

# Helping Adolescent Parents Achieve Educational Goals



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## Summary

Teen parents face significant challenges in learning to parent, performing developmentally appropriate tasks, and also pursuing educational or employment goals. This project developed a video model of practice designed to guide child welfare workers in assisting teen parents toward achievement of educational goals.

## Goals of Project

1. Prepare role play video model of skills utilized in assisting teen parents in achieving educational goals
  - a. Goal setting
  - b. Involving teen parent in choosing appropriate program
  - c. Providing support and linkage to resources
  - d. Problem solving and crisis intervention
  - e. Accompanying teen parent in visiting programs

2. Share video with child welfare practitioners working with teen parents around educational goals

## Implications for Policy and Practice

Child welfare and other social workers need models for dealing proactively with teen parents toward educational goals. This video model demonstrates how to come to agreement with the teen parent about educational goals, how to provide appropriate support and how assist when difficulties occur.

## Literature Review

- Teen parents need assistance with both parenting and education
- Teen parents need to feel connected, not isolated, and linked to resources
- Programs are more successful if also linked to employment exploration
- Programs work best if multiple resources work together

## For More Information

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## Description of Project

The Teen Parent Support Network (TPSN) makes services available to adolescent parents who are themselves wards of the State of Illinois. Social workers meet twice monthly with adolescent parents, both young women and young men, to plan together for how they might be best equipped to emancipate at age 21 with job training, employment and educational resources that will permit them to safely parent their children and have the resources to live independently in raising their children.

Young people who have been raised in part in out-of-home care have a set of challenges in becoming independent at 21. They strive to have a job, employable skills, educational accomplishments, a place to stay, and a network of family, friends, mentors, to support them. The young parents from TPSN have these goals as well as a second set of challenges of becoming safe, effective parents while growing up as young adults.

Progress toward these two goals is not always smooth. These young parents are caught between two sets of developmental needs: their own, and that of their child or children. Those two sets of developmental needs may pull them in opposite directions: to strive for individuation as an adolescent becoming a young adult and to act as a competent adult parent for their children. The TPSN exists in part to help them with these challenges: to become an independent young adult and supportive, effective parent for their children.

TPSN and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hired Professor Ronald Rooney in 2006 to conduct training of staff and supervisors of the TPSN related to an introduction to the Task-Centered approach, to work with involuntary clients, and an introduction to stages of change and motivational interviewing.

As part of the evaluation, a random sample of

cases of clients who graduated from the TPSN program was selected. Case files were redacted from the point they began the TPSN program until the point at which they completed the program. Analysis of that data led to one surprising conclusion: Three of eighteen clients with a goal of completing a GED were able to do so. Fifteen of eighteen completed course work and other study but did not take the examination (Rooney, Rzepnicki, & De Jong, 2007).

The hurdle of taking the examination appeared to be major for many of the adolescents. It was unclear whether this was a kind of test anxiety or what could be done to reduce it. The fact was that, whether the worker offered to take them to the examination or not, most did not take the examination. In consultation with Mary Kay McDermott, OIG's office, it was determined that a model would be created designed to address these educational gaps (Ferguson, 2001, 2003).

## Creation of Modeling Video

A role play model was created in May 2008 with Shantell Stephens, MSW, a TPSN worker and an TPSN client acting in a role play. Several scenes and locations were utilized to focus on problem areas in such work.

The first scene depicts the goal setting process. Frequently teen parents are ambivalent about seeking further education, having had limited success in prior efforts and limited current resources. Hence they may agree to seek further education without actual genuine commitment or hope. Ms. Stephens models practice skills that hears the client's ambivalence and gently assists her to consider her goals and be active in seeking them.

Beyond goal setting, teen parents often falter in making the actual contact with an educational program. Ms. Stephens demonstrates here how to accompany the teen on visits to prospective programs and to

encourage her to be active in the choice. However well connected initially to the program, it is not unusual for teen parents to experience crises that lead to diminished attendance or dropping out of the program. A crucial modeling sequence of the video demonstrates how Ms. Stephens empathizes with the client's feeling of depression and being stuck and assists her to make a decision to return to the program. Finally, there is a sequence in which dealing with test anxiety is demonstrated. The four hours of video practice are currently being edited into a 30-45 minute video.

### Discussion questions

1. How does the video practitioner assist the client in developing her own educational goals? What is the role here of developing her own questions to ask of educational personnel?

2. How does the video practitioner both support the client's independence and self-determination and provide adequate support?
3. How do you see the video practitioner support the client Gwen through a crisis?

