute to teen pregnancy prevention by treating and making appropriate referrals for a variety of physical, mental, and psychosocial problems. The opportunities to prevent teen pregnancy present themselves throughout the day for many medical professionals. But their resources can also be utilized as part of community education efforts and through involvement with local coalitions.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention Within the Daily Provision of Health Care

Providing medical care for children and teens affords an opportunity to attend to problems that can interfere with a child's ability to

be successful in school. Proper screening can identify young people involved in risky behavior or those at a higher risk of teen pregnancy because of physical, mental, emotional, or situational factors. Teens needing special attention and extra time include those involved in substance abuse, who have been sexually abused, already involved in a pregnancy, living in out-of-home care or in dysfunctional families. Risky behaviors tend to cluster; for instance, teens with drug or alcohol problems are also more likely to be having unprotected sex. Attending to the needs of the whole child will allow us to identify the special needs of children at an early stage and to then provide the appropriate intervention.

The New Mexico Department of Health estimates that 44,500 of our youth suffer from a mental disorder that seriously interferes with their role or functioning in family, school or community. And this statistic only represents the seriously impaired!

In the course of providing day-to-day care, medical professionals can help parents talk with their children about sexuality and provide them with accurate information on topics such as growth and development, contraception, and STDs. When a provider is well connected to their community resources (such as

Proper screening can identify young people involved in risky behavior or those at a higher risk of teen pregnancy because of physical, mental, emotional, or situational factors.

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programs that offer parent/child communication workshops) they can be a valuable referral source to their patients.

Working successfully with teens in a medical setting involves creating a teen-friendly environment, ensuring confidentiality, and providing teen-specific services. Teens who are sexually active need support to prevent unintended pregnancy; they need the knowledge, skills, and motivation to use contraception. Those who have not become sexually active need support and encouragement for their choice but they also need contraceptive information and a plan to protect themselves in case they change their mind. Using negative pregnancy tests as an opportunity to offer in-depth counseling and education can help prevent a future pregnancy. Medical professionals are also in a good position to help determine if a sexually active teen is involved in a consensual or coercive sexual relationship.

Also, the medical community must make a commitment to ensure that contraception – including emergency contraception – is truly accessible to young people.

Avoiding pregnancy – whether by not having sex at all or by using contraception diligently – takes strong, consistent motivation. The medical community can do a great deal to help teens build the motivation (desire) and the capacity (ability) to prevent a pregnancy.

Avoiding pregnancy –
whether by not having sex
at all or by using
contraception diligently
– takes strong, consistent
motivation.

Supporting Teen Pregnancy Prevention Through Community Education

Health care professionals can expand beyond their traditional caregiving role by contributing to community education efforts. Making presentations in schools and community programs is a valuable way of ensuring that accurate information is readily available to youth and adults. Addressing the misinformation and lack of awareness about emergency contraception is an important community education role for the medical community.

Other education oriented activities appropriate for the health care professional include staffing tables at school or community health fairs and ensuring that your local library has resources that are up to date, accurate, and youth friendly.

Supporting Teen Pregnancy Prevention Through Local Coalitions

The medical community can be a significant partner in community-based prevention organizations and are often effective members of boards and committees. Because of the respect typically accorded them, medical professionals can be great allies in influencing others and as visible spokespersons.

One strategy that can be especially productive in small communities is for health care professionals to come

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together in a “forum” to brainstorm how to make contraceptive services more accessible in your community. To ensure a large turnout, a prominent and respected member of the community should call the meeting. Don’t forget to include pharmacists, physician’s assistants, nurses, midwives, nurse practitioners and public health personnel.

School-based Health Centers

Advocating for a school-based health center (SBHC) in your community, or supporting your existing facility, is another place where the medical community can participate in teen pregnancy prevention. These centers provide comprehensive medical and mental health services and are integrated into the context of the school environment. Improving access to health care is the cornerstone for the SBHC model.

Each SBHC is unique in the array of services that it provides. However, in New Mexico, mental health and substance abuse treatment are considered to be critical components. Unfortunately, most do not offer the full range of reproductive health services that could more effectively address teen pregnancy prevention.

Medical Schools Can Play a Role

Medical training institutions can do more to prepare practitioners to work with children and teens. A better understanding of developmental stages

and brain functioning is helpful, but healthcare providers also need to become more familiar with the real life experiences of young people in today’s world. This includes issues of cultural, gender and socioeconomic realities. A solid educational foundation for providing health care also includes the exploration of ones own beliefs and values regarding sexual issues. Teen pregnancy prevention requires health care professionals to be comfortable providing all options — from abstinence to contraception — without a judgmental tone. If this is not possible, then the professional must refer the young person to someone able to address the teen’s needs.

Since the early 1990’s, there have been substantial reductions in the teen birth rate, nationally and in New Mexico. This is the result of more teens choosing to abstain and an increase in contraceptive use among sexually active youth. This fact demonstrates that, despite the strong influence of popular culture, it *is* possible to influence the behavior of both male and female adolescents. The medical community can play an influential role by encouraging abstinence and by continuing to support sexually active youth in the successful use of contraception. We need more abstinence *and* more contraceptive use; and we need to motivate teens to use one or the other – consistently.

Medical training institutions can do more to prepare practitioners to work with children and teens.

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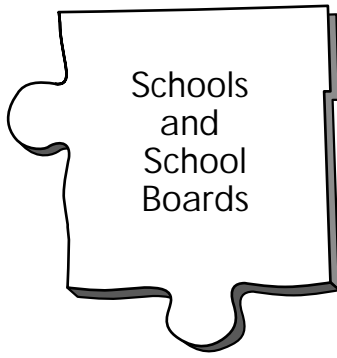
Working successfully with teens in a health care setting involves creating an environment in which teens feel welcome and secure and in which they know their needs and interests are important to those providing services.

Teen-friendly offices employ staff who are comfortable and knowledgeable about the needs of young people. They strive toward the following practices.

