



The Teenage Single Parent

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We generally think of “the family” as two parents living together with children. However, more and more single women and adolescent girls find themselves in a situation where they must raise their children in single-parent homes.

When an adolescent girl discovers that she is pregnant, it can be one of the most frightening moments of her life because she is totally unprepared. To add to the confusion she is feeling, she may come under strong censure simply because people in our society still have mixed feelings and reactions to women who become pregnant outside marriage.

Any family that is different from our imagined norm, the two parent nuclear family, has to deal with the possibility of being stigmatized, being marked by defect or disgrace for not being the “ideal” family. Although single parent families are growing in numbers and unwed mothers are more numerous than ever and therefore, more visible, they are still branded by the stigma.

The teenager who finds herself “illegitimately” pregnant is faced with limited alternatives. She may get an abortion, or she may carry the baby to term and then give it up for adoption, or she may choose to have the baby and raise it herself. In talking with some students, I found that most of their choices were based on moral judgments, not on what was best for them or for the baby.

A premarital pregnancy not only jeopardizes moral respectability, it lessens the chances for continuing in school and attaining a better life. Young people who become parents while in their teens are much more likely than their classmates who postpone childbearing to have their educations cut short. The younger the parent at birth, the greater the educational setback or total loss.

A single teenage parent faces a number of problems. Will she be able to cope with being pregnant? Is she ready to assume the role of a parent? What about financial responsibilities? Will she be able to return to school after the baby is born? What about child care?

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Ways of Coping with Pregnancy

Early parenthood creates an immediate crisis for the young girl and her family, which often results in long-term disadvantages for her and her child. It curtails her life chances, especially her prospects for educational, economic, and probably marital well being.

Most girls perceive those problems and they are often causes of great anxiety. I believe that one way to alleviate some of the mixed feelings the girls experience is, for them, to be able to talk about them. It would help if they could talk to girls who are in the same situation as they are.

I teach young mothers and mothers-to-be, and I have found that some girls can openly discuss their situations, but many are too embarrassed to talk. I usually start my English class with a five minute writing exercise. The girls are asked to make a diary using a cardboard file folder cut in half, with paper put inside and stapled to the back. Each morning they are asked to write whatever they choose. They often have trouble getting started. I then tell them to write about their feelings. For example, one girl commented that she did not feel up to coming to school. She was asked why and instead of telling the class, she was asked to write it in the diary. As another way to encourage them to write, I may ask questions about the baby, such as, "What do you hope to have—a boy or a girl?" In addition to learning to express their feelings, they are learning writing skills and vocabulary.

Another way to cope with being pregnant is to join an exercise program for pregnant women. The YWCA offers such programs where the mother and child are able to attend. Most of these programs are inexpensive, some are free. Other agencies that are available to help young women in the Greater New Haven area are: Planned Parenthood, Mental Health Services, Young Mother's Program at Yale New Haven Hospital, and the Lee Parenting Program (LPP) at Richard C. Lee High School.

To Prepare for the Baby

The pregnant teenager not only has to prepare herself mentally for the arrival of the baby, she has to be prepared physically as well. Teenagers are notorious for their poor eating habits; they have the worst diets of all age groups. During adolescence, a girl needs increased amounts of nutritious foods for her own growth and development. If she isn't eating properly, her body is ill prepared for pregnancy. The additional nutrient demands of pregnancy can compromise her own growth and increase the health risks to her baby. (See Lewis and Lewis 1950:259)

A pregnant teenager needs more food than she usually does, but not much more. A pregnant girl between 1415 years old requires about 2500 calories a day if she is of average height and weight. She will need increased amounts of iron, calcium, and protein.

Usually there is no problem getting the pregnant girl to eat, but getting her to eat properly is another matter. One way to teach good nutrition is to teach meal planning. Some things that are nutritious but inexpensive can be made in the classroom.

Dairy foods provide calcium essential for the baby's bones and teeth. Pudding made with milk can be made quickly in the classroom without a mess. The girls should have four servings a day. They should also have

three servings of meat, fish, or poultry a day. These foods are excellent sources of iron, particularly important to avoiding anemia in pregnancy. They should have six well chosen servings of vegetables and fruit a day to provide vitamins, minerals, and dietary bulk to help prevent constipation. They could also prepare a fruit salad in the classroom; it will go well at snack or break time. They will need four servings of bread and cereal a day.

