



Reaching out to

# PREGNANT TEENS

by Ginger Sinsabaugh MacDonald

# “What

do you mean they made the National Honor Society? They're both pregnant!”

“That's bogus, man!”

I'll never forget the moment. The curl of my Farrah Fawcett bangs went instantly limp when I heard the 1978 inductions to my high school's National Honor Society. It was during fifth hour English. I was sitting in the back row with my best friend, Laura, when the announcement came over the static-filled PA system.

I turned to Laura, who was also in shock. She opened her mouth so wide, a rubber band snapped off her braces and hit a kid in the back of the head sitting three rows up.

Two pregnant girls in 1978 and it wasn't inner-city Chicago. It happened in a small farm town in southwestern Michigan about the size of a shoebox. A place where teen pregnancy was as newsworthy as a two-headed calf. The buzz spread through the community with the speed of the Internet. Informants at the school cafeteria, corner gas station and local bakery made sure everybody knew these

girls each had a bun in the oven. Yet as much as our stares could melt Kryptonite, the two pregnant teens graduated with high honors, their bellies protruding like Jiffy Pop® popcorn, each proudly wearing a gold National Honor Society pin.

While at the time I didn't think so, thirty years later, I realize how honorable these graduates were.

Over the past 20 years doing urban youth ministry in Chicago, I've dealt with teen pregnancy more than I'd like to admit. It comes with the territory, along with potholes and graffiti. I've seen more girls end up with baby carriages than college diplomas; dropping out of school goes hand-in-hand with pregnancy most of the time.

But as I learned in my one-stoplight town, it's not just a city problem. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, three out of 10 girls become pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Some segments of the population experience higher pregnancy rates, such as Latinos, where an estimated one in two girls will get pregnant.<sup>1</sup>

So what do you do as a youth leader? There are several ways to help.

## Understand Why Teens Get Pregnant

Girls aren't getting pregnant for just one reason any more than Eve ate an apple to get her Five-A-Day. Multiple factors from hormones to low self-esteem play a role in why so many girls choose to get pregnant. Taking time to uncover the real reasons a girl got pregnant will provide valuable insights on how to reach out to her. Here are a few:

- Want someone to love.
- Secure a relationship.
- Have a reason to leave a bad home situation and move somewhere else.
- Fit in with friends.
- A child will force her to grow up.
- Her mother was a teen mom.

## Infuse the Love of Christ into Your Youth

Your teens are privy to places you'll never be, from online chat rooms to school cafeterias. The more they see a pregnant teen through Jesus' eyes, the more of Jesus she will see in return. Make it your priority to get your teens to talk to – not gossip about – the pregnant teen. Challenge them with tough questions, like *Can teens make good parents?* and *What would Jesus say about Jamie Lynn Spears?*



## Don't Confuse the Messin' with the Blessin'

Though some might view a bulging belly as billboard for sin, be sure to thank the pregnant teen for choosing life. While abortion numbers have decreased, there were still over a million in the US last year, making it a lot more common medical procedure than a tonsillectomy. So let

## Or Bring Church to Her

The Bible is full of stories of moms who had it tough, so why not share them with the teen mom in a casual setting? Start with Jochebed. She was the young mother who gave her son Moses up for adoption by placing him in a basket in a river. Or the world's most famous teen mom: Mary. Keeping it casual – along with

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the pregnant teen know she made the right choice (by not terminating her pregnancy), even if sex before marriage wasn't a good choice.

## Challenge Teens to be Ruth

If you can't remember the lowdown, Ruth and Naomi is a story of BFF (best friends forever) in the Bible. Ruth stuck by Naomi's side through some pretty rough stuff, from famine to the death of loved ones. The pregnant teen is going through some rough stuff as well, from drama at home to being the center of gossip in the lunch room. So challenge teens to be an unconditional friend who'll stick around after the baby shower is over.

## Invite Her to Church

Organize a special outreach service for teen moms. You might want to involve other area churches, crisis pregnancy centers, or even let local schools know what you are doing. Invite a former teen mom to share her story, describing how the only thing harder than being a teen mom is being a teen mom that doesn't know Christ. Bend the rules this one night—allow the teen parents to bring their babies. Make sure you have extra hands and diapers on hand!

connecting the Bible to relevant issues – can help her rethink her faith.

## Get to Know your Local CPC

Many Crisis Pregnancy Centers offer support groups to moms who choose life. So instead of birthing your own teen mom group, partner with your local CPC to help with existing programs. You can sponsor a car wash in which the proceeds buy diapers or other supplies for the center. In exchange, the CPC can sponsor a seminar on abstinence in your youth center.

## Work with High Schools

While the two graduates at my high school beat the odds, **the majority of teen moms never finish high school.** Offering daycare can get tricky, since you have to be licensed. But by offering free tutoring or babysitting, you can detour a lot of red tape and still help the teen mom stay in school. Let your local high school know about your plans. Teens who would never step inside a church will show up for tutoring to help them finish schooling. Maybe they can graduate with a coveted National Honor Society pin. You never know. ↻



## Ginger Sinsabaugh MacDonald

has survived multiple teen pregnancies during twenty years of urban youth ministry. Her experience can help you. Life After Birth Bible Studies for Teen Moms and other helps are available at her website: [www.TastyFaith.com](http://www.TastyFaith.com).

<sup>1</sup> Teen Pregnancy Data supplied by *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*.

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