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Teen Parents and Major Social Institutions

Impacting One Another

Young single parents have been a scandalous bunch for a long time. There are laws against premarital sex, derogatory words for children of unwed mothers, and that family is marked and is looked at differently from then on. The teen pregnancy rate has declined in the last few years, but the issue presented by these young parents is still one that cannot be ignored. The major institutions in their lives are the school, the church, and the community, and they each have an effect on the parents as well as the parents having an effect on the institutions.

When a young girl finds herself to be pregnant and decides to keep the baby, there is so much that goes on in her mind, but one of the first things she may think of is how her peers will think about her after they find out. Their relationships change forever. She may feel lonely because of the secret she is keeping, and if she does not have those great friends that stick with her, life can be much more difficult for her. There is a lot of pressure on this young person. She is in school and expected to get good grades, she is a new mother, and she is taking parenting classes. Even getting ready for school in the mornings requires more effort, with teen parents required to remember both their own school supplies and their babies' supplies for the day, including formula, baby food, diapers and wipes (Brown).

However, schools are beginning to recognize the need that the new parents have. Schools all over the country are providing parenting classes and day care for their teens.

The schools are also proving on site day care. The parenting classes are usually about both infants and toddlers and teach proper discipline, interaction, socialization, and what is developmentally important for their children. The classes also teach the parents self-sufficiency, so that they will be able to support themselves. A major theme in the classes is that graduation is still possible and well worth striving for. If teen moms stay in school after the baby is born, they are almost as likely to graduate from high school (73%) as their peers who are not parents (77%). If teen mothers drop out of school when the baby is born, only half will return (Grime). Interestingly, students who have decided to finish their education for their child's sake improve their grades and behave better. They grow up quickly, because they need to for their child. It not only keeps the mothers in high school, but encourages them to go on to college as well as working to break the cycle of teen pregnancy. In spite of the situations they find themselves in, the teens have not lost their focus. Several are on the verge of graduating high school and have goals and dreams for the future. "I honestly think that it's the best thing that ever happened to me. Now I work 10 times harder," (Clark). The rewards for the adults that help these girls through this transition are immeasurable. Many girls graduate and go to college or to a well paying job. One person put it this way, "It's really nice to see the girls grow and amazing to see that we do makes a difference," she said. "We'll bump into (former students) at Wal-Mart, and they tell us their kids are in grammar school and they're married. Then they give us a hug and say, 'We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you."'

The church can be a large part in the life of a young mother if she wants them to be. If the mother is not religious, she may never receive assistance from a church. The mother may also feel ashamed of the wrong she has committed and would want to hide

from the church. However, if the girl knows God's grace, then she can repent of her sins and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). There are many churches that are willing and able to offer the same kind of assistance and support to teen mothers as any other organization would. There are many church organizations that offer pregnancy testing and counseling, pregnancy education, adoption, parenting and abstinence; clothing for both mother and baby; referrals for medical care, social services, legal aid, adoption and foster care as well as presentations to schools, churches, and youth groups on teen pregnancy and abstinence (Miami). Churches can also offer a place to talk about spirituality, forgiveness, baptism for their new baby. Most non-profit organizations are not allowed to discuss religion.

The young mothers might also be worried about what the church will think about the new baby. They may be thinking that because it was conceived out of wedlock that the church will refuse to baptize it, or will look at it differently than any other child. The church is full of people, and people are sinful and make mistakes and judgments. However, scripturally, that is not how we should behave toward the young mother or to her child. All people are born as sinful beings that need forgiveness. God has provided a way (through Holy Baptism) for children to be cleansed from sin and forgiven. God also makes it clear in His Word that all children are precious and highly valued in His sight and are to be regarded as a blessing (Psalm 127; Matt. 19:14) (LCMS). Looking through this perspective, even if some members of the church put down or condemn the mother or child, they still have the love of God and forgiveness with them. Something the church may already do, but should if they do not, is to make sure that the mother forms a support system for herself with other young mothers from the church in a parenting class or Bible

study, so that she can receive advice and support from other like-minded religious women.

The community is impacted greatly by a young mother. Legally, a new family is formed and there are more taxes to pay. Socially, circles of friends and neighbors need to shift to adjust to this change in their lives. Social services might add this new family to their list of clients. The daycares and preschools can also look forward to a new child to teach and look after.

There are many non profit and charitable organizations that offer services to pregnant teenagers and young mothers. As with religious organizations, these places in the community offer many classes and services as well as some basic medical services. Here are some services offered by one organization: Pregnancy tests, Early obstetrical ultrasound, STI (sexually transmitted infections) Screening, Pregnancy options counseling, Maternity and Baby supplies, Childbirth Education classes, Parenting classes, Community referrals for medical care, legal assistance, housing, and Post Abortion Recovery assistance. Some of the classes offered are The First Trimester, Prenatal Care, Nutrition, Your Developing Baby, Smoking, Ultrasound, Bonding with Your Baby, Your Changing Body, The Second Trimester, A Look at Adoption, Reducing the Risk of SIDS, Amazing Talents of the Newborn, The Third Trimester, Getting Ready for Baby, Newborn Care, Crying, Colic, and Sleep, The First Years Last Forever, Safe & Healthy Environment, Parent Child Relationship, Self-Esteem, Car Seat Safety, Discipline with Love, Preventing Child Molestation, Accidents & Illness, Childbirth Education (labor, delivery & post-partum), Single Parenting, Toilet Training, and Sex, Love, Relationships (Crisis). Most of that information could be offered at any place, but community

organizations seem to be more pro-choice oriented and religious organizations tend to be more pro-life oriented. Even so, the community offers lots of great services for pregnant teens.

Young women who are expecting a baby before society says they should have one should expect a lot of stress in their life. With a strong support system from their school, they can still reach many of their goals and become very responsible young adults. The church can also help them cope with their transitions and also sometimes runs clinics and centers with a religious background for pregnant teens. The community offers a very wide range of classes, and resources for the young mothers and helps take care of them for as long as they need it. With so many places of support, these young women can make the transition to being a mother with all the help she could ask for and grow as a person as well.

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