In preparing for the arrival of the baby, the pregnant girl should learn what arrangements need to be made to go to the hospital. Usually they leave it up to their parents to make the arrangements, but they can at least make sure that the baby will have the necessary clothing to come home from the hospital. As a lesson, I have the girls cut pictures from magazines and make posters to be hung on the wall. This works well for the girls who have learning disabilities. It also motivates them and leads to open discussions about their babies and their plans for after the baby is born. Cutting out pictures and looking through newspapers gives the girls a chance to compare prices of certain items. They are also given a puzzle which contains words to be learned. They are instructed to circle every word they can find in the puzzle. Each word is an item found in the baby's layette.

PLAN A LAYETTE

A layette is a complete outfit of bedding, clothes, etc., for a newborn baby. Plan a layette for your imaginary baby boy or girl! All the words in the list below are hidden in the puzzle. Most of them are part of a layette, but three are infant care and development terms. Don't be confused—they are not part of the layette! When you find these three words, write them under INFANT CARE AND DEVELOPMENT TERMS. They are hidden down, across, diagonally, forwards or backwards.

(figure available in print form)

Word List

Bib

Booties

Bunting

Crib Sheet

Diaper Liner

Diaper Pins

Fontanel

Gown

Kimono

Pediatrician

Sacque

Umbilicus

Undershirt

Waterproof Pants

Infant Care & Development Terms

Bonus Words

Learning How to Take Responsibility

Having a baby inevitably changes a girl's life. She has to realize that she is a mother or soon will be, and that she is responsible for a new family; she is not simply the same girl with a baby tacked on. Accepting the fact that the baby changes a lot of things is part of the decision that she made when she decided to keep the baby. Taking responsibility means setting goals for herself and for her baby. It includes continuing her education and learning skills so that she will be able to survive if she chooses to leave home and to live on her own.

In my lessons, I will give the girls information on how to prepare themselves when looking for a job. They will be asked to look through the newspaper and to choose a job they think they would like to apply for. They will also practice filling out applications for jobs. I have found that many high school students have trouble answering questions found on an application. This lesson could be used not only for the single parents but also to any students in the middle schools.

Taking responsibility will also include sharing in the extra work at home. Having a small baby in the home adds extra chores that have to be done. The girls will be asked to keep a schedule of the chores that they do at home and anyone else who will be involved in doing them.

In a lesson, I will write several short scenes to be acted out by the class. Only the beginning of each scene will be given. The students will be asked to act out the ending.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Objective The students will discuss responsibilities.

Method I have written several short scenes to be acted out by the class. Only the beginning of each scene is given. The students will be asked to act out the ending.

Mom: Stacie, the baby is crying. It's time for his feeding.

Stacie: But mom, I fed him last time. Can't Ann do it this time?

* * *

Ann: The house is a mess, Mom will be home soon and dinner isn't on yet. Stacie, you were home all day, didn't you do anything today?

* * *

Stacie: I went to a party last night and I had a terrific time.

Mary: That's great Stacie! But where did you leave your baby?

* * *

In acting out these scenes, the girls will discuss whose job or responsibility it is to do certain things. I hope to elicit different responses from the girls. They have to realize that it is their child and that they are responsible for its well being. If they are still living at home, they must share in the workload to help make things go easier for the family.

Developing Goals

A goal is something a person plans to do within a certain time period. When put together, goals become a road map to life, a direction, a plan to work for. Having no goals to work toward would be like trying to get to Edgetown, Maine, without a map.

The students will be instructed to write their goals down on paper in order to think about them more clearly. They may be tentative and indefinite and they will probably change many times.

One Immediate Goal

1. One goal that I would like to accomplish:

2. This is the first step I am going to take:

3. My next three main steps will be:

4. I have the following skills and abilities:

5. I have the following knowledge that will help me reach my goal:

6. To achieve my goal I need more information about:

7. Here are places and people I can go to get help:

Next Week

The goal I set last week

___ was met with ease

___ was met with difficulty

___ was not accomplished

Variation *This lesson could have to do with personal goals, school work or a project. It could be done with any students.*

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Purpose To teach a lesson on how to fill out applications.

Objective To have the students become familiar with terms found on an application.

Materials Paper, pencil, application forms.

Method The following vocabulary terms will be put on the blackboard and discussed:

personal data references
spouse position desired
occupation maiden name
marital status employee
resume employer

Follow-up Activity The students will be given employment applications and will be asked to fill them out, pointing out to the students that they must always read the small print.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Purpose To teach a lesson in apartment hunting and to introduce abbreviations and words that are found in an ad.

