

## TIP SHEET

Personal Responsibility  
Education Program

# Working with Parents of Teens

September 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Parents<sup>1</sup> are a primary influence on a child's socialization and development (Brauer & De Coster, 2015; Maccoby, 2000), and there is evidence that a strong parent-child relationship and communication are linked to delays in initiating sexual activity and reduced unprotected sex (Markham, et al. 2010). This tip sheet describes types of parent involvement in youth-serving programs and provides concrete examples for how Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) program providers can engage parents.

Engaging parents in youth-focused programming can be challenging, especially as children get older and become more independent. 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 they or other adolescents do not want parents involved. This tip sheet provides strategies for overcoming these challenges.



## TIPS FOR REACHING PARENTS

- Go to the parents; do not expect them to come to you. Try to reach parents at workplaces; places of worship; community locations, such as laundromats, libraries, and community centers; parent organizations; and other common spaces, such as apartment complexes or parks.
- Expand beyond biological or adoptive parents to foster parents, guardians, adult relatives, and trusted adults as you try to involve parents. Some adolescents do not live with their parents.
- 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 phone calls, video conferencing, or audio recordings.
- Host events at multiple times and varying hours to enable working parents to participate (e.g., lunch hour, evenings, weekends).

<sup>1</sup> "Parent" refers to a child or teen's adult primary caregiver, guardian, or other trusted adult.

- Host smaller events or incorporate facilitator-led small group breakouts into larger events to allow participant dialogue.
- Offer incentives to help overcome barriers and boost motivation to attend, such as child care, food, gifts, transportation, and easy parking (within grant guidelines).
- 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. Consider parents who prefer virtual events or communication and establish an online presence. Learn how to hold events via Zoom (or another platform parents are familiar with) and communicate through apps or a website with an online library housing short text (e.g., tip sheets) and video resources (e.g., presentations).
- Be sure that all information provided is usable, culturally relevant, gender neutral, 508-compliant, and shared in a way that shows sensitivity to differences in socioeconomic status. Use program facilitators who represent the population served.
- 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.
- Use input from parents to plan efforts—whether gathered informally through casual conversations or formally through a parent advisory board or by using a data collection instrument such as a survey—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.
- Market your program carefully to make it clear why it is important and how parents will benefit. Include clever, fun or eye-catching graphics and messages.
- Have parents recruit or disseminate information to other parents.
- Celebrate parent involvement with individual and group recognitions.
- Co-create with parents instead of lecturing to them, when possible.



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT DEFINED

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University developed a model of parent involvement in youth-serving organizations (Epstein et al., 2008) that highlights how involving parents extends well beyond getting permission for program participation or helping at a bake sale. This model includes six types of parent involvement and has applications for those doing APP work in and outside of schools. The following table lists the six types of involvement and provides example activities that APP programs can implement in their communities.

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT	EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITIES FOR TPP PROVIDERS
<p><b>Parenting:</b> Build parenting skills.</p>	<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, 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 (e.g., on your website, at the program) or create a mobile system (e.g., set up text alerts or a mobile app) for easy exchange.</li> <li>• Provide access and orient parents to online resources (see page 4).</li> <li>• For more intensive activities, consider using a curriculum like <a href="#">Families Talking Together</a>, which teaches parents effective communication skills, builds their relationships with their adolescent(s), and other parenting skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communicating:</b> Establish open and effective two-way communication between providers and parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess barriers parents face in engaging with youth-serving organizations and identify potential solutions. This can be done via formal or informal surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one conversations with parents. You could also have a small meeting or town hall with interested parents to learn more about their barriers and potential solutions.</li> <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 call—in all communications.</li> <li>• Use language interpreters and translate written materials as needed.</li> <li>• Create a space for parents to ask questions, using a variety of methods (e.g., encourage use of a chat page on your website, social media groups, email, phone or video calls, or in-person meetings).</li> <li>• Incorporate virtual methods (e.g., social media, a chat page on your website, mobile apps) to provide updates, connect parents with one another and program staff, and provide resources to increase parent engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Volunteering:</b> Offer a variety of ways for parents to contribute.</p>	<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. If allowable, providing snacks or light meals, depending on the time of day, can help get parents in the door.</li> </ul>

