

Policy Position:

Adopted by the MOASH Board of Directors, 2017

Support for Pregnant and Parenting Youth



What we stand for:

The Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH) supports teens and young people who are pregnant and/or parenting. It is essential that, as teen pregnancy prevention initiatives continue, they do not knowingly or unwittingly stigmatize young people who become parents. MOASH advocates for a positive youth development approach with young parents, with efforts that focus on increasing access to quality support services and helping them to understand their rights in realms of education, healthcare, employment, and more. Young parents deserve assistance and resources to achieve their personal goals while building happy, healthy, and thriving families.

Why we stand for this:

- It is inaccurate to assume that all teen pregnancies are unintended.
- When educated on all their options after becoming pregnant, young people are better able to make well-informed choices about their bodies and if and when to become a parent.

- Individuals who become parents should be respected and supported. This support should utilize a positive youth development approach, where adults assist in the coordination of prenatal and pregnancy-related care, education around parenting skills, etc.
- As a consequence of some teen pregnancy prevention initiatives, many young pregnant and parenting individuals feel stigmatized and isolated from their communities. Comprehensive sexual health education that is inclusive and not shaming to pregnant or parenting teens can mitigate a loss of connection with their peers, and also help prevent unintended repeat teen births.
- Without support from their communities, young parents often face additional hardships in the areas of educational achievement, employment opportunities, financial stability; dating, interpersonal, and sexual violence; mental health concerns, accessing housing, child care services; and maternal and infant health.
- When provided with support, young parents are able to finish high school; pursue and excel in higher level education; gain employment and thrive in work environments; achieve housing and financial stability; and make valuable contributions to their communities.
- Helping young parents leads to positive health and social outcomes for their children.¹
- Many other expert organizations² - including the US Department of Health and Human Services, Advocates for Youth, Forward Together, the National Crittenton Foundation, Healthy Teen Network, the National Women’s Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union, and other member organizations of the Strong Families Young Parents Cohort³ - and federal laws like Title IX have recognized the importance of supporting pregnant and parenting teens, implementing programs and policies that respect their rights and protect them from discrimination.

Data and statistics:

- Larger systems of oppression - and the intersection of identities across different dimensions of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, ability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. - may put some youth at a higher likelihood than others to have a teen pregnancy.⁴
- Data from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (2015) reports:
 - There were 6,412 births to teen mothers⁵ which accounted for 5.7% of all births in the state.⁶
 - The Michigan birth rate for women aged 15-19 was 19.4 per 1,000 women.⁷
 - 16.8% of births to teens ages 15-19 were repeat births.⁸
- Many young people report feeling more motivated to finish school after they become pregnant or begin parenting.⁴ However, a lack of support or active opposition from school staff, community members, family, etc. can make this difficult:
 - Pregnant or parenting teens face both direct and indirect pressures that push them out of school, including punitive absence policies, bullying and harassment, coercion into lower quality alternative schooling, barriers to child care services and transportation, and more.⁹

¹ State of Michigan. (2017). March 2016: Parenting Awareness Month Proclamation. Retrieved from <http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-57577_59874-377876--,00.html>

² #NoTeenShame. (2017). "Our Collaborations." Retrieved from <<http://www.noteenshame.com/about/>>

³ Strong Families. (2016). "Young Parents." Retrieved from <<http://strongfamiliesmovement.org/young-parents>>

⁴ Young Women United. (2016). Dismantling Teen Pregnancy Prevention. Retrieved from <<http://www.youngwomenunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ywu-dismantlingtp-DEC2016-digital-interactive.pdf>>

⁵ Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). (2016). Number of Live Births by Age of Mother, Michigan Residents 1920-2015. Retrieved from <<http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/osr/nativity/Tab4.3.asp>>

⁶ MDHHS. (2016). Percent of Live Births by Age, Race and Ancestry of Mother, Michigan Residents, 2015. Retrieved from <<http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/pha/osr/Nativity/tab1.2perc.asp>>

⁷ MDHHS. (2016). Live Birth Rates by Age of Mother, Michigan Residents 1920-2015. Retrieved from <<http://www.mdch.state.mi.us/osr/nativity/Tab4.4.asp>>

⁸ Kids Count Data Center: A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2017). REPEAT TEEN BIRTHS AGES 15-19. Retrieved from <<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/1647-repeat-teen-births-ages-15-19?loc=24&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/869,36,868,867,133/any/3501,13077>>

⁹ Garcia, K., & Chaudhry, N. (2017). Let Her Learn: Stopping School Pushout for Girls Who Are Pregnant or Parenting. The National Women’s Law Center. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Final_nwlc_Gates_PregParenting.pdf>

- Only about half of teen mothers earn their high school diploma by age 22.¹⁰
- About 48% of teen mothers (age 15-19) live below the poverty line. Most custodial teen mothers receive little or no child support.¹⁰
- Teen parents are significantly more likely to experience homelessness compared to other high school youth.¹¹
- Teen mothers are nearly twice as likely as older mothers to be struggling emotionally with depression, loneliness, and fearfulness.¹²
- Teen fathers involved in raising their children run similar risks to teen mothers, including dropping out of school, poverty, homelessness, and higher incidences of repeat births.
- Healthy engagement from both young parents, and particularly involvement and attachment with teen fathers, has been shown to have positive effects on their children.¹²

¹⁰ Ng, A. S., & Kaye, K. (2012). Why It Matters: Teen Childbearing, Education, and Economic Wellbeing. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Retrieved from <<http://d3np9zinex7nzb.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/childbearing-education-economicwellbeing.pdf>>

¹¹ Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy (2013). Living on the Edge: The Conflict and Trauma That Lead to Teen Parent Homelessness. Retrieved from <<http://www.massteenpregnancy.org/sites/default/files/publications/matpliving-edgesummer2013.pdf>>

¹² Ng, A. S., & Kaye, K. (2012). Why It Matters: Teen Childbearing, Single Parenthood, and Father Involvement. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Retrieved from <<https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/why-it-matters-teen-childbearing-single-parenthood-and-father-involvement>>