- Schedule appointments quickly upon request
 - Hire friendly, culturally competent staff who speak the patient's language
 - Have office hours that are convenient for teens
 - Provide frequent follow-up visits
- Provide adequate time for the teen and health care provider to talk
 - Provide confidential services as appropriate
 - Have a designated staff person whom teens can call if they have further questions
 - Provide or refer to counseling services for issues like violence, abuse, and sexual abuse
 - Offer low-cost or free services
 - Are male-friendly. Welcomes males as partners or individually.
 - Utilize a health history questionnaire designed to initiate conversation with teens

Teen-friendly offices employ staff who are comfortable and knowledgeable about the needs of young people.





Schools & School Boards

Next to parents, schools play the second most important role in preventing teen pregnancy. Students who report feeling connected to school were more likely to delay initiating intercourse, and if they did become sexually active, they were more likely to use contraception.

Each year, approximately 5,000 New Mexico teens become parents before their scheduled high school graduation date. Research indicates that the long-term impact of early parenthood on the educational, social, and economic futures of young people and their children can be devastating.

The impact of teen pregnancy on schools does not end with the young parents; the effect on their children is also dramatic. Children of teen parents are at a higher risk of educational failure. They have lower cognitive skills, lower scores on standardized tests, lower grades and more behavioral referrals. As a result, they are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school.

Schools can and should address all four of the primary indicators, or risk factors of teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

Teens who become parents are usually one or two grades behind their age group in school, have more school absences and lower expectations for their futures (prior to the pregnancy). Those who are 2-5 years behind their peers academically are five times more likely to get pregnant.

Research suggests that preventing teen childbearing would increase the high school completion rate by 40% among females. Seventy percent of young mothers drop out of high school, making early motherhood the number one reason that girls drop out of school. Only 30% of teen mothers complete high school by the age of 30, compared with 76% of their counterparts who delay having children until age 21 or later.

School-age fathers also face educational challenges. Although these young fathers complete only about one less semester of school than men who delay fatherhood until at least age 21, the missed semester is often the crucial one that determines whether they earn a high school diploma.

Students with higher grade point averages are more likely to delay sexual involvement and use contraception if they do become sexually active. The same is true for male and female students who can identify at least one trusted adult at school. Involvement in extracurricular

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or community activities also enhances the likelihood that young people will abstain from sex or use reliable contraception.

It's no coincidence that New Mexico's teen birth rate, school dropout rate, and poverty rate are all among the highest in the nation. They feed each other in a destructive causal relationship, as one problem gives rise to the others. Students who are not succeeding in school are more likely to drop out and to become involved in a pregnancy either before or after dropping out. Lack of a high school diploma will result in lower earnings and a greater likelihood of poverty. Teen pregnancy is itself both a cause and effect of poverty.

It is indisputable that schools can, and must, play an active role in preventing teen pregnancy and addressing the peripheral issues of behavior problems, family dysfunction, and poverty. Although clearly overburdened with many tasks, ultimately, schools are greatly impacted by these other indicators of teen pregnancy. Behavior problems usually show up in school early. The student living in a distressed family environment is often struggling academically and family poverty has a negative impact on school success.

How can schools and school boards most effectively address teen pregnancy? The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) provides this answer to the question.

The combined educational, social,

and economic risks for young parents and their offspring create a vicious circle that the education community cannot ignore. Schools must join forces with families and local communities to reduce the rate of adolescent pregnancy. Doing so does not necessarily require schools to create another "special" program; rather, it requires that schools play a part in addressing the developmental needs of students by providing a supportive curricula, auxiliary services, and extracurricular activities. These components not only are effective in preventing teen pregnancies; they also reduce dropout rates and increase achievement.

NASBE's four-pronged approach consists of enhancing the:

- Academic success of all youth;
- Health literacy and the health status of all youth;
- Career skills and aspirations of all youth; and
- Family, community, and other supports for the success of all youth.

Further details on NASBE's proposals can be found in *The Impact of Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood on Educational Achievement: A Blueprint for Education Policymakers' Involvement in Prevention Efforts*, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), December 2000.

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Sex Education

NASBE acknowledges that youth who receive health education in conjunction with a strong academic program are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. They also point out that skills-based comprehensive health education that includes sexuality education – and is grounded in effective theory and practice – can effectively encourage young people to delay sex or use contraception consistently and correctly.

The 2000 statewide survey of New Mexico adult attitudes on sex education clarified the type of sex education that parents want schools to provide. Parents of school-age children overwhelmingly support sex education that includes both a strong message about the importance of abstinence and also information about contraception. (*TUNE IN*, a report on this survey is included in this chapter.) This inclusive approach to sex education is currently the only one demonstrating success. Public opinion and research agree on the need to provide support for abstinence as well as contraceptive information.

Local New Mexico school boards often say that their community will only support an abstinence approach to sex education, however, this survey clearly dispels that myth. It is now incumbent upon school boards to provide the comprehensive sex education that parents want.

In May 2001, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy published the landmark report, *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. The report identifies eight programs with strong evidence of success (most are curricula) and also the ten characteristics of effective sex and HIV education programs. Author, Douglas Kirby, Ph.D., states that effective programs share two common attributes. (1) being clearly focused on sexual behavior and contraceptive use and (2) delivering a clear message about abstaining from sex as the safest choice for teens and using protection against STDs and pregnancy if a teen is sexually active. To date, abstinence-only curricula have not been able to demonstrate impact on teen sexual behavior.

Emerging Answers suggests three strategies for employing promising approaches in schools and communities.

1. Carefully replicate programs that have demonstrated effectiveness.
2. The next best option is to select or design programs with the common characteristics of programs that have demonstrated effectiveness.
3. If #1 or #2 are not possible, use a careful and deliberate process to select or design new programs. (Kirby details this process.)

Parents of school-age children overwhelmingly support sex education that includes both a strong message about the importance of abstinence and also information about contraception.

