



# Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Teen Pregnancy, STD/HIV Prevention Efforts

## Why Connect with Parents/Caregivers?

**Parents/Caregivers have influence and authority with youth.** Young people often view their parents/families/caregivers as role models. Parents can encourage young people to become involved in youth programs and other initiative efforts. As the primary sex educators of their children, parents deliver messages about sex and relationships to youth. Parents may also be influential figures in the lives of their children's friends.

**Parents have clout in schools and communities.** When it comes to children's welfare, vocal parents are key advocates and allies. Having parents on your side can make all the difference when you are seeking change to benefit youth.

**Parents can give insights into this key constituency.** Community change that affects teens must involve parents to succeed. Any community-wide plan to address teen pregnancy must address parents' concerns and engage parents in creating and supporting change.

**Interests in common.** Adolescent sexual health initiatives share certain goals with parents/caregivers:

- **Building competencies and achieving goals.** Many initiatives seek to expand opportunities for teens and prepare youth for adulthood. Parents are deeply concerned that their children succeed in life.
- **Success in school.** Early pregnancy and parenting are linked to school dropout. Parents want their children to succeed academically and graduate from high school.
- **Health.** Parents/caregivers want their children to be healthy.

**Objectives for parent involvement** might range from parent education (parent-child communication or adolescent development sessions) to supporting parent advocacy for comprehensive sexuality education with the local school district.

## Talking Points for Engaging Parents

Parents/caregivers have key qualities in common, but they are as diverse as human beings get! While these talking points may help you engage families, be sure also to listen to the perspectives and interests of the people you are trying to reach.

Most parents, but not all, want comprehensive sex education in the schools. You may want to emphasize the full breadth of your initiative, including goals to prepare youth for adulthood.

### Resources

Preventing Teen Pregnancy Through Outreach and Engagement: Tips for Working with Parents

*National Campaign*

<https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/tips-working-parents>

Talking Back: What Teens Want Adults to Know About Teen Pregnancy

*National Campaign*

<https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/talking-back>

## Describe Who You Are Succinctly

"[Our initiative] brings people together to help youth stay healthy and prepare for adulthood. In our [city/county/community], teen pregnancy rates are high. We want our community to be a place where teens have the opportunities they need to stay in school and achieve their goals. We [have/are creating] a plan to reduce teen pregnancy rates by making sure youth get what they need to stay healthy, avoid pregnancy, and get involved in positive activities."

## What's in it for Parents/Caregivers?

**Making a difference to their children:** "When it comes to teens and sex, parents matter way more than they think they do! Parents are a big influence on their teens, but many parents want some help answering their teens' questions. [Our initiative] can help."

**Social connections:** "We're going to make this fun! You'll meet other parents and community members who also want youth to be healthy, safe, and heading in the right direction."

**Building a resume:** "We can offer you a chance to use and build your skills and talents, and to make connections that could help you in the future."

**Connecting to resources:** "Through this project, we will all be learning more about the resources available to youth and their families in our community."

## Go Where Parents Are

Successful strategies for connecting with parents involve going where parents are: faith communities, beauty parlors, workplaces (lunch time meetings), community centers, parent meetings such as PTAs, Open House events at school, athletic events, and community fairs. Remember that parents' social life is often determined by their children and teens: they socialize with others who have kids in the same age group. Parents can take on an active role in reaching out to other parents.

## Identify a Range of Meaningful Roles

Parents/caregivers may want to be involved but may not have a lot of time and may have inflexible schedules.

- **Less intensive roles:** Complete a parent survey; attend a parent education session, open house, or community forum.
- **More intensive:** Distribute parent surveys, educate peers, recruit other parents.
- **Most intensive:** Serve on advisory council, advocate for policy change, train other parents to be parent educators.

### Cultural Competence: Resources

Connecting the Dots: How Practitioners Engage Parents, Families, and Youth Around Reproductive and Sexual Health  
*Annie E. Casey Foundation*  
<http://www.aecf.org/resources/connecting-the-dots/>

Organizational Development: Improving Cultural Competence  
*Advocates for Youth*  
<http://advocatesforyouth.org/improving-cultural-competence>

Parent-Adolescent Communication about Sex in Latino Families  
*National Campaign*  
<https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/parent-adolescent-communication-about-sex-latino-families>

## Tips for Including Parents/Caregivers

1. Be sensitive to language and cultural differences and norms. Cultural competence, especially around issues of sex, sexuality, and parenting, is vital.
2. Talk to parents; assess needs; find out what parents want; ask parents for their ideas.
3. Provide childcare and food, and use incentives whenever possible.
4. Include a teen performance or presentation as part of an event: parents may attend to see their teen.
5. Ask teens to invite their parents to join your efforts.
6. Locate your event near public transportation.
7. Use a wide variety of methods to reach parents—not just a one-off flyer, for example.
8. If they won't come to you, go to where they are.
9. Assess your organization's parent engagement efforts and plan for more rewarding partnerships.

### Assessment and Planning

Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders: A Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Nonprofits and Schools

*Annie E. Casey Foundation*

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/engaging-parents-developing-leaders/>