


A stylized green icon of a house with a gabled roof and a chimney, positioned centrally above the text.

CLOSE TO HOME

DEALING WITH
teenage
pregnancy

A large, stylized, light-colored graphic of a person or figure, possibly representing a pregnant woman, set against a dark green background. The figure is composed of thick, brush-like strokes.

Julia's story

Julia is a teen with hopes and dreams like her peers. She is a joy to her family and they are active at their local church. While she was in eighth grade, she became friends with a boy from high school, and they began dating. After about a year they became sexually active but were very careful using condoms each time they had sexual intercourse. This was not something Julia talked about with her parents.

It was a shock to Julia when she missed her period not only once, but twice. She bought a home pregnancy test and discovered her worst fear: she was pregnant. She went to her boyfriend and told him the news. He immediately broke up with her and disappeared from her life—avoiding her if they ever were in sight of each other at school.

Julia turned inward and became emotionally isolated. She cried easily but remained committed to school and her youth group. She didn't gain much weight, and she wore baggy clothes so no one ever suspected anything was different. She literally carried her secret for six months.

One day her very caring sensitive pastor said to her, "I sense you are carrying a burden. I don't know what it is, but I want to encourage you to share it with others so we can carry it with you." This was the encouragement Julia had craved to hear so she timidly told her parents. They were shocked and disappointed and worried for her, but they said they would help her in any way they could. They told her, "No matter what, we are going to remain a family." And they immediately helped her get prenatal medical care.

At school, it was hard for Julia when people found out she was pregnant. She had been isolated before, but now people were staring at her, especially at her stomach. She

felt very conspicuous. But Julia continued going to school every day until the day she went into labor and delivered a healthy baby boy—six pounds and eight ounces. She was fourteen years old.

Her family and close friends from her church surrounded her with love and support. For six weeks after the baby was born,

"I sense you are carrying a burden. I don't know what it is, but I want to encourage you to share it with others so we can carry it with you."

her parents arranged home-bound school for her. They wanted her to have time to bond with her baby. Julia then returned to high school and graduated on time. She was fortunate because her high school had a daycare at the school so she could more easily return.

Sometimes the responsibility of caring for a growing child 24/7 was almost more than Julia could bear at her young age; but she was determined to do it, and to be a role model for her baby. Because of the support of many, especially her parents, she kept her goals. She combined parenting with finishing high school and graduating from college as well.

There were people, even at her church, who were embarrassed and disappointed with Julia when she became pregnant. But she focused on her supportive family, her caring friends (old and young) at her church, and her pastor, who all helped her carry her load.

What do I do if I'm pregnant?

- 1.** Teen pregnancy is an unexpected shock. It's unplanned, it's scary, and it can make you feel very alone. It's important that you talk to people. As the pregnant girl, you may need to talk to the baby's father and see if you can go through this together. If not, know that there are others who care about you. If you are the one who has fathered a baby, you need to support the pregnant girl, who is in a very difficult situation.
- 2.** If you are pregnant as a result of being raped, or you were pressured into sex, you may be feeling very alone and betrayed. It's not your fault; you need help. Find a trusted adult or a counselor who can help you.
- 3.** There are people who care about you. Think of someone you can trust and talk to that person— Mom, Dad, a caring relative, an adult at your church, your pastor, a counselor, a helpful teacher, or a health provider. They will help you.
- 4.** It's important for you to seek medical care as soon as you realize you're pregnant. Look in the phone book for your local health department, or go to a trusted doctor. They will help you.
- 5.** There are decisions to be made, and this can be a confusing time. You may be afraid of what will happen in the future. A baby may feel like a problem, but she or he is a gift from God. If you aren't ready for parenting, you may want to consider allowing a loving family to adopt your baby. Find a counselor to help you sort it out.

Facts about teen pregnancy

- The majority of teenagers in the U.S. and Canada are sexually active.
- Teenage pregnancy rates have declined since 1990, largely because of contraceptive use.
- Teen childbearing is associated with reduced educational attainment. This significantly increases the risk of poverty for new families.
- Not all teenage pregnancies are from consensual sexual activity. Sexual abuse, rape, and incest can result in pregnancy.

Statistics are from Alexander McKay, "Trends in teen pregnancy in Canada in comparison to USA and England/Wales" *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* vol. 15 [3-4] 2006.

- 6.** Recognize that God loves you. You are God's child, and God will give you strength. God helps you through those who care for you. Accept their love and support. Take care of yourself—your body, mind, and spirit.
- 7.** You may feel that if you get married, things will be easier, or maybe you are being encouraged to get married before your baby is born. It may be better to focus on being a parent first and on finding the support you need to be a good mother.
- 8.** It's important that you, the pregnant mom, stay in school if possible and work toward your goals. By continuing to take steps toward your goals, you're only helping your situation.

Teen pregnancy, the Bible, and the Christian story

From the moment the angel Gabriel left Mary's room after announcing that she would bear a child, Mary was put in a very awkward position. How would she tell her fiancé? How would she tell her parents? How would the people in the community look at her, knowing that she was pregnant?

Christians believe that all children are a gift, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. Jesus loved children: he said, "Let the little children come to me." This includes children, or adolescents, who are having children. Jesus also said, "Whoever welcomes a little child . . . in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5).