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School-Based Health Services

NASBE reports that school-based and school-linked health centers have been beneficial to both the social and educational development of young people. States and communities around the nation have touted the slogan, “Healthy Students Make Better Learners.” SBHCs are an important partner in our efforts to improve overall student health and academic success in New Mexico.

The New Mexico survey also showed that 65% of adults believe that school nurses and counselors should refer sexually active youth to family planning clinics. Parents of school-age children are evenly divided on whether or not contraceptives should be made available in schools.

Counseling and Mental Health Services

Teens need safe places to talk and people who can listen. In a series of six focus groups that NMTPC held around the State, teens told us that the opportunity to talk about sex honestly and openly with peers and adults was both rare and greatly appreciated. They expressed their need for counselors who are comfortable with the topic of sex and can help with their problems – not just schedule classes.

School/Business Partnerships

Teens who have high hopes for their future are less likely to become involved in a teen pregnancy. Schools can form partnerships with local agencies and businesses for the

purpose of designing ways to make the connection between academics and future employment for students. This combination can support a young person’s belief in a positive future.

Teacher Training

Teacher preparation is critical to the quality of all education. New Mexico teacher-training institutions must ensure that students receive adequate instruction on a wide range of human sexuality issues, including the latest information on teen pregnancy prevention. For teachers already in the field, staff development in this area must be continual and required. Because New Mexico has few opportunities for staff development on teen sexuality, it’s important that school administrators actively support and require teachers (and other appropriate personnel) to attend such offerings. All too often, teachers report being unable to get leave in order to attend continuing education events.

Service Learning

Service learning programs have been found to generate marked improvements in attendance rates, high school completion, and post-secondary attendance. In *Emerging Answers*, Dr. Kirby reports that service learning programs may have the strongest evidence of any intervention that they reduce teen pregnancy rates, at least during the time that youth are

Teens who have high hopes for their future are less likely to become involved in a teen pregnancy.

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participating in the program. School-based service-learning programs integrate organized community service experience into the existing curriculum.

Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Keeping pregnant and parenting teens in school is important because it increases the academic achievement of the young mother, reduces repeat pregnancy, and contributes to the health of the baby. These outcomes were confirmed in the report, *Future Voices II: Teen Parents & Their Children in New Mexico*. This publication summarizes the result of three years of data collection on all teen parent programs in the State. Contact the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition for more information.

Collaboration

The successful partnerships that currently exist between the State Department of Education, New Mexico Department of Health, and the Children Youth and Families Department should continue and expand in order to collaboratively address the teen pregnancy problem. State agencies must establish ongoing working relationships related to teen pregnancy issues. Including other community partners in collaborative efforts will make the most of our very limited resources.

Keeping pregnant and parenting teens in school is important because it increases the academic achievement of the young mother, reduces repeat pregnancy, and contributes to the health of the baby

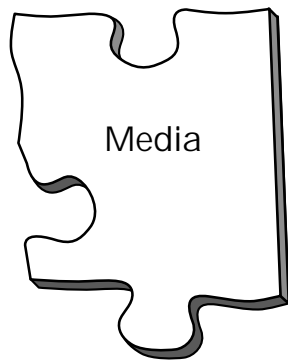
YRRS

The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition strongly urges all school districts to take part in the Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (YRRS) conducted by the State Department of Education and the New Mexico Department of Health. This survey assesses the health risk behaviors and resiliency factors of middle and high school students over time. It allows us to measure change and important trends among our students. The data generated for the YRRS is important to individual districts and to the entire State as we design effective programs and activities.

Resources

A Call to Action: What Schools Can Do To Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Remote Student Achievement, National Association of State Boards of Education

The Impact of Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood on Educational Achievement: A Blueprint for Education Policymakers' Involvement in Prevention Efforts, National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), December 2000.



Media

Media can help us address at least three of the primary indicators, or risk factors, for teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- Poverty

Media messages can successfully and creatively support school and academic success. They can also encourage young people and families to get help for problems such as drugs, alcohol, and family distress.

In the absence of effective sex education at home and school, television has become a major source of information for young people. The chances are good that you get a less than positive feeling when you think about the combination of teen pregnancy and the media. It certainly is true that media messages often glorify risky behavior and present sex in an unrealistic and consequence-free manner. But media have the potential to be as powerfully positive as it is negative; although, that will only happen with a great deal of effort on our part. Media can play a powerful role in teen pregnancy prevention, but we must teach them why and how to support our efforts. A good media message can generate awareness, motivate action, spur funding, and keep a community focused on the bottom line – reducing teen pregnancy.

For the most part, addressing mass media on a large-scale statewide level is not the job of local communities - the cost is probably too high. This needs to be addressed by larger entities like the New Mexico Departments of Health, the Children, Youth & Families Department and the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition. But there's still important work that can be done on the local level.

With your encouragement and persistence, local media can be a useful partner in your teen pregnancy prevention effort. Before you head off to your newspaper or radio station, take some time to develop a media plan that will ensure that your energy isn't wasted on hit-or-miss endeavors. Here are a few of the basics that need your consideration.

1. Decide what message you want to get out and the appropriate target audience.
2. Decide what role you want the media to play.
3. Get to know your local TV, newspaper, and radio people. Invite them to become members of your local teen pregnancy council (or whatever community group is undertaking this agenda). Convene a group of local media to discuss the pervasiveness of the "sex

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A good media message can generate awareness, motivate action, spur funding, and keep a community focused on the bottom line – reducing teen pregnancy.

without responsibility” message or some other relevant topic.

4. Educate the media about why teen pregnancy is such a serious problem. You can do this with a presentation or a packet of material.
5. Encourage them to keep teen pregnancy prevention issues up front by regularly giving them new stories. Once they know you, local reporters will come to you for a comment when national teen pregnancy stories break. Be prepared to take advantage of the opportunity to piggyback on these situations with news of your local activities, success stories, or just to repeat the message that you’re trying to get out.

Keeping the teen pregnancy issue in the public eye is important because it builds community awareness about the problem. Remember that we need to influence the attitudes of both adults and youth.

