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MY TEENAGE DAUGHTER IS PREGNANT!



1. What to do when they first tell you?

The normal reaction is to explode when faced with a teenage pregnancy. Most people think it is because parents are angry about the decisions made; this is only a small part. The true core of the feeling is fear for one's child and the future that may be much altered. This is expressed in anger at times.

A child who is pregnant though is even more scared than a parent, it is happening to them after all. So at this stage they have taken a great leap of faith that they can get help from a parent in a situation where they will feel completely overwhelmed. They are about to get judged by everyone they know and themselves so it really does not help to have a parent judge them as well. What they need is support.

Parents feelings of anger and fear are not to be belittled though, they are just as important. They should though be directed at a close friend, partner or therapist who can help a parent work through their own feelings of the pregnancy without further burdening their child.

2. How can you support your pregnant teen?

Teenage years are already a very difficult time in anyone's life. When a pregnancy is added to all the stressors already present at this stage of development there is a high risk that a child may not be able to cope. These years set the building blocks for a child's future and if gotten wrong could prevent them from achieving their full potential. It is thus very important to assist as much as possible to ensure that they are able to achieve their full potential.

Emotional support is one of the most important factors related to support. While society has come a long way in prejudice tendencies there is still stigma around teenage pregnancy. They will face criticism and a lot of self-doubt which can be combated with emotional support from friends and family.

Financial support is also important as the cost of having a child can be very high. Proper medical care and funds for shelter and good nutritional food are very important to the child and baby's health. A teenager is not financially independent and so cannot afford the cost that come with a pregnancy unaided or without dropping out of school to find work.

3. Should you discuss all the options (adoption, foster care and abortion) with them?

This is one decision that you cannot undo and it will affect the rest of the teenager's life as well as their family and support systems that will help them through it. It should not be taken lightly and should not be rushed.

Knowledge is key at this point, a teenager and the family should look at all options gathering the information they need. This should be done with professionals though and not just on friends opinions. Go to your GP/local hospital Nurse and discuss what abortion is and what the procedure entails. Visit adoption agencies that you could possibly use and ask them to explain the process. Speak to family who would be assisting you if you keep the child, what are they willing to do to help?

With this information one can make an informed decision as they will have to live with this decision for the rest of their life. At this point I would recommend that a social worker/therapist be sought and the teenager and family sit down together. A therapist

can mediate the different options without bias and get all parties to consider opinions alternative to their views. They are also trained to contain emotions that come with such a high consequence decision.

4. Dropping out of school?

It is vitally important for a child to finish their schooling as it provides the key to a better future and the fulfilment of their full potential. In the long run it also provides a better economic standpoint from which to support a child and build a future.

Parents are very important in terms of the ability and willingness of a teenager to complete schooling. Some parents may feel shame and hide their child preventing them from getting schooling. Ironically they are denying them a chance at something which in the long run will help provide for the teenager and child. Parents also provide the financial support to keep a teenager in school. It is impossible to raise a child and go to school when there is no money for food or nappies, at this point a teen will look for work instead of completing their schooling.

5. How much should a parent step in to help?

It is very important that a teen still develops socially and has the time to also relax and recharge. A happy parent is a good parent and one who has the energy to provide for their child's needs.

The child is the teen's responsibility though. The teens parents did not choose to have to raise another child and should not have to, but they can assist. This assistance needs to come with boundaries though to prevent frustration from the teenager and parents. If they are going to look after the child then they need to agree on a set amount of time they are willing to do this. If they are providing financial support, what are they willing to pay for and what not?

If a child is in school this may also change depending on the time of year. Exam time grandparents may want to help out more to give a teenager more time to focus on work. In holiday time grandparents may want to take a step back as the teen has more free time to look after and bond with their child.

6. Aftercare

Whatever decision is made it is not an easy one and will take an emotional toll on the teen. It is vitally important that when a decision is made that they sit down with family and support structures in their lives or a social worker/therapist if able. This is in order to deal with the emotional consequences of say an abortion or to put a concrete plan together of how to support the teen if they choose to have the child.

I have adults who come to my practice that are still scared by an abortion they had because once done it was swept under the rug and never spoken of again instead of dealt with.