

There's Nothing Puzzling About Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Get the Word Out

Stay Close to Your Teen

Focus on What's Right with Teens Not What's Wrong

Mobilize Teens

Make Good Health a Priority

Provide Safe Places to Hang Out with Friends

It's time to change the conversation.

DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Keep Track of the Facts

STAY CLOSE TO YOUR TEEN

In boxing, they call it the one-two punch and it can pack quite a wallop. Parents and teens working together on prevention can deliver the same kind of blow to teen pregnancy rates.

If you're a parent, talk to your child about love, sex, values, and relationships. Your child wants to know what you think about these important topics. And don't let it be a one-time deal either. Instead, the conversation should be an ongoing dialogue that starts early and keeps going. District residents believe this approach works. In fact 89 percent of those polled in a recent telephone survey felt that parents should "initiate discussions with their children about sex." They were also in favor, by 95 percent, of creating programs to teach parents how to talk to their children.¹ Let your child know how you feel about abstinence and don't be afraid to talk about birth control as well. In DC, nearly 90 percent of residents are in favor of this *abstinence-plus* approach.

When you share your values with your child – as well as much needed factual information – you may find the next time they have questions, they will turn to you for answers, rather than to their peers. Close, caring relationships with parents and other trustworthy, reliable adults can help prevent teen pregnancy.

MOBILIZE TEENS

Life in DC can be hard for kids. More than half of African American teens surveyed, almost half of Latino teens and, 3 in 10 white teens know a teen parent or a pregnant teen.² Nevertheless, teen pregnancy rates in the District of Columbia have made dramatic declines in the last decade. These declines mirror trends throughout the country driven by two important changes in teen behavior:³ 1) more teens are postponing sex until they are adults and 2) sexually active teens are using contraception more effectively and consistently.

For teens, pregnancy is not a distant or abstract concept. It is very real and they see how it disrupts the lives of their friends. Part of mobilizing teenagers to become more involved in prevention includes providing them with opportunities to speak out on what motivates them to avoid pregnancy in the first place. Teens listen to other teens, and they can be their own best advocates by talking to their peers about prevention, testifying at city council hearings, speaking at PTA or faculty meetings, writing letters to the editor, and organizing school assemblies. Teens can be mentors to younger teens. Many teen parents lament the fact that no one ever told them how hard parenting could be. If you know teen parents, enlist their help in talking about their experiences to younger children so they will understand why parenting should wait. Teens are the experts on what is happening in their lives. Listen to them.

¹ DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2000). *Common Sense: Teens and adults speak out about teen pregnancy in the District of Columbia*. Washington, DC: Author.

² *ibid.*

³ Flanigan, C. (2001). *What's behind the good news: The decline in teen pregnancy rates during the 1990s*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.



GET THE WORD OUT

There are only two ways to prevent pregnancy. Don't have sex or if you do, use contraception carefully and consistently. If you want the facts about teen pregnancy prevention, check out our website, www.teenpregnancydc.org, and pass on what you learn.

You don't have to be a great orator, just talk to your children and friends about what an important issue teen pregnancy is in the District. Get the word out to your church, workplace, neighborhood school, social, civic, or community organization that we can all make a difference and help prevent teen pregnancy.

Nine out of ten DC residents surveyed supported using TV, radio and other media outlets "to encourage teens to make healthy responsible decisions about sex." Let your favorite media outlet know that you want their help in reducing DC's teen pregnancy rate.



KEEP TRACK OF THE FACTS

"Dragnet" television show detective Sgt. Friday had the right idea. Sometimes "just the facts" are all you need to motivate people and get them involved. DC teens rank pregnancy second only to violence as one of the most important problems in their lives.¹ And with good reason. According to the most current data, the rate of pregnancy in the District of Columbia is 122.7 per thousand teens ages 15-19.⁴ This means about one in eight teen girls became pregnant in the District, substantially higher than the national rate of one in ten.

Because of these high rates, District residents are united across lines of age and race about how to prevent teen pregnancy. They strongly support providing positive activities for teens; help for parents in educating and supporting their children; readily available contraceptive information and services; media support of teen pregnancy prevention efforts; and age-appropriate sexuality education.



