Topics: Teen Parents in Foster Care, Work on Educational Goals

Title: Assisting Teen Parents in Achieving Educational Goals

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Summary/Abstract: 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 Po**licy 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

Adolescents who become parents face challenging obstacles in managing the conflicting demands in their lives. Adolescents are normally dealing with developmental changes, completing education, preparing for employment. Adolescent parents have these challenges in addition to learning how to care for a child. It is not surprising, therefore, that teen parents often face educational challenges in completing a GED or high school education. The consequences of not completing a GED or high school are significant for the parent's future capacity to care for her children. Valued participation in a socially and

culturally stable community, in and out of school makes teen pregnancy less likely to occur (Bickel et al, 1997).

Evaluation of programs designed to assist adolescent parents suggest that individualized case management services are useful in facilitating educational success (Solomon & Liefeld, 1998). Resources are needed to assist the adolescent in parenting and simultaneously attending school. Resources are needed to prevent isolation from a provider who conveys caring. Such resources include access to transportation, day care, time off from school to attend medical appointments, home tutoring during weeks after birth, prenatal care, counseling about daily living needs, and information about wise parenting (ibid.)

Getting to school is not the only problem. Adolescent parents need to feel connected in order to stay in school. Discussions with other adolescent parents can be bonding experiences and opportunities to discuss topics of common interest. A factor in school retention is the viability of employment post graduation (Bickel, Weaver, Williams and Lange, 1997). Among the factors making educational attainment problematic are attendance of large, impersonal education settings, membership in a devalued cultural group and participation in a devalued educational curriculum (ibid.), Hence, education that is connected with employment exploration is more successful.

Assistance is more successful if it includes multiple resources working together. For example, if case managers assist adolescent parents in linking to school resources, they are more successful (Solomon and Liefield, 1998). Other kinds of resources include linkage to hospitals, clinics, mental health care, recreational activities, community involvement, and involvement with mentors. This intensive individualized, case management services can provide some of the needed support network function when absent in teen parent's life. Essentially, these services can provide some of the services that a parent would provide the adolescent, if available. In fact, working with and encouraging families, especially grandmothers, to support adolescent parents can be critical. Adolescent parents are unlikely to overcome the multiple barriers to school success without focused intervention. Assistance programs are most successful with adolescent parents who already have educational aspirations, support networks, and access to transportation. Some cultural groups have much experience with adolescent parenting as a rite of passage into adulthood (Roosa, 1986). Adolescent parents do better with flexible attendance policies and being able to attend classes close to where they live. Having a second child poses additional obstacles to educational success. If the adolescent had not experienced educational success prior to the pregnancy, special concerns are raised about development of an appropriate support network.

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 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. The intention of this training was to provide a solid source for guiding social worker interactions with adolescent parent clients in TPSN. It was thought that such training might provide more structure for contacts such that goals might be clearer and it might be easier to record and monitor progress in case records. Sixteen hours of training content was then delivered to TPSN staff and supervisors on the above content areas in March-May 2005. In addition, an adaptation of the Task-centered approach for supervisors was delivered in eight hours over this same time period. A paper-pencil test of knowledge of the content was administered to staff and supervisors before and after the training. Scores were significantly higher on Task-Centered and involuntary client content after the training compared to before, and no significant differences were found on knowledge related to stages of change and issues in supervision.

A plan was developed to assess the impact of training through examining disguised case records. Indicators of content that would reflect content from the training such as clear indication of agreement with the client on the problem to be worked on or tasks to be undertaken were developed. When these indicators were used with a sample of records selected from pre and post training, no evidence was noted of these factors in the records. That is, while the paper-pencil test indicated learning of the content, a transfer to practice with clients as reflected in records was not evident.

A revised plan was developed to assess the records in a different way, by examining indicators of client engagement using a format proposed by Julia Littell 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?

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Authors' names or other contacts within the SSW
Project dates: September 2008- Current

*To earn CEU credit, learners will thoroughly read the narrative materials for the project and view the project video. The learner will select one of the discussion questions, write a 1 page reflection in response

and submit it to the CASCW. CEUs will be issued after all elements of the IV-E Learning Module have been completed.