Finding a Strong Core Message

The most important step in teen pregnancy media work is finding a strong core message. It’s also one of the most difficult because this is a complex and often controversial subject that isn’t easily reduced to simple, one-dimensional sound bites.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has a great deal of experience to share with us in this area. They have developed messages targeting teens, parents, or other adults. Each message suggests a specific action, conveys an important idea, or encourages a particular point of view. They are based on two ideas that are at the heart of the entire National Campaign, they are:

- *Teen pregnancy is not “okay.”* Adolescence is for education and growing up, not pregnancy and parenthood. Children need adult parents, not parents who are children themselves.
- *There are only two ways to avoid pregnancy: either do not have sex at all, or use contraception very carefully. Teens must actively choose one or the other.* Public opinion overwhelmingly supports abstinence as the desired standard for teens still in school; there is also strong support for sexually active teens having access to contraception.

From these two basic premises, the National Campaign has created media messages such as the following.

- *(Teens)* Not everyone is “doing it.” It’s okay to delay, and many teens do just that.
- *(Parents and other adults)* Teens want to know what adults

Remember that we need to influence the attitudes of both adults and youth.

think about sex, love, and what the difference is. Take a position, be specific, and start early. Talk with teens about values, not just body parts. Talk to boys as well as girls.

- *(Teens)* Have a plan. Know what you are going to do “in the moment.”
- *(Boys)* Having a baby does not make you a man. Acting responsibly does.
- *(Girls)* You don’t have to have sex to keep a boyfriend.

Once you’ve chosen your core media message(s), you’re ready to go public. You can take it to radio, TV, or the press. Or you could also spread your message via billboards, book covers, fast food tray place mats, newspaper brown wrappers, pencils, etc. Consider collaborating with other community prevention projects and putting up a billboard or banner that says something like, “Deming (fill in your town) loves its kids! Please keep yourself safe from drugs and alcohol, violence, pregnancy and diseases.” Ask your local media to cosponsor the campaign.

Because of the powerful influence of media in today’s world, it’s essential for young people to become media literate. It’s one of the few ways that we can keep them from falling prey to the many unhealthy messages that are ubiquitous in the 21st century. The New Mexico Media Literacy Project provides excellent resources and training in this area. Contact them at 6500 Wyoming Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, 828-3129 or visit their web site at www.nmmlp.org

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is actively involved in working with the national mass media. Visit their web site to learn more about their efforts and get tips for working with the media. www.teenpregnancy.org

***B**ecause of the powerful influence of media in today’s world, it is essential for young people to become media literate.*



Faith Communities

Communities of faith know that teen pregnancy is a complicated problem. They also know that their work with young people must compete with messages from a wider culture often at odds with the ethics and morality of their religious traditions and beliefs. That's why it's so important for faith communities to get kids when they're young – and stay with them through their teen years. As teenagers yearn for spiritual guidance, faith communities are uniquely situated to minister to this need, and faith communities quite properly place questions about sex firmly within the context of religious values and moral traditions.”

Sister Mary Rose McGeady
President and CEO,
Covenant House International
Member, Task Force on Religion and
Public Values, National Campaign To
Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Faith communities can address all four indicators, or risk factors, for teen pregnancy.

- ✓ Early School Failure
- ✓ Early Behavioral Problems
- ✓ Dysfunctional/Distressed Family
- ✓ Poverty

Faith communities are in a unique position to address these risk factors within the daily expression of their religious tradition, whether practiced in a church, synagogue, meeting house, temple or mosque. Secular and religious groups have a shared interest in supporting strong families and the healthy development of youth. This naturally creates a mutual interest in teen pregnancy prevention and a foundation for collaboration.

Many religious institutions are already involved in their communities by providing services to families and youth and by ministering to the poor. Some faith communities also provide counseling that can address issues of family dysfunction and youth behavioral problems.

It's important to remember that anything that strengthens families or helps young people succeed in school also helps prevent teen pregnancy. Religious institutions commonly provide youth with opportunities for

community service. New research reaffirms that service learning programs demonstrate strong evidence of reducing teen pregnancy.

Preventing teen pregnancy is not just about biology. It involves complex issues of values, personal standards of behavior, parent-child relationships, morals, and beliefs. More research is showing that religious faith and a strong moral sense play vital roles in protecting teens from too-early sexual activity and teen pregnancy.

A recent national poll indicated:

- 8 of 10 teens said that religion is an important part of their lives, and about half say they attend religious services weekly.
- Teens said that morals, values, and/or religious beliefs affect their decision to have sex more than concerns about STDs or pregnancy, information about sex or attachment to their partners.
- 7 in 10 adults and teens believe that faith communities should be doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy.

*Faithful Nation:
What American Adults Think About
Faith, Morals, Religion, and Teen
Pregnancy, 2001, National Campaign to
Prevent Teen Pregnancy*

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Faith communities are strongly encouraged to become involved in the statewide New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition as well as local councils that address this issue. By doing so, you will educate yourself and determine how you can best participate in this important effort. This involvement will connect you to conferences and trainings that will keep you updated and aware of what's happening in New Mexico.

Being involved in teen pregnancy issues does not require faith communities to change positions on matters of sexuality or behavior – or get involved with specific activities that conflict with specific beliefs and values. Rather, the intent is to encourage the development of compatible activities that support the goal of preventing teen pregnancy and also suit the expression of faith by individual religions. Providing programs such as after-school activities, parent-child communication, youth development, tutoring, mentoring, reaching out to high-risk youth and families are all examples of promising approaches to teen pregnancy prevention that are appropriate for religious institutions. Faith communities don't have to agree with all of the coalition's positions, except the basic premise – that adolescence is best reserved for education and growing up, not pregnancy or parenthood.

Don't let disagreements over specific strategies or activities prevent collaboration with local or statewide teen pregnancy prevention organizations. Some faith communities only want to support the choice of abstinence for teens; others are comfortable addressing the contraceptive needs of sexually active youth. There's plenty of common ground on individual projects – and there's plenty of work to be done!

