



HOW TO...

love and care for teenage parents

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a series of resources aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly, where we look at how to care for and love teen parents in a time when they need support the most.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording

Psalm 27: 10

"Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me."

is your church somewhere teenage parents want to come to?

Picture this: A mom walks into your church with her husband – she is pregnant, married and having her first child. Now, picture a young mom walking into your church, she is alone, she is pregnant, and she is a teenager. Out of those two moms, which mom deserves your support? And which of those children deserves more opportunities?

The way we currently pay attention to teenage pregnancy implies that the child born to a married woman deserves more opportunities rather than the child born to a teenage mom – and that is because we assume, imply, or judge the mom that she has done something wrong or is responsible for her pregnancy. We each sit with our own assumptions and stories in our heads – but it is a time to acknowledge that each mom has her story, it is unique, and she needs support to care for her child well.



what is happening in south africa?

- There has been an increase in teenage pregnancy over the years, with some of the girls are as young as 10 years old!
- 70% of these pregnancies are not planned or wanted, which is affecting the health and life choices of the young women and their children.
- Rape, child abuse, and gender-based violence are highly prevalent and have contributed to teenage pregnancies – along with the difficulty in accessing contraception in some communities.
- **Early childbearing can have negative effects on the education, livelihoods and health of adolescents.** Many girls who are pregnant drop out of school, which can impact on their educational and employment opportunities.
- Only 1 in 3 teen moms return to school - limiting their future economic opportunities and perpetuating a cycle of poverty.
- Studies have found that early childbearing, particularly by teenagers and young women who have not completed school, has a significant impact on the education outcomes of both the mother and child, and is also associated with poorer child health and nutritional outcomes.^[1]
- Teenage pregnancy causes a disruption to her/his learning, it is a life interrupted!
- But there are other negative consequences that teenage moms experience, such as their mental health. Research has shown that teens are twice as likely to suffer from postnatal depression as women who have their babies at a later stage of life.
- Teenage moms are twice as likely to fall pregnant again – usually within the first 2 years of having a child.
- **Early pregnancy and childbearing can also have social consequences for girls,** including reduced status in the home and community, stigmatisation, rejection and violence by family members, peers and partners, and early marriage.
- There are preconceived ideas in health care facilities that often means teen moms are shamed and do not receive adequate health care – which continues the cycle of unwanted pregnancies and girls not accessing the health care services they need to raise healthy children

Learners also tell us there is a lot of judgement and ill-treatment from older nurses when they visit government facilities to ask for contraceptives, so this makes them reluctant to approach clinics and hospitals.

- **Early pregnancy can also affect the health of adolescent girls, and globally maternal conditions are among the top causes of death and disability among adolescents** aged 15 - 19 years. The younger the girl the greater the health risk, especially among girls aged 10 - 14.^[1]
- The health implications of falling pregnant are vast – from a higher risk of infant mortality (or the baby dying) during birth, to girls developing fistulas or contracting HIV and other lifelong diseases. They account for 36% of maternal deaths every year, despite only accounting for 8% of births.
- There is a high risk of trauma during the birthing process as teenage moms are young and their bodies have not developed to birth babies and often end up in forceps being used or caesarians.
- We see there is a myth that teens get pregnant to access Child Support Grant (CSG) continues, when in fact only 20% of moms are claiming the CSG. And of that only 5% of all child support grants are teen moms.
- The boys are neglected and not focused on to educate in how to be a dad, nor asked to leave the church.
- We see generation after generation poverty and teenage pregnancies continues

is this as a societal failing?

panel discussion with:

Tracey Aitken: Founder of The Zoe Project (and The Princess Project)

Website: <https://thezoeproject.co.za/>

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Mary: a 15-year-old teenage mom

Elizabeth Giba: Teen Parenting Programme Facilitator for The Parent Centre

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Reverend Bernadette White-Phillips: Pastor at Capricorn Community Church

Watch the video recording [here](#)

let's talk about the individual...not the statistic

FTD-friendly churches can pay attention to teen pregnancy by:

- **Speaking up:** in your sermons, to your congregants about the judgements, assumptions that we make towards teen parents; speak up around the challenges that teenage moms face;

“When we dedicated the babies, as a church we have made a commitment to support them in their spiritual role as parents but also to support them as a community, so it is our role and our responsibility not to just say “ok now teach your child all about life and Jesus, we have made a commitment to come alongside them as a body – which is important and we are trying our best to fulfil that.” – Rev. Bernadette

- **Surrounding families:** by offering to cook a meal for a teen mom, older dads mentoring teenage dads; offering a lift to the hospital for mom's check-ups; calling to check in and see how mom and dad are doing; encouraging mom to return to school; encouraging dad to be part of baby's life.
- **Creating warm and welcoming spaces:** by being welcoming, loving towards teenage moms and dads in your churches – making your church is a place teenage parents want to go to each week, as they are not told to leave the church but rather welcomed in and encouraged, because it is somewhere that they feel loved. Show grace, love, compassion, care and walk with a teen parent.
- **Equipping and preparing:** to prepare teenage parents for parenthood whether that is referring them to an antenatal class or a parenting class, or run a programme to address some of the causes of teenage pregnancy in our youth.
- **Collaborating and referring:** by inviting experts to speak in your groups; collaborate with organisations in your community that support teenage parents to know where to refer teenage parents to or train congregants in ways to support young parents.
- **Praying:** into the challenges teenage moms and dads face; pray for our youth, our health systems to love and care for teenage moms during labour and check-ups; create WhatsApp groups for prayer or dedicate people in your church to pray for teenage parents in your church and your surrounding community

^[1] P Barron, H Subedar, M Letsoko, M Makua, and Y Pillay. *Teenage births and pregnancies in South Africa, 2017 - 2021 – a reflection of a troubled country: Analysis of public sector data*. Available at: <https://journals.co.za/doi/full/10.7196/SAMJ.2022.v112i4.16327>

We must remember that each teen parent has their own unique story as to what happened. Being a teen parent doesn't mean that his/her dreams are dead – her dreams are still there, and she can still reach her dreams and be the person she wants to be. Having a baby is a major life event, whether you are 30 or 16, and whether it was planned or not (Perinatal Mental Health Project). However, teenagers face multiple risks and barriers to consistently provide the necessary care that their baby needs. It isn't that teenagers are automatically bad parents - we must see that they face additional barriers that children born later might not have. So, regardless of how mom became pregnant, we can walk a caring, loving journey with mom to see that she thrives and is supported to provide what baby needs.

other organisations:

- **Mamkhulu.org** in Mpumalanga www.mamkhulu.org
- Teen Moms Youth Development run by **Options Care Centre** in George www.optionsgeorge.com
- **Lifeline Pregnancy Support** www.lifelinepregnancysupport.org.za

resources:

- Teenage Pregnancy Booklet
- Tips for a praying mom
- Why young children matter daily devotional
- A prayer for baby
- Mom's pregnancy journal and Pregnancy devotional (facilitator group guide)
- New mom's journal and New mom devotional (facilitator group guide)
- Prayers for children

