

Teen Pregnancy

Did you know it could happen to you? Do you know someone it happened to? Teen pregnancy has been declining over the past decade but Mississippi is still ranked number one in the United States. Mississippi currently has the highest rate of teen pregnancies in the nation. What does this mean to you? It means higher taxes, increased poverty levels, fewer high school graduates and less state revenue.

Pregnant teens are at a higher risk of the baby having a birth defect, low birth weight, premature delivery and/or miscarriage. Unplanned/teen pregnancies put stress on the family unit and are a financial burden. Today, young fathers are equally responsible for the well-being of the child as are young mothers. A baby means 6-8 diaper changes a day, no time to spend with friends, late night feedings, illnesses, lack of sleep, cost of providing for a family and maintaining a



job and school. It's very difficult. Futures for young parents are either postponed or cut short. Teens, ask yourselves, do you really want to bring a child into the world under these conditions? It's best to wait until you are married and prepared to make that decision with your partner.

Teen pregnancy, casual sex and risky behavior are all portrayed as normal in today's social media but they're anything but normal in reality. The average cost of a child in the first year of its life is \$10,158.00. That is an enormous financial burden for anyone to carry during their teenage years. The social media doesn't address the negative aspects of risky behavior or tell you everything comes with a price. It's glamorizes these behaviors as though nothing has to change. The truth is everything changes, from your relationship with your friends to your relationship with your parents. You are not only responsible for a child's life; you are bound to the mother/father of the child and will always have to

accommodate that person in your life and the life of your child. Every birthday, holiday, whatever career/job you pursue, whether you move to another state, these things will affect other people. You will have to consider them in your future decisions. Your future is no longer your own.

KNOW THE FACTS

Three out of ten teenage girls in the United States get pregnant at least once before age 20 - that amounts to 745,000 teen pregnancies each year.

The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world - twice as high as in England and Canada and eight times as high as in the Netherlands and Japan.

Almost 50% of teens have never considered how pregnancy would affect their lives.

Parenthood is the leading reason why teen girls drop out of school. Less than half of teen mothers ever graduate from high school and fewer than two percent earn a college degree by age 30.

Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50% more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.

Pregnant teens are far less likely to receive timely and consistent prenatal care than those who get pregnant at a later age. The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birth weight and are two times more likely to suffer abuse or neglect compared to children of older mothers. Teen mothers are also more likely to smoke during pregnancy, and often teen mothers are not at adequate pre-pregnancy weight and/or do not gain the appropriate amount of weight while pregnant.

Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor. More than half of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager.

Teen mothers are likely to have a second birth relatively soon. About one fourth of teenage mothers have a second child within 24 months of the first birth which can further impede their ability to finish school or keep a job and to escape poverty.

Eight out of ten fathers don't marry the mother of their child. These absent fathers pay less than \$800 annually for child support, often because they are poor themselves. Children who live apart from their fathers are also five times more likely to be poor than children with both parents at home.

The daughters of young teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

The sons of teen mothers are twice as likely to end up in prison.

HAVE A PLAN!

What can we do to lower the number of teenage pregnancies in Mississippi? Communication, education, active listening and get involved. There are lots of other things teens can do together other than have sex. Teens talk to your parents. Parents listen to your teens and talk to them. Support one another and the choice to abstain from having sex. It's the only 100% guarantee against getting pregnant and having an STD. Think about your future and what you have planned for yourself. How does a baby and a family factor into that plan while you're still a teenager?



GET INVOLVED



Be an active parent, listen to your teen. Be an active teen, talk to your parents. Tell your friends it's ok to wait. Think about your future and your future family. Have a plan and stick to it. Don't put yourself in a situation that can compromise your plan. Surround yourself with motivated positive people who share your feelings. Get involved in organizations devoted to preventing teen pregnancy. They are affiliated with churches, synagogues, schools, independent clubs, nonprofit organizations, health centers, and reproductive health organizations. Contact your local school board, faith leaders, youth groups and others who are concerned about young people. Get other people involved and make a change. Improvement requires involvement.