Support the parts of the agenda that you can. If you agree on the goal of reducing teen pregnancy, then there's a role for you. We are a diverse culture and our youth require multiple approaches. There is more than one way to effectively prevent teen pregnancy. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy suggests the following approach: unity of goal, diversity of means. We “agree to agree” on the goal of reducing teen pregnancy, but where necessary, we “agree to disagree” about exactly how to get there.

Many faith-based institutions *are* involved in providing sexuality education for youth. This can be useful since young people are often receptive to such education when it comes from their faith community. Sexuality education from the viewpoint of a faith community encourages young people to consider sexuality in the context of faith and spiritual values. Since these programs currently do not have

It's important to remember that anything that strengthens families or helps young people succeed in school also helps prevent teen pregnancy.

Religious institutions commonly provide youth with opportunities for community service. New research indicates that service learning programs demonstrate strong evidence of reducing teen pregnancy.

Continued on next page

evaluation data, it is difficult to determine their success. Adding an evaluation component to faith-based sexuality education is strongly encouraged, since it would add to the body of knowledge about what types of interventions are successful.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is extensively involved in working with faith-based issues. They have published reports and surveys and created a Task Force on Religion and Public Values. We strongly encourage you to visit their website and explore the resources available. Their brochure, *Nine Tips To Help Faith Leaders*, is largely reproduced at the end of this chapter. www.teenpregnancy.org

Another valuable resource for faith communities is the Search Institute. This organization is involved in promoting youth development from an “assets” approach. Visit their website for more information. [**www.search-institute.org**](http://www.search-institute.org)

Faith communities don't have to agree with all of the coalition's positions, except the basic premise – that adolescence is best reserved for education and growing up, not pregnancy or parenthood.

See next page

Nine Tips To Help Faith Leaders and their Communities Address Teen Pregnancy

1. Address the need teens have for spiritual fulfillment and help them find answers to the many challenging problems they face. It is during the teenage years that many young people first struggle with the enduring questions of human existence, and the intensity and urgency of these questions can be very powerful to them. Many teens hunger for a framework of values and faith that can help them make moral decisions and manage the everyday problems of living that can be so stressful in these transition years. They also want help in seeing beyond the present moment. Because faith communities are uniquely able to provide the spiritual guidance that many teenagers crave, they should embrace this responsibility with energy and commitment.

2. Encourage parents to talk with their children about sex and morality within the context of your faith traditions. Many parents are embarrassed and uncomfortable talking with their children about sex. This is not unusual, but it is unfortunate since parents are children's first and best teachers about values and moral expectations. A faith community is an ideal place for parents and children to learn how to talk with each other about these important topics. Consider sponsoring workshops for parents

about how to talk with their children about sensitive subjects, such as human sexuality, according to the children's age and maturity and within the context of your faith tradition. And help your parents set proper limits for their children's behavior.

3. Enlist adults in your faith community to help young people. Teenagers develop character and personal values through interacting with respected and empathetic adults. Sometimes faith leaders themselves are available to work directly with teenagers, but often they carry so many responsibilities that they need help from others. If this is the case, ask highly trusted and knowledgeable adults in your faith community to assist in the important work with teenagers. Whether the adults create an organized mentoring program or something more informal, be sure they understand teenagers and can talk about values and relationships within the context of your faith's principles.

4. Make sure the children and teenagers in your faith community understand what your faith tradition says about sex, love, and marriage in general and teen pregnancy, in particular. Use clear and unambiguous language. Young people need to know and understand

Continued on next page

where your faith tradition stands on matters of sexuality. Faith traditions can have a strong impact on helping teens avoid too-early sexual activity and pregnancy, but messages need to be clear, direct, and precise. Encourage open, honest, and frank discussions about the challenges — and choices — that young people face in their daily lives. Discussions about sex, love, and marriage within the context of religious faith should begin when children are young, rather than waiting until they're teens.

5. Learn about contemporary youth culture – what your young people are reading, listening to, watching, and doing. Understanding the world of teens makes communicating with and caring for them easier. The influence of the entertainment media, in particular, on youth culture is extraordinary. Know the music that young people enjoy. Watch the television shows they watch so you'll know which characters they may be trying to emulate. Take a look at the magazines they are reading. With such information in hand, you can better explore with teens how the cultural messages they receive agree with or differ from what is expected of them as members of your faith community.

6. Organize supervised group activities for teenagers in your faith community. Teenagers need things to

say “yes” to, especially when we are asking them to say “no” to too-early sexual activity and pregnancy. Encourage the parents and other adults in your faith community to organize and lead group activities with teens. All the activities that you sponsor for young people — from prayer circles to field trips — are excellent opportunities for fostering fellowship and supportive friendships. By creating a positive and spiritually-oriented peer culture, you can help teens make the right decisions about sex.

7. Reach out to teenagers who are not involved in any faith community. Though young people seek answers to spiritual questions, some are reluctant to find them in institutions of organized religion. And it is often the teens who are outside of faith communities and unattached to any positive group who are particularly likely to get in trouble. One dynamic youth minister in California reached out to neighborhood teens by encouraging them to structure their own youth program. He also moved his youth activities into a storefront center just a half-block from the church. A youth group of thirty teens that once met in the church basement now numbers in the hundreds.

8. Celebrate achievement and excellence in young people. By specifically supporting excellence and achievement of young people, faith

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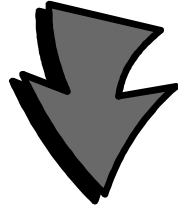
communities can help to create an environment for young people that reduces the risk of early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. For example, research has shown that early school failure and dropping out of school are closely associated with becoming a teen parent. By encouraging educational achievement, faith communities may be able to help persuade teenagers to stay in school. Organize tutoring, homework assistance, and opportunities for community service. Encourage or offer scholarships for college and vocational training.