A teenage mother needs a lot of welcoming, as does her family. There is practical help that needs to be given, as well as emotional support. The community needs to respect the decision as to whether the mother keeps the baby, or offers it up for adoption. Support needs to be ongoing; child care, babysitting, and financial help will be appreciated for years to come.

Supporting a teenage boy who has become a father is also a big challenge. He may not be living with his new child, and so he can feel isolated or unsure about his role, or overwhelmed by the financial burdens placed on him. He needs the loving care of people who introduce him to the joys and opportunities that fathering can bring.

Non-judgment is a powerful posture that shows and acts out God's love and grace. If the church is a place of noncritical welcoming, young people and their families in a time of need can find a home there. If they sense harsh judgment, they will turn away and avoid it.

The pregnant teenager is likely going to feel different from her peer group. She will have experiences (pregnancy and childbirth)

that her friends will not be able to relate to. Activities that her friends participate in, such as going on youth retreats or mission trips, or casually hanging out after school at the mall, may be inaccessible to her now, because of her child-care commitments. It's a challenge to the pregnant girl's peer group to include her as much as they can. Thankfully, the intergenerational nature of congregations can be extremely helpful. Strong bonds can be formed between the teenage mom and older mothers because of shared experiences.

It's important for the congregation to support the extended families as well. The new grandparents may be very involved in taking care of the baby, right when they were thinking that their child would soon be leaving home. They have to adjust their plans and goals, often making big sacrifices. They also need the support of the church.

The teenage parents, who are taking on a role they may be unprepared for, will look to people they respect for guidance. People in the church can model what it means to be in a committed relationship, to show each other

The church can demonstrate how to show grace to each other, just as we have received grace from God.

respect, to have a consistently caring family, and to act as a united community. The church can demonstrate how to show grace to each other, just as we have received grace from God time after time.

When church is a place of hope and light, burdens are shared, loads are lightened and we walk together in God's love and grace.

Next Steps

Becoming a teen mother

Having a baby launches you into one of the most intense relationships you will ever have. You may be worried about whether you will be a good mom. Loving your baby may come naturally to you. Many find that they are overwhelmed with love for their baby. For other mothers, love is something that grows day by day. God has created us with a natural biological love for our children.

Parenting has many challenges, both in terms of caring for a needy baby and caring for a temperamental toddler. You may find that parenting has a lot to do with managing your own emotions of anger and frustration.

God wants you to be a good mother, and you can't do that alone. There are lots of people who can model parenting for you and can teach you what you need to know. Being a mother is one of the most rewarding roles you ever will have.

Becoming a teen father

When you become a father, you are launched into one of the most intense relationships you will have in your life. For a teenage father, there can be special challenges, particularly if you aren't living with the new baby. You can feel separate or distant from your child. You can feel that your girlfriend no longer has interest or energy for your relationship. Being a parent involves patience and sacrifice—thinking about others more than you think about yourself.

Supporting your girlfriend as she goes through the hormonal changes of pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing will strengthen her bond with you, even if she may not be giving her attention to you as much as she used to. If you and your girlfriend are no longer in a

relationship, you will need to put your differences aside and focus on the baby. The community around you can help; talk to other dads about how their relationship developed with their new baby. Know that God has many blessings in store for you as a dad. Taking your responsibility seriously will provide you with rich rewards in the long run.

Hope!

We see hope when teens who are pregnant are surrounded by support. They are treated with compassion rather than judgment. Families and churches provide the practical help they need. With support, there's a higher chance a teenage mom will receive earlier medical care, finish high school, and look at additional educational and career options. With support, there's hope that the couple's fledgling relationship can develop into a mature family bond. Even if this bond breaks other support, such as extended family groupings, can be formed. The hope is that the teens will have the safety net of family and church friends to accompany them on this journey. The hope is that the new baby will be a gift who is nurtured and loved by young people who are being nurtured and loved.

For further awareness

Books

Lindsey, Jeanne Warren, and Jean Brunelli.
*Your Pregnancy and Newborn Journey:
A Guide for Pregnant Teens*. Buena Park,
CA: Morning Glory Press, 2004.

Perry, Linda Ellen, and Lynellen Perry.
*How to Survive Your Teen's Pregnancy:
Practical Advice for the Parents of a
Pregnant Christian Single*. Dumfries, VA:
Chalfont House, 2007.

Websites

[www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/AboutTeenPreg
.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/AboutTeenPreg.htm)

[www.thenationalcampaign.org/parents/
ten_tips.aspx](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/parents/ten_tips.aspx)

[www.statcan.gc.ca/search-recherche/bb/info/
3000020-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/search-recherche/bb/info/3000020-eng.htm)

For this pamphlet, special thanks to: Jane Wenger Clemens, Lois Edmund, Virginia Froese, Irma Janzen, and Carol Penner.

© 2017 by MennoMedia, Harrisonburg, VA in close cooperation with agencies and seminaries of the Mennonite Church and Mennonite Brethren denominations; member institutions of the Mennonite Health Services Alliance and the MHSA mental health council; teachers, pastors, therapists, and other Mennonite professionals.



CLOSE TO HOME

**Local resources for help with
teenage pregnancy:**

**For more information on other Close to Home
titles, go to:**

www.mennomedia.org/closetohome



MennoMedia