



California **CASA**
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN



CASA Conversations

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Pregnant and Parenting Teens and Young Adults

Introduction

Nothing is quite as life changing as having a child. You may think that it is not an ideal time for the young person you serve to have a child. In fact, you may believe this person is still a child themselves! However, it is not uncommon for young people in care to become pregnant or father a child.

A recent study of foster youth found that teens in foster care were more likely than their peers become pregnant, to describe their pregnancies as unwanted, and to experience a repeat pregnancy. At age 19, **48%** of the young women in the study had been pregnant at least once, and of those young women in foster care who had been pregnant, **46%** became pregnant more than once.

As a trusted adult in your CASA youth's life, you can play a crucial role in supporting the pregnant and parenting youth during this crucial time. If your youth becomes pregnant, or has a baby or fathers a baby, how do you effectively advocate for their needs? What, if anything, will change about your relationship with them?

The Facts

Key points to remember:

- Youth are entitled to access to family planning, birth control, even abortion without any permission or knowledge of anyone.
- Youth have a right to choose whether to raise their baby, terminate the pregnancy, or choose adoption. Foster parents, social workers, CASAs or others can counsel the youth, but the final decision is up to the youth.
- Parenting minors have a right to have the child placed with them if at all possible.
- Just because a youth is in foster care **does not mean** that their child is dependent, or under the jurisdiction of the court! The infant/child of a foster youth can only become a court dependent by the filing of a 300 petition alleging abuse and/or neglect under the law.

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Starting a Conversation

It is ideal to have a trusting relationship already established with the young person. This will make talking about such a serious subject easier for you both. It may be helpful to refer to the CASA conversation “Starting a Conversation” for tips about how to encourage dialogue.

Create a safe space and time to discuss pregnancy. Let them lead the conversation – they may have many deeply mixed feelings and desires. Ask open ended questions, and let them take their time in sharing with you. It is perfectly normal for them to change their minds, or to be unsure of what they want to do. Also, if they don’t want to talk, or don’t want anyone to know about their family planning, than that should be respected if at all possible.

Support the Youth – Help them get the resources they need as soon as possible. Make sure the youth has a trusted therapist, if appropriate, and access to health care. Make sure they know their rights to obtain confidential and free access to medical care and advice on birth control, family planning, and pregnancy tests without the consent of anyone else. To get these services, contact Family Planning (800) 942-1054 or Planned Parenthood (800) 576-5544.

If you are the first person they have shared this information with, you may have them determine who else needs to know – foster family, birth family, social worker, father of the child, etc. You can also help them practice how to tell the important people in their lives about this change.

There are many things the young person will have to decide – you can help by keeping the young person on track with these items. Perhaps you can get them a planner, or an app on their phone to track appointments, to do items, etc.

Things to consider:

1. If a young person becomes pregnant, both the mother and the father will need support to make informed decisions.
2. As will anyone raising a baby, both mother and father will need a support system.
3. When supporting the young person, remember to consider the developmental stage young person.
4. The father, and paternal family, can and should be involved as much as possible.

"What happens after baby is born, and everyone goes away?"
- Luz

"What are pros and cons of having a baby. What does it look like to be involved? Guys can be scared and overwhelmed"
- Jazzel (a young father)

"Ok to explore living together, try to make that work"
- Erica

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Health Care – Teens who receive proper medical care and take care of themselves are more likely to have healthy babies. Those who don't receive medical care are at greater risk for: anemia; high blood pressure; labor and delivery complications, like premature birth; low birth-weight infant; stillbirth and fetal death.

- The earlier your teen gets prenatal care, the better her chances for a healthy pregnancy, so encourage (or actually take) her to the doctor as soon as possible after finding out she's pregnant.

Housing – How does having a baby affect placement? Can the young person stay in the same home? If not, how can the youth and baby stay together? Resist all attempts to separate the mother and baby for reasons not related to safety!

- Explore options, like a “Whole Family Foster Home” (WFFH), which is a foster home for teen parents and their children that has been trained to provide supportive family focused care and help teen parents develop parenting skills.

Education – Pregnant youth cannot be discriminated against because they are pregnant. So, while there may be programs or special class setting for pregnant youth, the school cannot force the youth to attend them. Make sure that the educational track and classroom setting meet the needs of the youth.

Planning – Have the youth create a “Shared Responsibility Plan,” where the youth, the caregiver, and social worker make a plan to help assign the tasks, timing, and responsibilities of shared parenting of the youth's parent's child. (See below for a link to a plan template).

Connections – It is important for the parent(s) not to be isolated, which is another reason to include as many healthy friends and family as possible in the young persons' support network. Parenting is difficult and can be overwhelming for anyone. It can be even more overwhelming for someone who is a survivor of childhood abuse and neglect. They may not have seen healthy parenting, and have unrealistic ideas about themselves as parents, and the infant or child.

You can play a key role in pulling together extended and chosen family for the young people, ensuring successful parenting. Have ongoing conversations about who is important to the young people, and who they would like to have in their child's life.

Remember, if the young person you serve has a child, this is lifetime commitment, and you and they will have many, many conversations around parenting.

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Pitfalls to Avoid

No Judgement! If you believe it is a mistake for the youth you serve to have a baby, remember it is not your call. This is a deeply personal decision and you can make sure the young person has all the information they need to make an informed decision – and the support needed to help them.

Don't forget the father! The baby will have a father and many paternal relatives who can contribute to the care and love of the infant or child! Talk to the mother about the father and the father's family. There are many reasons to involve the father and his family, if possible. The baby and child will benefit from having two loving parents, and extended family can be a support to the mother and child.

It is not part of the CASA role to babysit. You can help the young parent get daycare if needed so they can be in school and work.

Don't just take professional's word for it! Work to ensure that the youth has every opportunity to:

1. have their choice honored,
2. keep the youth's child out of the foster care system,
3. have the youth live with them, and;
4. have access to services and benefits that maximize the care of the infant.



Additional Resources

AdoptUSKids:

<http://www.adoptuskids.org/news-and-announcements/in-the-news/story?k=fostering-teen-parents>

Pregnant and Parenting Foster Youth: Their Needs, Their Experiences:

http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Pregnant_Foster_Youth_final_081109.pdf

A Guide For Teen Parents to Welfare and Health Care Programs:

<http://www.publiccounsel.org/tools/publications/files/2013-A-guide-for-teen-parents-to-welfare-and-health-care-programs.pdf>

Assessing Accessibility: Do Teens in Foster Care Have Access to the Full Range of Reproductive Health Care Services Under Medicaid?

<http://youthlaw.org/publication/assessing-accessibility-do-teens-in-foster-care-have-access-to-the-full-range-of-reproductive-health-care-services-under-medicaid/>

Teen Legal Guide to Sex, Pregnancy, and Parenting:

<http://www.pregnantyouth.org/>

Talk Read Sing: <http://www.talkreadsing.org/>

Shared Responsibility Plan Template:

http://calswec.berkeley.edu/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/SILP-Shared_Responsibility_Plan.pdf

U.S. Dept. of Ed. Anti-discrimination for Pregnant Youth:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201306-title-ix.html>

Planned Parenthood (800) 576-5544:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

Early Head Start:

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc>

First 5 California: <http://www.cfcf.ca.gov/>