Celebrate spiritual and non-academic achievement as well, like volunteer work or excellence in the arts. Consider recognition ceremonies during regular worship services or designate specific days each year to honor teenagers for their accomplishments in a wide range of areas. Give the teenagers in your faith community a place to shine no matter what their abilities or interests.

9. Reach out to other faith communities, neighborhood organizations, and institutions that work with young people. You don't have to go it alone. Working together, faith leaders can make a real difference in preventing teen pregnancy. Consider coordinating with fellow leaders to preach on the topic of teen pregnancy the same week. Or develop a particular prayer for all young people facing choices about sex and relationships. Look to clergy associations, ecumenical councils, and other local faith networks for support and collegiality in addressing this and other issues important to young people. And remember that other public and private institutions can be valuable partners in helping young people in your faith community — including schools, public health departments, YMCAs and YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, libraries, and recreation centers.

—Taken from *Nine Tips to Help Faith Leaders* by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. The full eight page brochure is available through their online store, www.resourcecatalog.org or visit the website at www.teenpregnancy.org

Start Here



Introduction

IMPORTANT INFORMATION about *Meeting the Challenge: How To Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community*

The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition (NMTPC) is pleased to provide you with this copy of *Meeting the Challenge: How To Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community*. It is our hope that this manual will support and assist you in your efforts to address teen pregnancy in your community and to meet your county's "Challenge 2005".

In February of 2000, the New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition and the New Mexico Department of Health issued a challenge to all of New Mexico to reduce births to teens by 20% by the year 2005. At that time, we distributed the publication *Challenge 2005: Reducing Teen Pregnancy in New Mexico*. This publication provided each county with information on what their reductions would need to be each year and for the full five years. It also offered a wealth of county data and program information. All this information was a good start, but it was only step one.

Meeting the Challenge: How to Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community is the next step. This manual will help you plan and implement community-wide teen

pregnancy prevention interventions. It offers a simple tool to assess your community's strengths and weaknesses and then provides an easy to follow plan for proceeding with promising approaches. *Meeting the Challenge* is structured around three concepts. These concepts are the foundation of everything discussed in this manual. They will be woven into all chapters.

1. The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle

This graphic demonstrates *who* the players need to be in order to successfully reduce teen pregnancy. When everyone works together in a collaborative manner, your

Continued on next page

T*his manual is structured around three concepts.*

- 1. The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Puzzle*
- 2. Promising Approaches*
- 3. The Primary Indicators of Teen Pregnancy*

interventions will fit together like puzzle pieces. It's our hope that you will find many uses for this puzzle as you introduce teen pregnancy information to your community. In the chapter on Where and How To Start, we suggest using the puzzle for a simple community assessment and to offer suggestions for the role that each entity can play.

2. Promising Approaches

We enter the 21st century with considerably more knowledge about what types of interventions are demonstrating success in reducing teen pregnancy. Chapter 4 provides a review of the latest information on promising approaches. You will also find suggestions based on these approaches in each chapter.

3. Primary Indicators (Precursors) of Teen Pregnancy

This manual continually addresses the needs of those teens who are most likely to become involved in teen pregnancy and parenting. Research demonstrates the most consistent indicators (precursors) to be:

- early school failure
- early behavioral problems
- distressed/dysfunctional families
- poverty.

This manual is designed to be a “breathing” resource. It will “inhale” new or updated information as it becomes available and “exhale” dated material. In with the new, out with the old. No, not by magic, we’re going to send it to you! In order to insure that you are always working with the best and latest information, The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition will provide you with updates and replacement pages twice a year. *Meeting the Challenge* will grow as our knowledge base increases. Some sections are still being written and will be mailed out in the fall of 2001. All you have to do is fill out the registration form in this section of the notebook to have your name added to the *Meeting the Challenge* mailing list.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. It’s important to us that this be a truly useful tool, so we want to hear from you. What should we add? What do you need more of? Please call, write, or email your ideas to NMTPC.

The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition is dedicated to helping you reduce teen pregnancy in your community. What can we do to help you? Do you need technical assistance? Let us know how to be your partner in this effort.

If we all work together, we *will* meet our 20% reduction of teen births by 2005!

This is a “breathing” resource. It will “inhale” new or updated information as it becomes available and “exhale” dated material.

N E W M E X I C O

TEEN PREGNANCY COALITION

P R E V E N T I O N • P A R E N T I N G

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Phone: (505) 254-8737 Fax: (505) 254-8741
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REGISTRATION FORM

Meeting the Challenge: How To Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community

Fill out this form to receive updates and replacement pages for *Meeting the Challenge: How To Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community*. Mail or fax to The New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition at the address above.

Name: _____

Title/Occupation: _____

Name of Organization: _____

Address: (use the address you want updates sent to) _____

_____ Zip _____

Phone: Home _____ Work _____

Email: _____

Fax: _____

We welcome your comments and suggestions about *Meeting the Challenge: How To Reduce Teen Pregnancy in Your Community*. Tell us what you think and need.

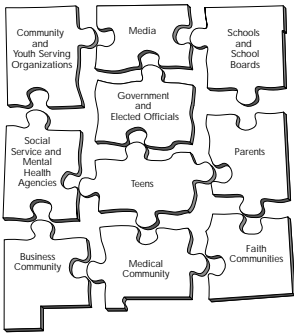



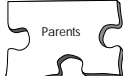


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Chapter #16 Media



Chapter #17 Faith Communities



Chapter #18 Evaluation

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Chapter #20 Resources

Handouts Pocket

A single puzzle piece is shown, oriented vertically. The piece has a complex shape with a curved top edge, a wavy right edge, and a stepped bottom edge. The text "Business Community" is centered within the piece. The puzzle piece is outlined in black and has a 3D effect with a grey shadow on its right and bottom edges.

