

## **For Parents of Teen Parents**

### *How to Cope if Your Teen is Pregnant*

Joanne Barker

Every year, about one million teenagers get pregnant.

If your daughter is one of these young women, you may feel angry, disappointed, afraid, and embarrassed. According to Peggy Waters, R.N.C., maternal child health case manager in Massachusetts, many parents think it's their fault when their teenage daughter gets pregnant. "They take it as a sign that they've failed," she says. "But that isn't true."

Debra Hobbins-Garbett, M.S.N., A.P.R.N., agrees. Hobbins-Garbett, a faculty member at Brigham Young University, provides prenatal care to girls through the Teen Mother & Child Program at the University of Utah. She says that even teenage girls from stable, loving homes get pregnant.

Parents often struggle to understand why their daughter has gotten pregnant. Many teens think it can't happen to them. Some may believe they are adult enough to be a parent. Whatever the reason, it's easier for all if you look for ways to make the best of the situation. That's what Linda and her husband, Daniel,\* did. After many heart-to-heart talks, they came to understand that Krista's pregnancy didn't mean she couldn't have a good life. They were upset, but they wanted to be supportive.

"We told her, 'We'll help you. But we want you to finish high school,'" says Linda. She and Daniel spoke with the parents of Craig,\* the baby's father. They asked that Craig speak up for Krista if other kids made fun of her at school. Their talks paid off, and Krista finished high school early.

Hobbins-Garbett recommends that parents try not to get angry. "Almost every teenager who gets pregnant knows that her parents are disappointed," she says. "But your daughter is probably scared and wants your help." Waters says that teenagers with supportive parents do better than those whose parents aren't. They are more likely to finish high school and follow through on plans for higher education. They are also less likely to get pregnant again until they've had a chance to grow up more.

Here are things you can do:

- Consider family counseling. Your daughter has some hard decisions to make. You may have strong feelings about what she should do. A third party can help you understand each other.
- Tell your daughter that she can talk with you and you'll listen.
- Tell your daughter you love her.
- Help her finish high school.
- Tell her you are proud of her.
- Talk with her about her goals, and help her reach them.

- If your daughter agrees, go with her to prenatal checkups and childbirth classes. Many parents are birth coaches for their daughter.

You may wish the situation were different. But this doesn't have to ruin your life or your daughter's life. Be supportive. Your daughter needs you now more than ever.

*\* Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

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