As Complex As It Gets: Providing Services for Teen Parents and their Children during the Time of a Global Pandemic

Our Time Together
- Foundations of our work with teen parents and their children
- Addressing trauma and resilience
- Using Partners for a Healthy Baby Curriculum
- Engaging young families through telehealth

Our Work With Court-Involved Teen Parents and their Children
- Miami-Dade and Broward Counties
- Leon and surrounding counties

**Think Development**
- Physical
- Cognitive
- Language
- Social Emotional

The Adolescent Brain
- The human brain is not fully developed into an “adult brain” until age 25.
- The prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to mature.
- It controls the “executive functions” of the brain.

Executive Functions Include...
- Planning
- Setting priorities
- Organizing thoughts
- Suppressing impulses
- Weighing the consequences of one’s actions
Learning From Mistakes

All adolescents need opportunities to “fail” safely.

**Prevalence of Sexual Abuse**

- 62% of the pregnant and parenting adolescents interviewed had experienced some form of sexual victimization in their preteen or teenage years

(Beyer & Eise, 1992)

**Interpersonal violence**

A common and dangerous reality for teen parents
- Teens and young adults are especially vulnerable, with violence intensifying when the teens found out they were pregnant.
- Time of greatest risk for homicide is during pregnancy

(Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2010)

**Build Parenting Capacity**

- Teen develops sense of self as “Parent”
- Positive Parenting Identity grows
- Teen learns to love and be responsible for his/her baby
- Teen’s network gives support (love) & structure (limits) for parenting

**Consider Trauma**

Many young parents are dealing with the long-term impact of sexual abuse and trauma while simultaneously learning to parent a young child.
Interpersonal violence

- Impacts health outcomes
  - delay in prenatal care
  - substance abuse
  - depression
  - birth control use
  - accessing health care
- Impacts the developing relationship with their child

Reproductive Justice

Parenting with safety, support and dignity.

Strengths of Young Parents

What are your experiences?

YPP Telehealth Services

Services Offered Prior to COVID-19
- Weekly Home visits
- Social Work support services
- Relationship Based Dyadic Intervention

Quick turnaround
- New way of offering services
  - Determining telehealth platforms
  - Issues that arise can typically be resolved in one home visit, now it could take weeks with closures.
  - Importance of ongoing case discussions/ team meetings

Loss of Protective Factors - Ensuring Safety for Teen and Baby

Built-in protective factors before Covid-19
- A part of a home visiting program
- Family dynamics were established
- Teen in an educational program
- Babies/toddlers enrolled in child care

Recognizing the Crisis
- Varying responses to the crisis
- Loss of employment
- Re-establishing schedules and routines

Supporting our teens and their babies to feel safe
- Being mindful of keeping ourselves grounded
- Response from our teens

Relationship-based Intervention

- Amount of time in the program – 1 month to 3 years
- Response to telehealth calls varies with each teen
- Consistency and persistence builds accountability and high expectations
- Accountability is one of the ways we promote positive outcomes
- Established relationships support ongoing engagement
Infant Mental Health Approach – Supporting Teens and their Babies

- Focuses on strengthening the parent-child relationship
- Provides developmental guidance to parents
- Develops and maintains regular levels of affective regulation
- Helps parents provide physical and emotional safety for themselves and their children
- Allows for joint construction of a trauma narrative

Minding the Baby – adaptation of the model

“Being held in the mind of another”
Jeree Pawl

Trauma Informed Practice

- Look for root causes and not just resulting symptoms (depression, eating disorder, etc.)
- Help the teen understand
  - how trauma affects emotions
  - how trauma experiences impact parenting
  - how they want to parent differently

Tips for fathers-to-be:

- Help your partner develop self-confidence
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s father
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s family
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s friends
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s school
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s neighborhood
- Help your partner develop a healthy relationship with the baby’s community

FSU Center for Prevention - Young Parents Project
Addressing Trauma
• Recognize the impact of trauma on the parenting relationship
• Linking to specialized trauma therapists
• Recognize that each stage of development, trauma may need to be re-addressed

Promoting resiliency
• Asking about funny or unique experiences that they will remember
• Ensure safety and safe spaces to share if needed
• Identify strengths that help them cope with the uncertainty
• Using this time to be fully present with their child

Health Education and Care

Pregnancy
  – Fears around delivery in the hospital
  – Stress of changing birth plans
  – Challenges in attending doctor appointments consistently
  – Fears of public transportation
  – Changes in eating habits due to stress and financial issues
Health Education and Care

Needs of Newborn:
- Difficult to assist with breastfeeding education without being face to face
- Teen has the stress of a newborn without the social support
- Fears of going to the pediatrician for newborn well visits
- New financial stress of diapers, etc.

Health Education and Care

Child Development:
- Challenges of observing development
- Skipping immunizations
- Tantrums increasing due to changes in schedule and lack of child care

Health Education and Care

Family Planning:
- Missing Depo shots
- Skipping appointments to get refills on pills
- Increased pressure from partners and more time at home
Health Education and Care

Advocacy:
- Changing the type of support for doctor appointments
- Spending time to translate medical jargon
- Addressing feelings of powerlessness for teen and staff member

Always our Goal

Supporting teen parents to become advocates for themselves and their babies.

Staying Connected

Telehealth Intakes

- Many of our clients have a history of exploitation
  - What does it feel like for them to share personal information with a stranger over the phone?
- Slowing down the intake process
  - Primary focus is on building rapport
  - Gathering basic demographic information
  - Other needed information will unfold over time
  - Allow client to take the lead in sharing about their circumstances

Getting to know each other

- “Beginning our work together over the phone is really different for me.”
- “I know we can work together by video until we can meet in person”
- “Let me tell you a little about myself. My favorite food/music/activity is…”
- “The pandemic has changed my daily life by…”

Engagement

- Adapting our services for specific needs
- Change in frequency and duration
  - Shorter calls if needed
  - May require more calls per week
- Continuing to address concrete needs and planning for future needs
- Video platforms, if possible, for introduction to teen and infant/toddler
Getting Creative

• For those who are difficult to engage
  – Use of social media
  – Mix it up
  – Sending notes and packages
  – Framing the message

Take time to remember those special moments...

• Birthdays - both teens and babies
• Graduations
• Loss of loved ones

Be the ones to follow-through

Relationship-based Intervention

A teenage parent’s new relationship with a supportive home visitor... can bring what they may have missed earlier in their lives.
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Stay In Touch!

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