Business
Community



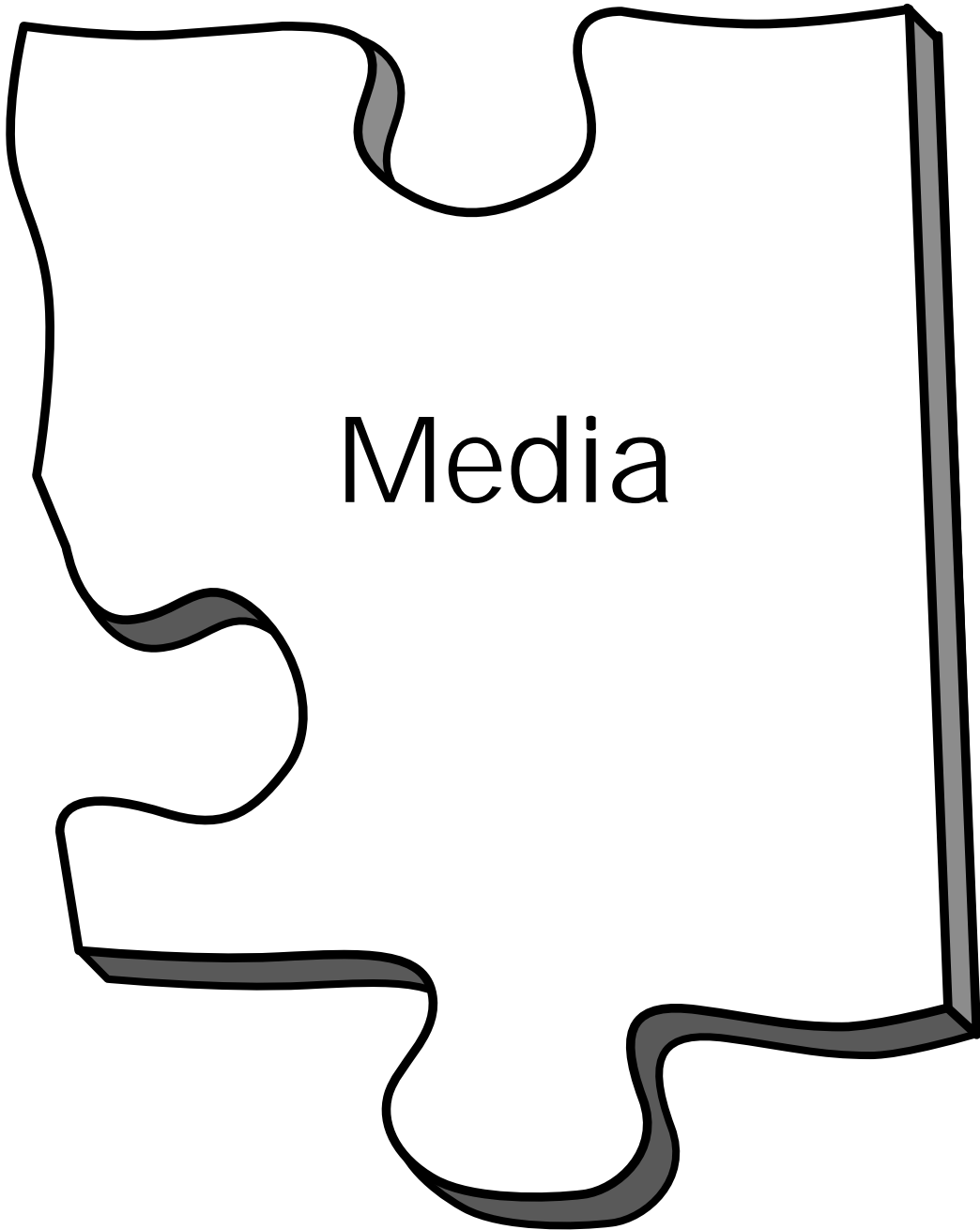
Community
and
Youth Serving
Organizations



