

Need to Know Series:
Pregnancy and Parenting
Issues for Youth in Care



Youth In Progress

New York State Foster Care
Youth Leadership Advisory Team

“The mission of Youth In Progress is to enhance and advance the lives of today’s and tomorrow’s youth by supporting their sense of self and responsibility. To do this, we pledge to educate everyone involved in the various systems Youth In Progress members represent to the realities of this experience.”

Pregnancy Planning

Take some time to think about whether or not you want to have a baby some day, and when it would be best for you to do that in your life. If you plan ahead, you will have a better chance of finishing school and meeting your work and career goals. To find a family planning site in your area, you can go to the Department of Health website, www.health.state.ny.us/community/pregnancy/family_planning/program_sites.htm or ask your caseworker, facility case manager or community case manager to help you find a family planning site near you.

Consent and Confidentiality

You have the right to give consent (say yes or no) for your prenatal (pregnancy) care. You don't need to ask your parents or any other adult for their consent to get the care and supportive services you may need. Information about your prenatal care which you have consented to cannot be given to anyone without your permission.

Pregnancy Testing

If you think you may be pregnant, you need to know for sure. You can get tested by your health care provider or by an Obstetrician-Gynecologist (a doctor who specializes in female health), healthcare clinic, or a family planning clinic like Planned Parenthood. You can ask your caregiver, caseworker or, if you are in residential placement with OCFS, you can ask your facility case manager or community case manager where to go for testing.

Options for Pregnant Teens

If you are pregnant, you will have to decide what to do. You are not required to tell others about your pregnancy, but it might help you to talk to an adult you trust.

As a teen parent – both teen mothers and fathers – you have the right to:

- parent your baby;
- live in the most family-like setting available;
- physical and legal custody of your baby – your baby should not be found dependent (relying on someone else for support) just because you are in care;
- have an attorney to represent you if the child welfare agency files a petition to have your baby found dependent; and
- visitation if you are not living with your baby.



Your caseworker is required to give you information about family planning clinics that provide counseling. There you can talk about your needs and options such as:

- having your baby with you in foster care;
- what happens when the mother and her baby are in foster care, but they don't live together;
- the possibility of a relative taking care of your baby while you are in foster care;
- the mother and baby being cared for in group homes or SILPs (Supervised Independent Living Programs);
- giving your baby up for adoption; or
- terminating your pregnancy.

If you are totally unable to care for your newborn, you may anonymously and safely leave your baby with a responsible person at a safe location such as a hospital, police station or fire station. (*Handbook for Youth in Foster Care*, p. 39-40)

If you are in residential placement with OCFS, you will be counseled by the appropriate facility staff regarding your options. You will be apprised of all possible options available to you prior to making any final decisions about your pregnancy. You will receive counseling by your facility case manager or community case manager on options such as:

- establishing an appropriate guardian for your infant;
- consulting with your family;
- accessing a religious representative of your faith;
- obtaining information to assist you in deciding whether or not to terminate or maintain your pregnancy; and
- receiving parenting skills classes on how to take care of your baby, and deciding if you would like the father of your child to participate in such instruction, if appropriate. (*NYS Division of Youth Policy Manual, Pregnancy & Contraception*, July 13, 1988, and *NYSOCFS, Resident Manual, Limited, Non-secure Facilities*, p. 6, January, 2007)



Supports for Parenting Teens

Daycare or child care is important, so take time to choose a program that will provide a safe and friendly place that will help your baby learn and develop. You are the best judge of which program will meet your needs and your baby's. Ask your caseworker, facility case manager or community case manager to help you locate the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCRR) in your county, which can help you find child care.

Community Health Workers help pregnant and parenting teens with a lot of things, like assisting you and your caseworker or foster parent with: applying for services such as Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC); completing your high school education; and selecting child care. They can help you understand how babies and children develop so you can take better care of your baby. Ask your caseworker to help you locate a community health worker in your area.

For youth in residential placement, community care staff will arrange for community services for pregnant adolescents who are supervised in the Community Care Program. Plans for your health care and parenting training will be an essential element of your service plan while in the program.

County/State/Federal Programs for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

WIC stands for Women, Infants and Children and is a special federal food program that provides nutritious foods, milk, juice, formula and other items to low-income pregnant or breastfeeding moms, infants, and children up to age 5. It also provides health education and support during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Child Health Plus is a health insurance plan for eligible children in New York State. Your child may be eligible to join either Children's Medicaid or Child Health Plus. Both are available through a number of providers throughout the state.

Food stamp benefits can help you feed your family and put healthy food on the table. Food stamps are monthly benefits that can be used to purchase food at authorized retail food stores.

Medicaid is a program for New Yorkers who cannot afford to pay for medical care. All youth in care are eligible for Medicaid.

Early Intervention Program (EIP) offers services to parents with babies or toddlers with disabilities.



Ask your caseworker, facility case manager, or community case manager to help you find programs in your area and get help applying for assistance.

Parenting Responsibilities

The Father's Role

Children need their fathers. Adolescent pregnancy is not just a concern for teenage girls. The teenage boy who is the father may want to share equally in responsibility for his baby. The father's need for parenting information and services is no less important.

