

## Adolescent Parents

Youth in foster care have high rates of early parenthood and face many personal and parenting challenges. A Chapin Hall study of the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) found high rates of child maltreatment investigations and out-of-home care placements among children born to young parents in foster care. The study measured child maltreatment investigations, indicated reports, and out-of-home care placements from birth to age five among 2,487 children born to youth in foster care between 2000 and 2008. What they found:

Before their fifth birthday:

- 39% of the children were the subject of at least one CPS investigation
- 17% of the children had at least one indicated child maltreatment report
- 11% of the children were placed in out-of-home care.

The vast majority of investigations and indicated reports involved child neglect.

The risk of child welfare services involvement was higher for children whose:

- Parents were still in foster care
- Parents were younger when they were born
- Mothers (rather than fathers) were in foster care
- Parents had a history of placement instability
- Parents had been in foster care for a shorter rather than longer periods of time

What it means:

- Children born to youth in foster care have higher rates of child welfare services involvement than the children of adolescent parents in the general population. One way to reduce the rate of child welfare services involvement among the children of youth in foster care is to help young people in foster care delay becoming parents.
- Another is for child welfare agencies to ensure that young parents in foster care have access to the services and supports they need. This could include linking pregnant and parenting youth in foster care to evidence-based home visiting programs.

### Children of Young Parents in Care at Higher Risk of Child Welfare Involvement – Chapin Hall

Each year, more than a half-million U.S. girls in their teens or younger become pregnant. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) explains how to help teens get prompt medical care and basic, accurate information about all their options—while respecting everyone's personal, spiritual, and cultural perspectives

"*Options Counseling for the Pregnant Adolescent Patient*,"

Facts about teen parents:

- Less than 40% of teenage girls who have a child before age 18 earn a high school diploma by age 22.
- Nearly 2/3 of teenage mothers receive public assistance, and their chances of living in poverty increase as they enter adulthood. Most teen moms receive no child support from their child's father.
- The challenges of teen parenting may last through generations. Children of teen mothers are more likely to perform poorly in school, repeat a grade, or drop out. The daughters of teen mothers are more likely to repeat the cycle and become teen mothers themselves.

It is important that pregnant/parenting youth receive adequate social and emotional, medical, and academic support for the parents and baby's future. Pregnant/parenting youth that are in care, face additional challenges of increase placement instability, increase likelihood of experiencing homelessness or poverty and even greater strain on their ability to have normal adolescent experiences.

There is hope though that strong collaboration between their placement provider (foster care, relatives, congregate care...) and individual/community service providers, these young people can obtain effective, comprehensive supports to enhance their protective factors.

Statistically, youth in foster care are more likely to become youth parents and without support their children are apt to enter foster care. However, there is professional support provided for youth parents by child welfare professionals. Here are some points to utilize when working with pregnant/young parents:

- 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.

- Ask young people what they need.
- 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.
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[Resources to Help Young Parents Thrive - The Annie E. Casey Foundation \(aecf.org\)](http://www.aecf.org)

**The essential role of fathers** - fathers have a critical role to play in children's physical, emotional, and social development and are essential partners in the prevention of maltreatment and achievement of timely permanence. Studies have highlighted myriad benefits of father involvement for child safety and well-being:

- Ameliorate circumstances that led to abuse
- Higher likelihood of a reunification outcome
- Discharge from foster care more quickly
- Lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations

Strengthening father engagement across the child welfare system is very important for the wellbeing of young parenting families.

[Engaging fathers prevention – Casey Family Programs](#)

Additional Information & Links:

[Effective Birth Control for Sexually Active Teens](#)

[The Adolescent's Right to Confidential Care When Considering Abortion \(AAP Policy Statement\)](#)

[Contraception for Adolescents \(AAP Policy Statement\)](#)

[Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents \(AAP Clinical Report\)](#)

Planned Parenthood

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Father's Toolkit

Playing with Children

Advice to Fathers Who Are Out of the Home

Ten Ways to Be a Better Dad

Caring for New Moms

It's a Matter of Pride: Being a Good Role Model

Re-Connecting with Your Kids After A Long Absence

Tips from a Father in Prison

Practical Tips for Knowing Your Child: Nontrivial Questions

16 Things Fathers Can Do to Support Their Pregnant Partners

Troubleshooter's Guide to Crying Babies

20 Long Distance Activities for Dads at a Distance

Disciplining Children Appropriately