



Young Mom Support

Support for pregnant & parenting teens

every child loved, every mother able

Young Mom Support is a registered NPO (093-008)

<http://youngmomssupport.co.za>

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Why Young Mom Support?

Teenage pregnancy affects all communities in our country

The topic is often discussed, and the focus is generally on prevention. While this is necessary, it does not address the reality that unintended pregnancies still happen every day, and most importantly – this approach does not answer the pregnant teenager’s question:

WHAT NOW?

Some teens will have the benefit of strong, supportive families to fall back on. The family will tackle the issue together and help the pregnant teen to find her way. This is not the case for many young people.

An unplanned pregnancy is a traumatic and emotional event in a teenager’s life and often she is afraid to reach out for help and information. Teen pregnancy is very often portrayed as the ultimate disaster in a girl’s life, a tragedy that there is no coming back from. Fear - of stigma, fear for the future, fear of disappointing family and lack of information leads to any number of poor outcomes, including **concealing the pregnancy** or attempting **unsafe or illegal abortions**, all of which cause health and emotional complications.

Regardless of how well educated a teen may be, the emotional upheaval takes its toll, especially if she feels alone. She may be in denial and unwilling to accept the reality of the situation. She may simply not be aware of what her options are and how she can access them in practice.

Young Mom Support aims to arm teenagers with reliable, non-judgmental information and support – allowing the pregnant teen to TAKE CHARGE of her situation timeously and make safe, healthy and well-reasoned choices about her pregnancy.

Whether a pregnant teen ultimately chooses termination, adoption or parenting is a life-changing decision, and one which is often clouded by the opinions of family, community, school, partner and friends. She needs to feel empowered to make the right choice for HERSELF and be able to manage the consequences of that choice.

Parenting teens need support, not stigmatisation. They can and do succeed.

Shame never made anybody a better parent.

Stigmatising teen parents does nothing to prevent teen pregnancy.

We have a choice: support a teen parent in their efforts to succeed - the parent and her children will be better placed for successful outcomes. OR – if we continue to place emphasis on “punishing” pregnant / parenting teens for sexual activity, by ostracising and judging them, cutting short their education – we as a society will face the effects broken and ill-equipped families for generations to come.

It is in everyone’s best interests for teen parents to succeed.

About Young Mom Support

Who we are

Young Mom Support is a social support group for pregnant and parenting teens, with monthly meetings in Masiphumelele and Driftsands. We also have an online portal on Mxit, offering information and online support for over 23 000 subscribers from all over South Africa.

Young Mom Support was started in 2010 by Tracy Engelbrecht, an author and one-time teen mom who grew up in Fish Hoek. We're a registered non-profit organisation (NPO: 093-008).

What we do

We offer a safe, friendly environment where young mothers can meet and socialise with their children, as they often feel excluded from other parenting-related organisations because of their age. In an environment where a mother is not automatically judged or questioned, she will feel more comfortable sharing her challenges and worries, and be able to ask for and access help if she needs it.

Young Mom Support aims to help young mothers challenge the often ignorant assumptions of society – to take their place as contributing and important community members, and to feel respected and heard as effective parents in their own right.

Having a stable group of friends with the same priorities and interests will help to beat the loneliness and isolation that sometimes comes along with being a young or teenage mom, giving them a voice long before they get to the point where they might feel they're not managing.

We believe it's too simple to say that it's merely the mother's young age that causes negative outcomes for her and her child. Rather, it's the complex combination of isolation, judgment, loneliness, lack of material, physical and emotional support which damages a mother's ability to parent correctly – not healthy for mom, not healthy for baby and not healthy for society which has to live with the consequences of poorly-parented children.

We're trying to reach young moms before it gets to that point, and acknowledge and respect those young moms who are doing it right.

We are different

Young Mom Support offers something different to other teen pregnancy focused organisations.

As a teen mom myself, I understand what pregnant and parenting teens are experiencing. I've been there. We are a secular organisation with no religious or anti-abortion agenda. We do not advocate one particular choice over another. We are led by the young woman we're speaking to, asking relevant questions about her personal circumstances and trying to find out what she wants, what she is capable of and most importantly, offering practical advice about how to succeed, no matter what she chooses.

We understand that not all teen moms are the same – and that there is no such thing as “that kind of girl”.

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Our workshops

Who should attend?

All high school students will benefit, both male and female, generally grades 9 to 11.

Format of the workshop?

