

RESEARCH BRIEF

What works to promote positive parenting among teen parents?

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Adolescent parenthood places teens and their children at higher risk for negative educational, relational, health, and economic outcomes. Effective programs can reduce these risks and lead to better outcomes for both parents and children. Scholars have begun to identify key elements that are found across effective family life education programs. Programs with these key elements tend to have better outcomes than programs that fail to include these components.

Elements of Effective Programs for Teen Parents

✓ Clear goals and objectives

- Define the purpose and the intended impact of a program and give tangible next steps and benchmarks for which to aim.
 - *For instance, a program that sees improving parent-child relationships as an intermediate step in reducing child abuse and neglect might identify creating opportunities for parents to have in-class interaction time with their child as an effective action they can take to reach their long-term goal.*

✓ Linked to theory and research

- Build programming around established knowledge and research related to teen parenting.
 - *Parenting research points to the importance of promoting a high quality parent-child relationship, which can be effectively supported by 1) teaching parents emotional communication skills and 2) teaching parents how to interact positively and often with their child.*

✓ Appropriate dosage and intensity

- Provide participants with enough classes and contact time to fully convey and practice the content.
 - *More is better in the case of teen parenting programs. Programs lasting at least four months to a year have time to build trusting relationships and offer sufficient practice and learning time.*

✓ **Embrace complexity**

- Incorporate support from multiple sources, and consider multiple influences on participants' lives.
 - *Include multiple members of teen mothers' support networks, such as grandmothers, fathers, and peers, and meet mothers' needs in the school environment.*

✓ **Use a variety of learning approaches**

- Active learning has been found to be an effective practice across educational settings.
 - *Developmental information is important, but actually practicing the skills of parenthood through interactions with their child has the biggest effect on parenting behaviors over time.*

✓ **Developmentally appropriate**

- Programs for teen parents need to address the dual development of teens and of their babies.
 - *Due to the developing brains of adolescents, parenting programs for teens need to incorporate additional opportunities to practice emotional skills, address the stressors of adolescence, and utilize best practices in teaching teens.*

TIPS FOR TEACHING TEEN PARENTS

1. *Parents need practice. Make time for teens to interact with their baby as you watch so you can give your feedback on their strengths.*
2. *Help parents learn how to read and share emotions. They'll be more sensitive with their baby.*
3. *Don't short-change your program! Provide at least 1 year of programming.*
4. *Include more than mothers. Babies' grandmothers, fathers, and mothers' friends impact successful parenting.*
5. *Simplify attendance by having program and childcare at school.*
6. *Build peer support by holding group-based activities.*
7. *Do more than lecture. Put developmental and parenting knowledge into practice with parent-child activities.*
8. *Remember that teens are still growing. Teach to their current brain and social-emotional development.*

Most programs take time to develop and need to be constantly revised and adjusted to work most effectively. Compare effective elements with current programming to identify areas of strength or needed improvement. Including activities related to these elements of effective programs for adolescent parents can boost the value and positive outcomes of programs.

WHAT WORKS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENTING AMONG TEEN PARENTS?

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