Objective To learn how to choose an apartment using the newspaper.

Method The following abbreviations and words that are often used in an ad will be put on the board so that the class can become familiar with them.

A/C—air condition

Bdrm or BR—bedroom

Bldg—building

Brkr—broker

Bth—bathroom

D/W—dishwasher

Effcy—efficiency

Flr—floor

Furn—furnished

Immed occup—you can move in now

Kit—kitchen

Livrm—living room

Lgr—large

Lse—lease

Sec—security

Sml—small

Studio—similar to an efficient apartment

Sublet—to rent an apartment from someone who's already renting it

Supt—superintendent

Util—utilities (gas, heat, electricity)

After introducing the words to the class, an activity sheet will be handed out. This sheet will contain newspaper clippings of apartment ads. The students will be asked to choose an apartment that they will be able to afford on a fixed income.

Variation The students will be asked to look through the newspaper and write on paper the actual cost of five apartments in the immediate area, listing them in sequence ranging from the highest price to the lowest.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Purpose To make a nutritious snack.

Materials Peanut Butter, slices of bread, butter knife, and a cookie cutter.

Method The students will be asked to spread peanut butter on slices of bread, alternating by putting jelly on some of the slices. After they have finished, they will cut the sandwiches into different shapes using the cookie cutter.

Variation Cream cheese can be used, leaving the top off the small sandwiches, and raisins can be used to decorate them. This lesson can be used for elementary students and when working with students in special classes.

Objective To have the students plan a breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu.

Materials Paper and pencil.

Method The students will be given a list of foods from the basic food groups. Using the list, they will plan a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

When preparing foods in the classroom, it is a good idea to talk about the foods. “Where does peanut butter come from?” “How is it made?” “Why is it a nutritious snack?” Peanut butter can be easily made in the classroom and discuss the process.

Activity

NUTRITION IQ

1. Which of the following is not one of the four basic food group?
 - a. milk

- b. meat
 - c. sugar
 - d. bread-cereal
 - e. vegetable-fruit
2. Which of the following is a good source of Vitamin C (necessary for the maintenance of ligaments and tendons)?
- a. grapefruit
 - b. water
 - c. beef
 - d. margarine
3. How many cups of milk should every child have daily?
- a. 1-2 cups
 - b. 3-4 cups
 - c. 5-6 cups
 - d. 7-8 cups
4. How many cups of milk (or milk products) should an adult have daily?
- a. none
 - b. 1-2 cups
 - c. 3-4 cups
 - d. 5-6 cups
5. Which of the following pairs of food are rich in vitamin D (necessary for the body's use of calcium)?
- a. apples and oranges
 - b. carrots and broccoli
 - c. cheddar cheese and chicken
5. Which of the following pairs of food are rich in vitamin D (necessary for the body's use of calcium)?
- a. apples and oranges
 - b. carrots and broccoli
 - c. cheddar cheese and chicken
 - d. eggs and liver
6. It is important to drink plenty of water each day because water:
- a. is full of vitamin A
 - b. helps the blood to clot
 - c. helps dissolve the food we eat
 - d. is a good source of protein
7. Which of the following is a good source of Vitamin A (necessary for healthy skin and the development of bones)?
- a. liver
 - b. cooked oatmeal
 - c. cooked white rice
 - d. all of the above
8. Children between the ages of 7 and 10 should have how many grams of protein each day?
- a. 15 grams
 - b. 23 grams
 - c. 34 grams

d. 40 grams

9. Half a breast of fried chicken contains how many grams of protein?

a. none

b. 18.5 grams

c. 26.8 grams

d. 31.9 grams

Scoring: (1) c (2) a (3) b (4) b (5) d (6) c (7) a (8) c (9) c

Teacher and Students' Reference List

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Real Life Employment Skills . Scholastic Book Services, 1979. This book lists the types of jobs, how to look for a job and how to respond to newspaper ads. At the end of each chapter is a review section.

Reading and Writing on the Job . Scholastic Book Services, 1979. Puts the basic skills in the context of job situations. It deals with alphabetizing and categorizing as a file clerk, general math and filling out forms.

Real Life Consumer Economics . Scholastic Book Services, 1980. Teaches basic concepts important to economic literacy by engaging the students in consumer skills activities.

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Hill Book Company, Inc., 1954.

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective. *Ourselves and Our Children: A Book by and for Parents* . New York: Random House, 1978. An ideal book to have in the classroom. It deals with the family, becoming parents, coping with becoming parents, and children growing up.

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