

Student Name

Dev Bose

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The Truth about Teen Parenting

Teen pregnancy is being called an “epidemic” in America, a national emergency, but is teen pregnancy really the worst thing that could happen to a teenager? Teen pregnancy rates have continued to rapidly fluctuate since World War II. Whether this be through lack of moral values and ethics among families, parents’/guardians’ lack of educating children, the Obama Administrations changes in Sex Education, or a thousand other reasons, whatever is causing this change, most individuals are not approving the latest trend. And although different individuals and groups are going to view teen pregnancy differently, overall, these views tend to lean towards the negative side. From a point-of-view favoring contraceptive use, whether the act is being made before or after marriage, teen pregnancy is not a topic being ignored. As many individuals discourage teens from trying to raise children on their own, they are ignoring the facts that thousands of parents do it every day. If a person thinks about it, it’s quite obvious that someone, of any “legal” – legal meaning “permitted by law; lawful” – age, can, with dedication, responsibility, and much effort, raise a child, study and educate themselves, work, or maintain any combination of these acts and more all on their own or with another individual, I.E.: boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, etc. Hence, the argument put forward: teen parenting.

Not only is teen parenting possible, it is very often successful. Being a parent requires no special skills; therefore, making it possible for any individual on this planet to raise a child with the right means of support. Not to go without saying there are people who should not be parents, no person has the right to tell another they cannot raise their own child. The judgment from friends and family close to the parent is typically based off of the parent's responsibility. Even someone with nearly no responsibility can change because of a thousand reasons, but a child with most often always change a person's thoughts, feelings, views, and more. A parent is the most responsible type of person in the world. And, to an extent, no one can tell a parent they aren't responsible. Of course, there are situations where outside sources will step in and attempt to fix a situation where responsibility or the next few ideas spoken of may be lacking. One major step to being responsible is planning for the future. Many pregnant teenagers will drop out of school or stop furthering their education; just because they don't think they can do it. The truth is, anyone can do it, but they have to want the best for themselves and their child. Teen parents should look for inspiration through their struggles and even in their successes. Many people passed by in everyday life are, or were, in the situation that teen parents are in now. It's no new concept; does puberty not start during, and sometimes before, the teenage years? Women's bodies would not function the way they do if teen pregnancy is so wrong. Now, as teens struggle to hold strong to their responsibilities for their child/children, as well as their responsibilities to their own success, they must realize they aren't alone. The government has stepped up to play a sort of "father" role for individual women who need a little extra encouragement or stimulus to help keep on track. And this support isn't only for individuals; it's available for couples and

families as well. No one is alone in this life. They have families, government, friends, and success stories around every corner. They just have to find what best fits their story.

Now, stepping away from the positives, some light must also be shed on the rest of the truth. Teen pregnancy is no easy task, even if it sounds like it is. Maintaining responsibilities even with support that is available is very difficult. Teen parents must maintain a job at all times no matter what. This is their means of taking care of their child's needs. In addition to working, some parents choose to take on education as well, making their jobs that much harder. Education is like a full time job, hence why students at universities are required to live on campus their first few years to get a hand on what responsibilities college will hold. Leading back to work, the root of all evil, as well as, the most needed component of life, money. A constant income is needed by parents to be able to afford the basic necessities of life for their child/children. Children need a lot more than a teenager, so this comes as a hard truth for new parents seeing that money really doesn't "grow on trees." After working so hard for an income, and sometimes maintaining an education, it's hard for parents to keep their relationships as strong as they were from the start. Stress builds up because of financial struggles, parenting disagreements, or even just regular relationship struggles, making it hard for teens and dating parents to keep their relationships strong. But doesn't a child need a father? Well, that's a touchy subject. It's purely opinionated in this century, but statistically, yes, a child needs a father figure as they grow up. Lack of a father figure in a child's life can cause more issues than seen from the outside, and more and more children are growing up without one as time goes on. Boyfriends traveling in and out of the picture on a weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis can take quite a toll on children's social life

and mental stability. Children need this support, but so does the mother. But, through all the struggles in a teen parent's life, the relationship may be the last thing they want to work on. For those teens that end up as "single" parents, issues of child abuse often arise. This is from a lack of support, responsibility, education, a job or income, or many other reasons. Teen parents, according to few legal recordings, are targeted as the most often parents to abuse their children, because of malnutrition; these parents don't manage to feed their children as they should, but there is no excuse. After dealing with all the stress and responsibility that the parent isn't used to, depression becomes a major concern. As of 2008, the suicide rate of teen parents is seven times that of non-parenting teens, and the depression rate is approximately eleven times that of non-parenting teens. With support and a change in social approval and disapproval of teen pregnancy and parenting, these teens may manage to better support their children, but overall, raising a child is as much mentally wearing as it is physically for the parent.

Statistics will tell you a lot, including the fact that not much has changed since the mid to late 1900s. In 1971, the number of teens engaging in sexual activity was nearing thirty percent. And by 1979, these numbers had risen to nearly fifty percent. As of 2008, forty-eight percent of male teens and forty-five percent of female teens have engaged in sexual acts. Now, those numbers are nearly the same, and as for the number of individuals using contraceptives, nearly ninety-nine percent of teenage females claim use contraceptives during intercourse. So how are so many teenagers getting pregnant? A lot of it has to do with changes in social norms for sex and marriage, as well as changes in government support of the use of contraceptives instead of encouraging the practice of abstinence. There isn't one specific reason for the increase in teenage

pregnancy, but overall, statistics show that rates have gone up since changes in social norms and what is said to be “right” and “wrong” among individuals.

Overall, instead of focusing on preventing teenage sexual activity, and start by encouraging those who are participating to think about what the consequences of intercourse can, and very likely, will be. After using that encouragement to prevent more teen pregnancy, step up and help encourage and provide support, not monetarily, but emotionally, to those teens that are raising children as a result of their own actions. There is no one to blame except for the parents who chose to participate in sexual activities, and they need to play their role and step up to be responsible parents for their children and their selves. Teen parenting will always be a factor in life, and if it doesn't become less prevalent, then it will become a social norm, like many other factors of daily life that had once been frowned upon. A person should never accuse another of not being able to do something, and the phrase “*can't* is the ‘cancer’ of *happen*” (Charlie Sheen) hits the nail on the head.

Works Cited

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