Faith
Communities



Government
and
Elected Officials



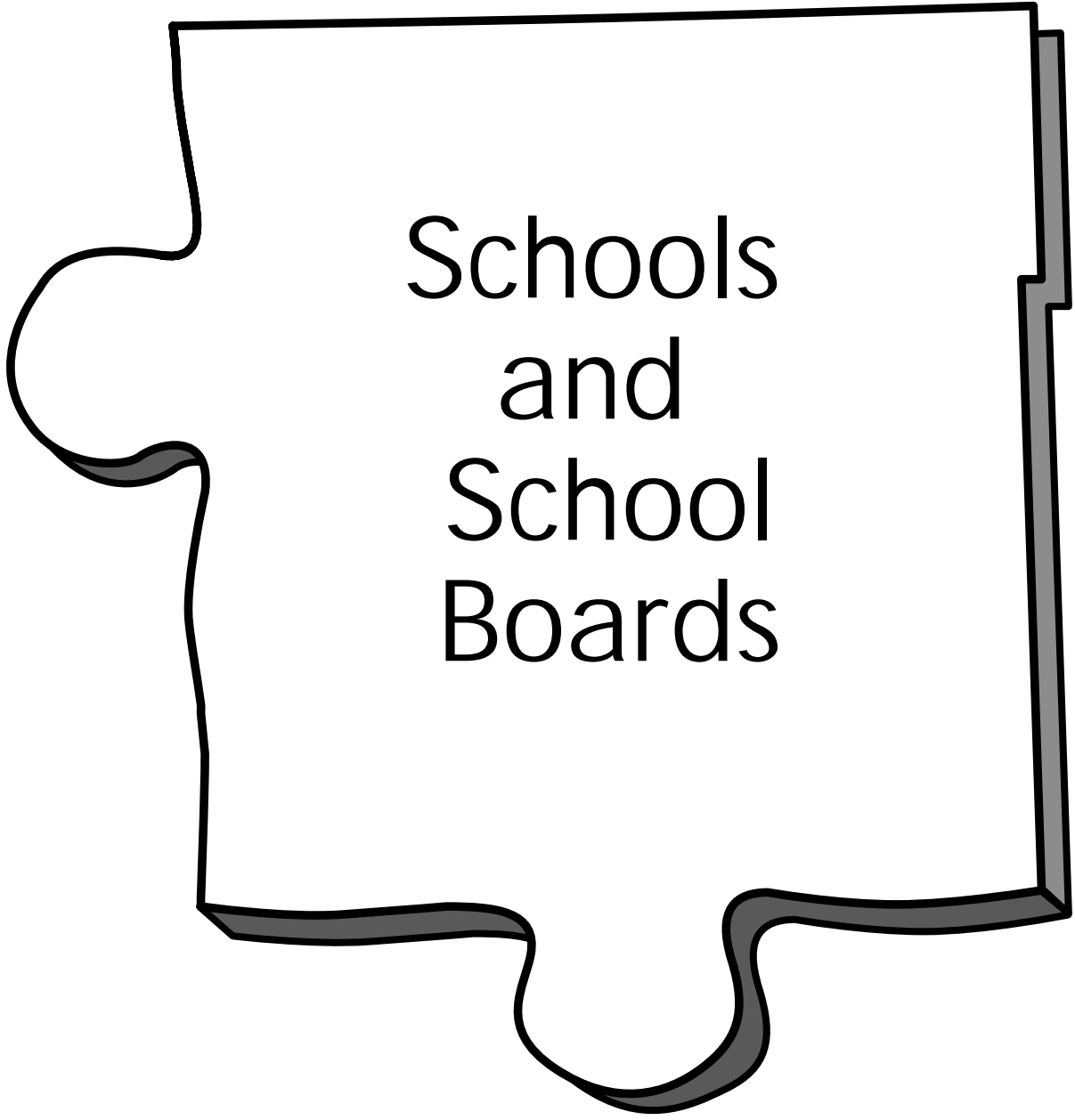
Media



Medical
Community



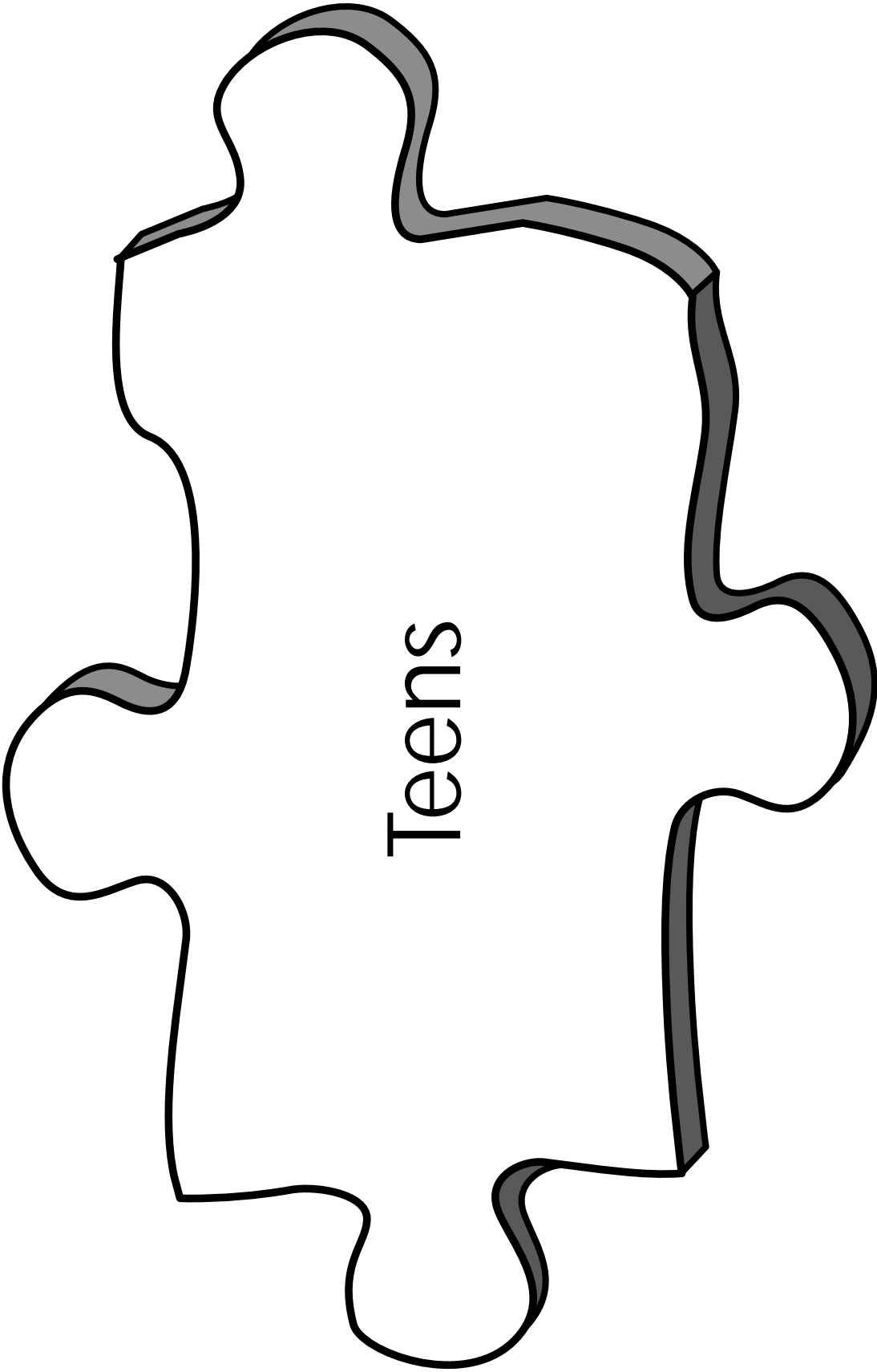
Parents



Schools
and
School
Boards

A single puzzle piece is centered on a white background. The puzzle piece is white with a black outline and a grey shadow on its right and bottom edges, giving it a 3D effect. Inside the puzzle piece, the text "Social Service and Mental Health Agencies" is written in a black, sans-serif font, centered and arranged in five lines.

Social
Service and
Mental
Health
Agencies



Teens