A father's involvement with his child helps the child feel good and secure. The mother may need help and support from the father, too. If you are about to become a father, you have certain rights and responsibilities to see and help take care of your baby.

You may need to establish paternity at the hospital or through Family Court to prove you are the father. Tell them that you want to give your baby good care and you want to learn how. Ask questions, take parenting classes, and work with your baby's mother. There is also more information on the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance website (www.otda.state.ny.us) on father's rights and responsibilities.

Both parents are responsible for the care and support of their child.

Child Support

Noncustodial teen parents (parents who do not have legal rights and responsibility for raising the child) must pay child support. Courts determine the amount of support a teen parent has to pay – regardless of your age or if the custodial parent gets married to someone else. Child support includes cash payments, health insurance for the child, and payments for child care.

Keeping Your Baby Safe

Here are some suggestions on how to help provide for the safety of your baby.

- 🌀 Learn about babies before you have one by taking classes to help you learn how to take care of them – what to feed them, how to change their diapers, how to dress and bathe them, how to take their temperature, and how to safely play with them.



- 🌀 Make sure your baby sees a doctor or nurse on a regular basis and that you bring the baby in for immunizations (baby shots—what your baby needs for protection against serious childhood diseases) on schedule.
- 🌀 Always use a rear-facing infant car seat that is properly secured in the back seat (preferably in the middle of the back seat) when taking a baby in a car.
- 🌀 Before bathing a baby, test the water temperature to make sure it is not too hot.
- 🌀 NEVER leave your baby alone in a tub of water, on a changing table, bed, sofa or chair, or with a young child or pet.
- 🌀 Babies are safest when they sleep alone, on their backs.
- 🌀 To avoid choking, do not feed your baby chunks of food like grapes or hot dogs. Keep small toy parts out of your baby's reach.

What to Do When a Baby Cries

Babies cry to let you know what they need. It doesn't mean that they are being bad or are angry with you. Here are some suggestions on what to check for if your baby is crying. Is your baby:

- 🌀 hungry?
- 🌀 too hot or too cold?
- 🌀 in need of a diaper change?
- 🌀 sick or having a fever?
- 🌀 needing to burp after eating?

If your baby is still crying after checking the above, try these tips to soothe him or her:

- 🌀 gently rock your baby;
- 🌀 sing or talk to your baby;
- 🌀 turn on some music, which can calm a baby;
- 🌀 take your baby for a walk in the stroller; or
- 🌀 lay your baby on his or her back and gently rub the baby's stomach. This may help your baby feel better.

If nothing seems to work, put your baby in a safe place, take a deep breath, and count to ten and take a break in another room. Remember, sometimes babies just need to cry. Call a friend during a time like this for support to help you through it. You should call your doctor if you think your baby might be sick.



NEVER Shake a Baby. Shaking a baby can cause serious injury and even death. Make sure everyone who watches your baby knows ways to calm him or her when he or she cries and knows to never shake the baby.

Parental Stress

Teen parents can experience feelings of being overwhelmed, of not liking their baby, wanting to get rid of the baby, feeling like running away or leaving the baby by itself to get a break. Even if you have feelings like these, **NEVER leave a baby alone.** Call or get help from a trusted adult or friend. Take your baby for a walk. Find other parents of babies to talk to. Ask your caseworker, facility case manager or community case manager for help.

After having a baby, you might experience “after-baby blues” where you might feel good one day and depressed the next. Eating healthy foods, getting plenty of rest, drinking lots of water, and getting exercise like walking your baby are ways to help you through the blues. If the blues don't go away and you continue to feel depressed, **be sure to get help from a doctor.**

References

Handbook for Youth in Foster Care, NYS OCFS, p. 39-40, 2007, available at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/publications/Pub5028.pdf

NYS OCFS website: www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/

www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/news/2008/2008_05_08_babiesSleepSafest.asp

NYS DOH website: www.health.state.ny.us/community/infants_children/child_health/parents.htm

www.health.state.ny.us/community/infants_children/child_health/welcome.htm

Resident Manual, Limited, Non-secure Facilities, NYS OCFS, p. 6, January 2007

NYS Division for Youth, Policy Manual, PPM 3243.37 Pregnancy & Contraception, July 13, 1988.

What Unwed Fathers Need to Know..., NYS OCFS, May 2008, available at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/publications/Pub5040text.asp

NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance: www.otda.state.ny.us



For More Information

New York State Department of Health Growing Up Healthy Hotline – Provides info and referral for pregnancy planning, prenatal care, WIC, and related topics.
1.800.522.5006 TTY 1.800.655.1789.

Food Stamps: call 1.800.342.3009 press “1” for Food Stamps, or in New York City, call 1.877.472.8411.

NYS OCFS Office of the Ombudsman: Phone: 1.888.219.9818, or go online at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/Ombudsman/OmbudsmanComplaintForm.asp

For additional help, check the New York State *Handbook for Youth In Foster Care* written by Youth In Progress. Get a copy from your county or agency, or go online at www.youthinprogress.org.

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