

Preventing Teen Pregnancy- Start Early!

In light of the news that Britney Spears' 16 year old sister Jamie Lynne Spears is pregnant, I thought it would be a good time to address the issue of teen pregnancy. The statistics on teen pregnancy are quite eye opening and suggest that parents should be involved in educating their daughters about sex at an early age and remain as nonjudgemental as possible to keep communication open. Parents of teen boys should also discuss the possibilities of teen pregnancy and provide them with education about prevention and protection at an early age (as early as 13).

- Nearly half of all teens between the ages of 15 and 19 have had sex.
- Over three quarters of teenage girls report that their first sexual experience was with a steady boyfriend, fiance, husband or someone they live with.
- Ten percent of women ages 18-24, who had sex before age 20 report that their first sexual experience was involuntary.
- Every year almost three quarters of a million teens between 15 and 19 years old become pregnant. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, it is important for parents to have a close relationship with their teens and it is never too late to reach out to a child despite a strained relationship. Some helpful tips for parents to decrease the chances of their daughters becoming pregnant include:
 - Parents should discuss their own thoughts about teen sexual activity and have open conversations with teens about this. Ask them questions not about what they are doing, but what they think about what others are doing. Do not judge, but explore together.
 - Try to remain as nonjudgemental and supportive of your teen as possible in order to keep the lines of communication open. Tell them if you are scared of something without being manipulative or nagging.
 - Ask them if they are afraid of anything or curious about sex. Answer their questions honestly.
 - Discourage your teen from dating men who are older than her until she is over 21. There are many obvious reasons for this, one being the statistics of alcohol use and rape.
 - Put teens on birth control pill or other oral contraceptives if they are sexually active, while also emphasizing the use of condoms (to prevent the spread of STDs).
 - Stay close to your children's friends and their parents. Discuss what your kids are doing and if there are problems how they can be addressed.
 - Discourage steady dating before the age of 16. Group activities are more age appropriate and less likely to encourage sexual experimentation.
 - Discuss what teen pregnancy looks like, how it can impact a teen's life, how it can impact the future and how your child would not be happy under these circumstances. Have this conversation often.
 - Be aware of the media that your child is exposed to (TV shows, movies, video games, magazines and internet all have mature content that may be inappropriate for young adults).
 - Tell your children that you love them often! The closer teens feel to their parents, the less likely they will be to look for love elsewhere (such as from a sexual partner or baby) and the happier your family will be. The most important thing you can do for your kids is be involved, loving and supportive. As much as they would like you to believe the opposite, teens need to feel loved and watched over. If they do not get the attention they need from you, they will try to find it from someone else, including a baby.