

## **BEST PRACTICES IN FAMILY SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

Teenage pregnancy is a major mental health problem. The discovery of pregnancy places the girl (and often her partner) under great stress. This is because it places her in the position to make adult decisions regarding the pregnancy. There are health complications to be considered for both the mother and child. Teen mothers who choose to carry to term risk death or complication during pregnancy and childbirth. The child is at-risk to be born prematurely and/or with a low birth weight. There are also long-term risk factors to be considered. Teenage pregnancy can affect a girl's future by delaying or terminating secondary education, decreasing the chance of education beyond high school, and increasing the chances of a poor marriage, unemployment or a low-paying job. Children of teenage mothers also suffer long-term effects of the early pregnancy. They are more likely to exhibit behavior and learning problems in school. They are also more apt to have lower intellectual abilities than their peers and are more likely to repeat a grade or require special education assistance.

Irresponsible sexual behavior frequently occurs in youth who do not have basic information about sex and contraception. The great majority of sexually active girls do not want to become pregnant. Teenage pregnancy can usually be attributed to abundance of sexual mythology that they have learned from peers and the lack of factual information that they have received from their parents. This causes them to believe that their sexual practices are safe and will not result in pregnancy.

Sex education should begin in the home with parents as the principal sex educators of their children. Parents need to accept their children as sexual beings and to understand how children develop in this aspect of their lives. Sharing information about sex and sexuality with children does not stimulate irresponsible or premature sexual experiences, but rather gives the child the necessary information needed to make decisions about sexual behavior in a mature fashion.

Children learn about sex whether or not their parents directly teach them. They can learn about sex by merely observing their parents. As Dr. Sol Gordon, Professor of Child and Family Studies at Syracuse University, notes, "The question is not whether you will teach your children about sex, but how well." Children require and will accept different kinds of information at different ages, and parents should encourage an air of openness and "ask ability" within the home so that their children seek facts about sex from their parents rather than from peers who are likely to provide misinformation. By providing sexuality education in the home, parents can help instill healthy, positive, responsible attitudes and values that will serve to guide their children throughout their lives.

*Approved by the FASP Executive Board*