

Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Transitional Age Youth

Adolescence is a time for youth experiencing hormonal changes, exploring relationships, and developing sexual identity. This is also a time for some youth where an untimely or unintended pregnancy occurs. Statistically, youth in foster care are more likely to become youth parents. It is important that pregnant/parenting youth receive adequate social, emotional, medical, and academic support for the parents and baby's future. Pregnant/parenting youth that are in DCF care face additional challenges of increased placement instability, increased likelihood of experiencing homelessness or poverty and even greater strain on their ability to have normal adolescent experiences (Taylor, 2013). There is hope though that strong collaboration between the youth's providers can assist in developing effective, comprehensive supports to enhance their protective factors.

In a 2020 report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation on Improving the Well-Being of Young Parents, best practice highlights for working with pregnant/young parents are outlined:

- Provide support, education and resources to equip young people to navigate contraceptive and sexuality and sexual relationships. Encourage supportive, candid, judgment-free conversations about safe sex and sexual identity that can strengthen the brain's decision-making pathways.
- Provide information and access to reproductive health resources and services. Encourage young people to ask questions about safe sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. Be prepared to address and ask questions such as: What is protected sex? Where is the closest clinic? How can you get there? What identification do you need? Who needs to know? What rumors are young people hearing about sex and STDs?
- Emphasize the importance of healthy, caring relationships. Provide training and information to foster parents. Encourage them to get to know friends of children in their care and provide age appropriate supervision.
- Family planning requires thinking about the future. Start conversations that help a young parent plan for college, career goals and managing multiple interests.
- Accept and respect young people's sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Ask their preferred pronouns and use those pronouns when referring to the young person.
- Provide opportunities for peer support. It is crucial to understand that young people who are parenting and their children are experiencing rapid periods of brain development at the same time.
- Strengthen young parents as the primary nurturer. Talk with young people about their questions and concerns about parenting.
- Don't assume that because they are pregnant or parenting that they are knowledgeable about sex and sexuality.
- Help young parents continue to make progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals.

- Continue to nurture their aspirations and meet their needs for new challenges and opportunities that support healthy brain development, at the same time they focus on their own children.
- Help young parents strengthen their relationships with each other and work together in caring for their children.
- Help both parents and children maintain good health and well-being.
- Make sure young parents can access and receive prenatal care and have access to well-baby medical visits and high-quality childcare.

Additional DCF and Federal Support: at the federal level, the US Department of Health and Human Services has provided funding to support pregnant and parenting youth and pregnancy prevention for youth in out of home care. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood. DCF will also assist through the parent program. Funding for youth to be responsible parents is provided including,

- Supports include enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through DSS.
- Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) which includes licensed day care so that the youth can attend high school; medical coverage and funding payments for the minor children

For youth 18 years old and older who are in CHAP, CHEER or SWEPT programs and are custodial parent of a minor child can receive further financial assistance for living expenses, expenses for the minor child and towards day care.

DCF youth also have access to a full array of reproductive health services. Please contact the Health and Wellness team for more information on appropriate supports.

Fatherhood: fathers play an important role in the lives of their child(ren). Often though, young fathers have not been included or actively sought to be a positive part of their child(ren) development. Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Teams (FELTs) are groups of dedicated professionals committed to increasing the overall engagement of fathers and their families within all systems and communities throughout Connecticut. Each region of DCF has a FELT that connects to the statewide FELT system.

A collaborative effort is also focused on engagement of incarcerated parents and their children. State agencies, community partners and advocates have made significant efforts in implementing programs to connect incarcerated parents with their children. This includes reading and art programs; renovating visitation areas within certain DOC facilities to be child friendly; increasing visits and phone calls and referring incarcerated parents leaving DOC to community agencies skilled in supporting these families.

References:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (July 7, 2020). Improving the Well-Being of Young Parents.
Retrieved at <https://www.aecf.org/blog/improving-the-well-being-of-young-parents/>

DCF Parenting Support Page:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Parenting-Support-Services/Home>

Circle of Security: Parenting Support & Education Program (DCF Referenced)

<https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/> (General)

<https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/resources-for-parents/> (For Parents)

Parenting Training Program (DCF Referenced)

<https://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home/> (Professional)

<https://www.triplep-parenting.com/us/triple-p/> (Site for Parents)

<http://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Practice-Guide-for-Connecticut-DCF-Caseworkers.pdf>

<https://www.fatherhood.gov/>

<https://www.fatherhood.org/>

Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative:

<https://portal.ct.gov/fatherhood>