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT	EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITIES FOR TPP PROVIDERS
<p><b>Learning at Home:</b></p> <p>Engage parents in homework assignments to reinforce important messages and enhance parent-child communication.</p>	<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. Offer guidance to help parents with these activities (e.g., Sex is...DC's <a href="#">The Backpocket Sex Discussion Guide – Trusted Adult Edition</a>).</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>
<p><b>Decision-Making:</b></p> <p>Include parents as meaningful participants in decision-making entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a parent advisory board or invite parents to participate in school or program advisory groups.</li> <li>• Seek the input of existing groups with parent representation, such as school booster clubs or church group advisory committees, or conduct focus groups.</li> <li>• Involve parents in selecting APP programs and adulthood preparation subject topics, as well as setting policies; provide ways for them to participate that do not demand a physical presence.</li> <li>• Train parents to be advocates for sexual health programs and policies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Collaborating with the Community:</b></p> <p>Connect parents with resources in the community and with community service opportunities for the family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help parents connect with needed services in the community (e.g., human, health, civic, career, recreational).</li> <li>• Invite representatives of community organizations, including religious or spiritual leaders, to share resources and 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.</li> </ul>

## REFERENCES

- Brauer, J. R. & De Coster, S. (2015). Social relationships and delinquency: Revisiting parent and peer influence during adolescence. *Youth and Society*, 47(3), 374-394.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., Van Voorhis, F. L., Martin, C. S., Thomas, B. G., Greenfield, M. D., Hutchins, D., & Williams, K. J. (2008). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Third Edition*. Corwin Press.
- Maccoby, E. E. (2000). Parenting and its effects on children: On reading and misreading behavior genetics. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 1-27.
- Markham, C. M., Lormand, D., Gloppen, K. M., Peskin, M. F., Flores, B., Low, B., & House, L. D. (2010). Connectedness as a predictor of sexual and reproductive health outcomes for youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(3), S23-41.



## RESOURCES

### Additional Online Resources for Grantees:

- ASPE: [Involving Parents and Other Adults in Teen Pregnancy Prevention](#)
- [Epstein's Framework for Six Types of Involvement](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health](#).
- ETR Associates: Parent-Child Connectedness: [New Interventions for Teen Pregnancy Prevention](#)
- Healthy Teen Network: [Zooming, No Contact Deliveries, and Food Bank Drive-Throughs: Engaging Young Parents \(and Parents-to-Be!\) During A Pandemic](#)
- SIECUS: [Innovative Approaches to Increase Parent-Child Communication about Sexuality: Their Impact and Examples from the Field](#)
- OPA Brief: [Successful Approaches to Engage Parents in Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#)

### Resources on *The Exchange*:

- [Talking with Teens about Relationships and Sex](#)
- [Supporting Young Fathers' Engagement with Their Children](#)
- [Respecting and Honoring Tribal Youth](#)
- [Building Community Support for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention in Conservative Communities](#)
- [Tips for Virtually Engaging Parents and Caregivers](#)
- [Toolkit for Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Optimal Health Programming](#)
- For more on parent-child communication as an adulthood preparation subject, see [Teen Pregnancy Prevention State Personal Responsibility Education Program \(PREP\) Adulthood Preparation Subjects – Resource Guide](#)

### Online Resources for Parents:

- Sex is...DC: [The Backpocket Sex Discussion Guide – Trusted Adult Edition](#)
- Advocates for Youth: [Resources for parents and organizations that serve them](#)
- Power to Decide: [Resources for parents and organizations that serve them](#)
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America: [For Parents](#)

.....

This tip sheet was developed by Child Trends and ETR Associates, subcontractors to RTI International under contract # HHSP233201500039I Task 3, with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau

**Suggested citation:** Karberg, E., Manlove, J., Elnicki, J. A., & Taylor, J. A. 2021. Working with Parents of Teens. Washington, DC: Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.