FOCUS ON WHAT'S RIGHT WITH TEENS NOT WHAT'S WRONG

Parents and other adults: Keep the lines of communication with teens open. That may sound trite, but it is so true. Talk to teens in your life about their dreams. Discuss the future with them, listen to their summer plans, and find out about school, hobbies, friends, and extracurricular activities. Acknowledge that there may be bumps in the road, even a few detours, but teen pregnancy does not have to be one of them.

Find out what he or she wants to do, see, and become. Conversations with a reliable adult about relationships, careers, employment, and college can help teens figure out how to prepare themselves for the future.

Praise for doing well goes a long way toward helping teens succeed, as does praise for just trying and doing one's best. And guess what? Children who are successful in school from an early age are less likely to become teen parents.

⁴Statistical Note: Reported Pregnancy Rates in the District of Columbia, 1994-1998. Department of Health, DC State Center for Health Statistics August 2000.



MAKE GOOD HEALTH A PRIORITY

Remember the last time you visited a doctor who made you wait forever, or who was unresponsive to your questions and concerns? If that was hard for you to handle, imagine what it's like for a teen.

Be sure your teen has a health care provider who listens and makes him or her feel comfortable. Boys *and* girls need teen friendly health care. Make sure your teen has a copy of your health insurance card and knows how to make appointments. Many chronic health problems develop because young people don't attend to minor problems early on.

At a Teen Town Hall meeting sponsored by DC Campaign and The Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington, one teen spoke out strongly for school health services. "...Some people don't know where to go or who to talk to. If it's in the school, it'll help them out..."

In the District of Columbia, the law allows teens to get contraception, prenatal care, treatment for STD/HIV, alcohol and/or drug abuse, outpatient mental health services, general medical health services, abortion services, medical care for a child, and place a child for adoption,⁵ but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be involved. Let your teen know you value good health and most of all you understand the need for prevention.



PROVIDE SAFE PLACES TO HANG OUT WITH FRIENDS

The role of community organizations that offer after school activities and opportunities to expand life skills is critical. National research findings suggest that programs focusing on education, employment, and life options for young people influence the choices teens make about their futures.

Out of school hours for teens without adult supervision are prime time for high-risk behavior.⁶ For many teens, the stresses of economic disadvantage and criminal activity in their neighborhoods call for safe havens in the afternoon and evenings. Teens clearly ask for "cool" places with caring and trustworthy adults, places that offer positive activities that help them prepare for adulthood, from sports to clubs to art and music opportunities to tutoring to computer training to community services and paid internships. They want to be involved in creating and managing such places, but they need adults to make that happen.

⁵The Alan Guttmacher Institute. (2000). *Minors and the right to consent to health care*. New York: Author.

⁶*A Matter of Time*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, March 1993.



JOIN DC CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

The mission of DC Campaign is to cut the teen pregnancy rate by 50 percent by 2005 by actively promoting a new conversation in the District about the factors that protect teens from pregnancy.

DC Campaign is based on principles of positive youth development that build on the strengths of young people while helping them acquire the skills, information, and competence they need for adulthood. This model of comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention works in five specific areas: (1) mobilizing teens; (2) drawing attention to teen pregnancy prevention; (3) engaging neighborhoods; (4) supporting local programs; and (5) keeping track of the facts.

These fields of action are based on research that suggests teen pregnancy is less likely when boys and girls, regardless of income or race,⁷ feel strongly connected to their parents or other caring adults; experience success in school from an early age; have a sense of belonging; are confident that they have safe places to learn and play and interact with their peers; have easy access to teen-friendly health care services including family planning information; and believe that they can reach economic security if they work for it.

Public opinion is a major influence for policy makers. When parents and teens all over the city work to prevent teen pregnancy, elected and appointed officials will take notice. But parents and teens can't do it alone. It will take every segment of the city—business leaders, the faith community, parents and teens, media leaders, schools, government officials, social service and community service agencies as well as private citizens to reduce the teen pregnancy rates in the District.

⁷Blum R.W., Beuhring T., Rinehart P.M. (2000). *Protecting teens: Beyond race, income and family structure*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Adolescent Health.

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