A workshop could be a once off session during a Life Orientation lesson but often this is not enough time to present the information and especially allow for questions. 60 to 90 minutes is generally sufficient. A smaller group of up between 30 and 50 learners at a time is best for encouraging participation.

What will be discussed?

The consequences for both girls and boys as well as options going forward. We address 3 main areas:

- How easy it is to fall pregnant - in other words - it could happen to you. This brings in the discussion about contraception and thinking about your choices beforehand, as well as addressing the issue of others stigmatising / ostracising / judging pregnant girls / teen moms. Teen pregnancy is not something that happens to “those” girls. We find that teens often perpetuate negative stereotypes of pregnant teens, when they themselves are sexually active – there is a feeling of invincibility – “it won’t happen to me”. While contraception is available and vitally important, of course the only sure birth control is abstinence.
- I’m pregnant, what now? We address the options available, including abortion, adoption and keeping the baby. We emphasise the need for early and urgent action. Many teens put off the confirmation of pregnancy until far too late, thereby losing the option to terminate if the pregnancy is too advanced, or missing out on vital antenatal care if they choose to carry the pregnancy to term. Taking action sooner means a safer, healthier outcome. We emphasise that no particular choice is better than any other, and that nobody can make the decision for you. Personal responsibility and taking charge of your life is the key aim here.
- If parenting is your choice: what are your rights and responsibilities as a young mother or father? What does it take to be a good mother or father? Am I up to the challenge? Negative outcomes are not necessarily inevitable - but it is certainly hard work, and life will change. We speak about the sacrifices and adjustments required to be a good parent, including financial, practical, emotional, educational and family impact.

If you are not willing to make those changes to your life, you should either make another choice if you're already pregnant, or if you're not yet pregnant, reconsider your sexual activity / contraceptive choices.

Parenting is certainly no walk in the park – we do not sugar coat or glamorize, but neither do we say that good teen parenting is impossible.

Cost

The cost per student, per session is currently R15. This fee is negotiable and can be adjusted depending on the length of the session and size of the group.



Questions?

Aren't you promoting teenage pregnancy?

Not at all. We know that teenage pregnancy is a reality, and there are as many reasons for unplanned pregnancy as there are pregnant teens. Reliable, non-judgmental and impartial information is crucial to better outcomes if pregnancy does occur. By relying solely on shame and stigma to prevent pregnancy, we alienate those who do become pregnant. A pregnant teen who feels alone and has nobody to turn to is at great risk of making further poor choices. In addition, for those teens who choose parenting, support and encouragement is crucial. A parent who feels valued and supported in their parenting will always do a better job than one who feels ostracised, judged and vilified.

Are you a faith-based organisation?

No, we are entirely secular and have no religious affiliation. Religion is often an important factor in a teen's decision about her pregnancy and her faith should a way to help her through it.

What is your position on abortion?

Safe, legal abortion is the right of every South African woman and we support this 100%. Teens will often be too afraid to access clinics and hospitals and may resort to unsafe / illegal abortions, with disastrous consequences. We pass no judgement on any woman's choice regarding her pregnancy – ultimately, she is the only one who can make the decision for herself.

Should you rather not focus on abstinence / prevention instead?

There are many wonderful organisations doing important work in this field. Our focus is on dealing with pregnancy once it has already happened, and providing real insight into the choices you will be faced with.

I'm pregnant. What should I do?

First of all, take a breath. You'll be okay. Now is the time for gathering information, taking responsibility, thinking and hard choices. We cannot make that choice for you, and indeed we will never advise a pregnant teen for or against a particular option. We can only provide the information and hold her hand while she finds her way.



The Bottom Line: Why does SA need us?

- Stigmatising young parents does nothing to prevent teen pregnancy: prevention is a different conversation.
- Fear hinders access to contraception, safe abortion & early antenatal care, leading to concealed pregnancy, unsafe abortion and dumped babies.
- Not all schools are willing to help young parents continue their education. Teen mothers are committed to completing their education – education will empower the mother to give her child a better life.
- Many families are not there for their children: to ask for help when they're in trouble or support them during pregnancy & parenting.
- Having a “first port of call” for pregnant and parenting teens will ease the burden on current social welfare organisations – we will be offering support and identifying problems BEFORE the young mother has a need for professional intervention.

The message from teens is clear: I need somebody to talk to

“Thank you for helping me see things differently. I feel better now”

- Victoria, 15 year old pregnant teen