

CHAPTER I: PREVENTING TEEN PREGNANCY

As you may know, our sexual maturation during puberty enables girls to get pregnant and boys to impregnate. But pregnancy is something that needs full responsibilities that adolescents may not be ready for – **physically, emotionally, and financially.**

In this session, let us further understand the implications of teen pregnancy in your growth and development.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY is such a complex reality. It is a result of several factors that should be known and understood by teens so they can prevent them from happening. In this session, let us discuss further the implications of teenage pregnancy to your life as adolescents particularly in relation to your dreams in life.

Let us try to read and understand the key messages that the topic wants to convey.

Key Messages

1. Early pregnancy among adolescents is caused by complex and interrelated factors.
²Some of the major causes of teenage pregnancy include, but not limited to exposure to pornographic contents and materials, peer pressure, lack of appropriate information and life skills, exposure to risky behaviors such as substance use including alcohol and drugs, sexual abuse or rape, and lack of parental guidance, among others. *Please see figure 1 for causes of adolescent pregnancy on page 13.*
2. Social norms and peer pressure influence sexual behaviors among adolescents. However, negative peer pressure including engaging in sexual activities should be challenged through critical thinking and assertiveness.
 - a. It is not because “everybody is doing it” that one should be pressured to do the same. Critical thinking and assertiveness are needed to prevent consequences of negative pressures from peers, media, or the society as a whole.
 - b. It is always okay to be different!

3. Too early pregnancy puts the young mother and her baby at risk of health complications and even death.
- a. Motherhood at a very young age entails a risk of maternal death (*death of mother due to pregnancy complications*) that is much greater than average, and the children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity (*diseases*) and mortality (*death*).
 - b. Pregnant adolescents are exposed to the following health risks especially when they fail to seek timely and appropriate maternal health care.
 - **Obstructed labor or difficult delivery.** Adolescent girls are still growing and their pelvis has not yet reached its full size. Pregnancy increases the body's nutritional needs and can slow down growth size.

If an adolescent girl gives birth and her pelvis is not yet at its full, she may suffer from what is called "obstructed labor" delivery or difficult delivery.
 - **Obstetric fistula.** A damaging complication of obstructed labor is obstetric fistula. In this case, there is a hole between the vagina and the bladder or rectum. A female afflicted with this condition constantly leaks urine or feces and smells bad.
 - **Unsafe abortion.** Overall, complications from unsafe abortion are one of the main causes of maternal deaths. Since most of teenage pregnancies are unintended or unplanned, and because of the shame, social stigma, and unpreparedness of the young mother and father to bear the child, many pregnant girls' resort to unsafe abortion. Unsafe abortion can also result in lasting and devastating consequences including sepsis, perforation of the uterus or intestines, hemorrhage, chronic pelvic infection, and infertility.
 - **Pressure to mental health.** Carrying a baby and becoming a mother not only creates physical changes. Women also go through mental changes. Young mothers face added stress from sleepless nights, arranging child care, social stigma, and attempting to finish schooling.

- c. The babies of adolescent mothers or teen mothers are also exposed to medical complications. Studies have shown that children among mothers have higher levels of mortality (death) and morbidity (diseases). Some of the health risks among babies born from young mothers include:
 - babies of adolescent mothers are likely to have low birth weight;
 - they may also run a higher risk of being premature; and
 - have a higher risk of dying before delivery.
4. Too early pregnancy puts you at risk of having **DISRUPTED** dreams and aspirations (i.e. social cost of teenage pregnancy).
 - D - Dropping-out** of school due to difficulty of balancing the physical stress of carrying a child and completing studies.
 - I - Incapacity** to assume parental and familial responsibilities further resulting to incapacity of young couples to raise their child and family responsibly.
 - S - Social stigma** and discrimination attached to negative and prevailing assumption of social promiscuity among pregnant adolescents.
 - R - Repeat pregnancy** especially resulting from continued exposure to sexual activities with the mother's partner.
 - U - Unemployment or underemployment** primarily due to lack of education or training required for available or higher paying jobs.
 - P - Poverty.** Without education and employment, young parents have high vulnerability to poverty.
 - T - Taking illegal drugs** or substance abuse as a means to "escape" from or deal with the difficulties of being a young mother or father;
 - E - Emotional instability** or crisis due to the pressure and tension from taking care of the pregnancy, social stigma, and lack of family support, among others; and
 - D - Dependence** to family and government on basic needs. As young couples are unable to provide for their needs, they will be highly reliant to their families and to the government.
5. Too early pregnancy also affects the adolescent father:
 - a. not being able to cope with the demands of fatherhood;
 - b. isolation or staying away from friends;
 - c. not being able to relate with equally young and inexperienced wife; and
 - d. opposition or lack of support from their family.

6. To prevent early and unwanted pregnancy, you should abstain from or delay the debut of your sexual relations:
 - a. Not engaging in sex or abstinence is the safest and most effective way to prevent pregnancy. Adolescents like you need the capacity to refuse, abstain, or at least delay engagement in sexual intercourse. For this, adolescents need proper information about their sexuality so they can be effectively guided in making responsible decisions; and
 - b. For sexually active adolescents, correct and consistent use of contraception (or family planning method) can prevent pregnancy. However, the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law requires parental consent from adolescents below 18 years old for accessing modern methods of contraception or Family Planning.
7. Mutual consent is a requirement before any sexual activity with a partner. Any unwanted sexual activity that happens when one partner is pressured, tricked, threatened, or forced in a non-physical way by the other partner is sexual coercion.
 - a. Coercion can also make one think he/she owes sex to someone such as his girlfriend or her boyfriend (i.e. fear of being abandoned).
 - b. Sexual coercion and harassment are violations of human rights that need to be reported to authorities (teachers, police officials, social workers).
8. Preventing teenage pregnancy requires the participation of both male and female adolescents. Boys can prevent teenage pregnancy by:
 - a. abstaining from sex;
 - b. communicating with his female partner and respecting his partner's decision not to have sex;
 - c. educating himself about the different contraceptives for sexually active adolescents;
 - d. avoiding risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and taking illegal drugs; and
 - e. supporting his partner to finish her education towards the achievement of their aspirations or dreams.

Points to Remember

- Engaging in unsafe sexual intercourse may lead to pregnancy. Too early adolescent or teenage pregnancy puts mother and baby at risk of health complications. In addition, it causes adolescent mothers, and also adolescent fathers, to stop schooling, and bear its social cost.
- The surest way to prevent pregnancy is NOT to have sexual intercourse. Everyone has the right to refuse sex. Everyone should respect that right.
- People who have become sexually active but do not want a pregnancy can choose to use contraception.
- Consulting a health care provider can help in choosing a suitable contraceptive or family planning method. Those below 18 years old, however, need parental consent to access contraceptive or family planning services.

“Piliin ang pangarap, huwag ipagpalit sa sandaling sarap”

