

## Suggested Messaging

As a communicator in the adolescent pregnancy prevention and parenting field you likely face common, usually negative, stereotypes of pregnant and parenting adolescents. These stereotypes, which focus on the failures or deficits of the adolescents themselves, have a negative impact on your clients. It can also inadvertently impact your service delivery if your clients become “problems” that must be addressed, rather than young and future parents whose potential and skills can lead to success for them and their children. When you develop your key messages, consider how your choice of words and your attitudes may reflect, even inadvertently, these stereotypes. Your organization is different because it embodies an opportunity for a new future for these adolescents and your community.

You know your community and your clients better than anyone. However, there are several key messages that are a good starting point. If these themes are incorporated into the messages you develop using this Toolkit, you are well on your way to communicating effectively. These elements may help frame a more positive set of messages to communicate to key audiences:

- **Adolescent parents are assets, not liabilities.** Teen parents have chosen to take a difficult, but life-affirming and rewarding, path in life. They are not a burden. So avoid, for example, discussing the “costs of teen pregnancy.” Instead, talk about the opportunities to help kids and the need to treat teens equally.
- **Do not blame the individual; focus on the potential of the individual.** By noting the transformative nature of parenthood, including for teen parents (lives can be transformed and individuals can contribute to society), you point out the unique character strengths and life skills pregnant and parenting teens are acquiring. Sure, it is earlier than many would like, but these teens are learning to make responsible, unselfish decisions for themselves and their children. That should be encouraged and used to focus on the great things these teens and their children will accomplish with your support.
- **Celebrate the resilience of teens and their children.** Being positive does not mean ignoring the truth. Raising a child is difficult no matter how old you are. Pregnant and parenting teens are enduring hardships that most kids their age will not. As a result, their resilience and character should be recognized, celebrated and encouraged.

**Promote the benefits to society of helping pregnant and parenting teens achieve their potential.** No one wants any teen to be left behind. Our society spends billions of dollars on education and other youth programs to act on that desire. Pregnant and parenting teens are no different – when they succeed, we all succeed.