

# Working with Parents of Teens

Parents are the primary influence on a child’s socialization and development,<sup>1</sup> and there is evidence that a strong parent-child bond has a positive effect on a teen’s decisions about sexual activity. This tip sheet describes types of parent involvement and provides concrete examples for how teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) program providers can engage parents.

## Parent Involvement Defined

Joyce Epstein, PhD, in partnership with a team at Johns Hopkins University, developed a model of parent involvement. The Epstein framework helps us see that involving parents includes much more than getting permission for program participation or helping at a bake sale. It includes six types of involvement and has application for those doing TPP work in and outside schools. The following table lists the six types of involvement and provides example activities that TPP programs can implement in their communities.

Type of Involvement	Example Activities for TPP Providers
<b>Parenting:</b> Build parenting skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer parenting classes on subjects of interest, such as adolescent development and how to talk with your adolescent about sex.</li> <li>• Use social and print media to disseminate parenting tips on topics such as enhancing parent-child communication,<sup>2</sup> healthy teen relationships, and monitoring use of social media.</li> <li>• Compile parenting resource materials on the topics listed above and house them at convenient locations or create a mobile system for easy exchange.</li> <li>• Provide access and orient parents to online resources (see page 3 for a list).</li> </ul>
<b>Communicating:</b> Establish open and effective two-way communication between providers and parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create and disseminate newsletters and other communications. Feature topics such as dating violence and communicating parental values about sexuality.</li> <li>• Use a variety of communication methods—including print, electronic, and personal phone calls—in all communications.</li> <li>• Use language interpreters and translate written materials as needed.</li> <li>• Open communication for parents to ask questions, using a variety of methods.</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteering:</b> Offer a variety of ways for parents to “help out.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite parents into the program to provide advice or share experience related to adulthood preparation subjects. For example, they can share their career experiences, offer job-shadowing time, or serve as financial literacy mentors.</li> <li>• Seek help with clerical tasks and room setup and takedown.</li> <li>• Ask parents to help recruit other parents or organize an open house or agency tour.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning at Home:</b> Engage parents in homework assignments to reinforce important messages and enhance parent-child communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign homework activities that foster parent-child communication; prompt parents to share their values, hopes, and expectations; and provide both youth and parents a structured opportunity to practice positive communication skills.</li> <li>• Encourage parents (including fathers) to look for other opportunities, aside from homework, to discuss topics related to sexual health.</li> <li>• Give youth and parents flexibility with homework assignments and due dates.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Parent refers to a child or teen’s adult primary caregiver.

<sup>2</sup> For more on parent-child communication as an adulthood preparation subject, visit <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/programs/tpp/adult-prep-tip-sheet.pdf>.

**Decision-Making:** Include parents as meaningful participants in decision-making entities.

- Form a parent advisory board or fill some advisory seats with parents.
- Seek the input of existing groups with parent representation, such as school booster clubs or church group advisory committees, or conduct focus groups.
- Involve parents in selecting TPP programs and setting policies; provide ways for them to participate that do not demand a physical presence.
- Train parents to be advocates for sexual health programs and policies.

**Collaborating with the Community:** Connect parents with resources in the community and with community service opportunities for the family.

- Help parents connect with needed services in the community (e.g., human, health, civic, career, recreational).
- Invite community organizations to support aspects of your program, including those related to adulthood preparation subjects (e.g. financial literacy, education and career success, and healthy life skills).
- Develop a family-based service learning project to support needs in the community and to enhance parent-child connectedness.

## Tips for Reaching Parents

Engaging parents can be challenging, especially as children get older and gain more independence. Parents experience competing demands for their time; may have varying degrees of comfort in different social settings, such as schools; may not feel a sense of concern or comfort with sexual health topics; and may hear from their adolescents that adolescents do not want parents involved. Here are strategies for overcoming some of these challenges that programs can consider while developing their outreach efforts:

1. Go to the parents; do not expect them to come to you. Going to parents can include workplaces; places of worship; service locations, such as laundromats, libraries, and community centers; and other common spaces, such as apartment complexes or parks.
2. Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who attend workshops or meetings. Use web-based and print media, as well as conference calls and audio recordings.
3. Host events at multiple times and varying hours to enable working parents to participate (e.g., lunch hour, evenings, weekends).
4. Host smaller events or incorporate facilitator-led small group breakouts into larger events to allow participant dialogue.
5. Offer incentives to help overcome barriers and boost motivation to attend, such as child-care, food, gifts, transportation, and easy parking (within grant guidelines).
6. Make all communications clear and understandable for all families. Consider parents who do not speak English, have low literacy skills, or have visual or hearing impairments.
7. Assure that all information provided is usable, culturally relevant, and shared in a way that shows sensitivity to differences in socioeconomic status. Use program facilitators who represent the population served.
8. Share your definition of parent involvement so that parents understand they can make a contribution in a wide variety of ways, not just by the traditional means of volunteering.
9. Use input from parents to plan efforts—whether gathered informally through casual conversations or formally by using a data collection instrument to learn what their needs and concerns are, what

barriers hinder involvement, and what logistics work best for them—and to reflect upon your services.

10. Market your program carefully to make it clear why it is important and how parents will benefit. Include something clever, fun or eye-catching.
11. Have parents recruit or disseminate information to other parents.
12. Celebrate parent involvement with individual and group recognitions.

## References

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[http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/terms\\_engagement2006.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/terms_engagement2006.pdf)

## Additional Online Resources for Providers

- Advocates for Youth: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home?task=view>
- Epstein's Framework for Six Types of Involvement: <http://www.cpirc.org/vertical/Sites/%7B95025A21-DD4C-45C2-AE37-D35CA63B7AD9%7D/uploads/%7B1310DD65-F94A-457D-A680-9EE824084458%7D.PDF>
- ETR Associates: <http://recapp.etr.org/recapp/documents/research/PCCInterventions.pdf>
- Healthy Teen Network: [http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC=%7BA2B78729-A265-4724-9402-9F6ACB6B0B49%7D](http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BA2B78729-A265-4724-9402-9F6ACB6B0B49%7D)
- SIECUS: [http://www.siecus.org/data/global/images/innovative\\_approaches.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/data/global/images/innovative_approaches.pdf)

## Online Resources for Parents

- Advocates for Youth: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/helping-parents-and-children-talk-psec>
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy: <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/parents/default.aspx>
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/>

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