

Preventing Teen Pregnancy Using Evidence-Based Approaches

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Preventing teen pregnancy is an issue many Alabama communities consider an important need.

This is evident when reviewing the Needs Assessment of Alabama counties, which is compiled by the Department of Children's Affairs using reports submitted by Children's Policy Councils (CPCs). The county CPCs review the needs of their youth in five areas: early care education, economic security, education, health, parent involvement skills, and safety. Although a case can be made for including teen pregnancy prevention in each of these categories, the **issue is most often identified under the category of health.** It is usually addressed in terms of decreasing the teen pregnancy rate through educational programs in both the school and community setting.

The following information is provided to help communities identify programs that have been **proven effective** in preventing teen pregnancy.

Using **evidence-based approaches** for teen pregnancy prevention helps ensure greater success of programs. An evidence-based approach includes the following:

- The use of demographic, epidemiological and social science research to identify populations at risk of early pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections, and to identify the risk and protective factors for those populations
- The use of health behavior or health education theory for selecting risk and protective factors that will be addressed by the program, and guide the selection of intervention activities
- Use of a logic model to link risk and protective factors with program strategies and outcomes
- Selection, adaptation if necessary and implementation of programs that are either evidence-based or promising
- Process and outcome evaluation of the implemented program

An **evidence-based program** is one that research has shown to be **effective in changing at least one** of the following behaviors that contribute to early pregnancy, STD and HIV infection: delaying sexual initiation, reducing the frequency of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, or increasing the use of condoms and other contraceptives. An evidence-based program **has been evaluated using a rigorous research** design, which includes the following:

- Use of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design
- Measures knowledge, attitude and behavior
- Has an adequate sample size

- Collects data from both groups at three months or later after intervention
- Uses sound research methods and processes
- Replicates in different locations and finds similar evaluation results
- Publishes results in a peer-reviewed journal

If an evidence-based program cannot be implemented with fidelity, or cannot be adapted to fit a community's population, then implementing a **promising program** would be the next best option. A promising program is **one that has not been formally evaluated, but has most of the characteristics of programs shown to be effective.** A list of 17 characteristics of effective curriculum-based programs has been developed by Dr. Douglas Kirby and colleagues. The list was developed by conducting a systematic review of 83 domestic and international sexuality education and HIV prevention program evaluations. The characteristics are divided into three categories: program development, program design/content and program implementation. A list of these characteristics can be accessed at <http://www.etr.org/recapp/programs/SexHIVedProgs.pdf>.

Detailed information about sex education and other programs that work to prevent teen pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infections may be found at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/programsthatwork/index.htm>

Portions of this fact sheet obtained from information published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Healthy Teen Network www.healthyteennetwork.org.

DEFINITIONS

Children's Policy Council: structure in each of Alabama's 67 counties created to assess the needs of children in the county and to build cooperation between various entities and interest groups.

Teen pregnancy rate: calculated as the number of pregnancies per 1,000 in a specific population.

Risk factors: individual or environmental markers that are related to the increased likelihood that a negative outcome will occur.

Protective factors: individual or environmental safeguards that enhance a person's ability to resist stressful life events, risks or hazards and promote adaptation and competence.

Intervention: deliberate entry into a situation or dispute in order to influence events or prevent undesirable consequences

Logic model: the relationship between specific events, situations, or objects, and the inevitable consequences of their interaction.