

Health Starts Where We Live, Learn, Work, and Play

# Communicating Effectively about Social Determinants of Health that Impact Teen Pregnancy

Assisting Organizations to Address Social Determinants of Health that Impact Teen Pregnancy





## **INTEGRATING SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND STRATEGIES THROUGH COMMUNITYWIDE INITIATIVES**

As part of the President's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI), CDC is partnering with the federal Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)/Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) to reduce teenage pregnancy and address disparities in teen pregnancy and birth rates. The OASH/OAH is supporting public and private entities to fund medically accurate and age appropriate evidence-based or innovative program models to reduce teen pregnancy. The purpose of this program is to demonstrate the effectiveness of innovative, multicomponent, communitywide initiatives in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and births in communities with the highest rates, with a focus on reaching African American and Latino/Hispanic youth aged 15–19 years. A communitywide model is an intervention implemented in defined communities (specified geographic areas) applying a common approach with different strategies. Communitywide approaches will be tailored to the specified community, and will include broad-based strategies that reach a majority of youth in the community (i.e., through communication strategies and media campaigns); and intensive strategies reaching youth most in need of prevention programming (i.e., through implementation of evidence-based programs and improved links to services). Additional information is available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/TeenPregnancy>.

*This publication was made possible by Cooperative Agreement Number CDC-RFA-DP10-1009 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or HHS.*

### **Contact**

Myriam Hernandez Jennings,  
Project Director  
[mjennings@jsi.com](mailto:mjennings@jsi.com)  
617-482-9485 ext. 3772

As Americans, we tend not to think about health in terms of social factors, but more from a medical perspective. Talking about the concept of social determinants of health in a way that is understandable, meaningful, and credible is challenging, but can be accomplished.

**About This Tool:** This tool was adapted from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Vulnerable Populations Portfolio publication, "A New Way to Talk About The Social Determinants of Health"<sup>1</sup>. It provides tips and strategies to help raise awareness among stakeholders, including non-traditional stakeholders, and engage them in meaningful discussions related to the social determinants of health that impact teen pregnancy. These tips and strategies will help tailor communication messages to engage and resonate with your community.

The tool includes three sections:

1. Starting Conversations
2. Making Presentations
3. Messages that Motivate

When raising awareness about teen pregnancy and mobilizing diverse stakeholders, the tips and strategies offered in this tool can guide conversations, presentations, and messaging to more clearly communicate the issue of social determinants of health that impact teen pregnancy.

## What Are Social Determinants of Health?<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Social determinants of health are factors found where we live, learn, work, and play that increase or decrease our chance of a health outcome such as teen pregnancy.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Social determinants of health are the cultural, economic, environmental, and social conditions that influence health.
- ▶ Social determinants of health are why some people are healthier than others or why some people are not as healthy as they could be, genetics aside.

## I. Starting Conversations

The concept of social determinants of health is challenging to convey. The connection between social conditions and health is well established,<sup>4</sup> but the idea that social factors influence health outcomes, including teen pregnancy, may not resonate with everyone. The notion of social determinants of health can be illustrated by developing story narratives showcasing their impact on an individual's life, including how social factors may influence teen pregnancy.

For example:

- *Phylicia's mother and grandmother had their children when they were young. The family is close knit. Phylicia knows she does not have the money to go to college, and her marks are not high enough to qualify for a scholarship. Now is as good as any time to start a family. There is no reason to wait.*<sup>5</sup> Planning to attend college after high school is of the one factors associated with a lower risk of teen pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> Many teens become parents because they may not be able to envision another positive direction to their lives, or because they do not have concrete education or employment goals and opportunities that would convince them to delay parenthood.<sup>7</sup> Young people need clear connections and pathways to college or jobs that give them hope and a reason to stay in school and avoid pregnancy.<sup>7</sup>
- *Sarah's father does not drink often, but when he does, he drinks a lot and becomes abusive. Sarah remembers hiding in her closet when she was small, listening to him physically abuse her mother. Now she leaves and stays with friends if she thinks he will be drinking. She worries about her mother but mostly she dreams of a home with people who love and protect her. She wants to move out, have a baby, and start a loving home of her own.*<sup>5</sup> Higher quality family interactions, connectedness and relationship satisfaction has been shown to be a protective factor for adolescents and pregnancy avoidance while family dysfunction is a risk factor.<sup>8</sup> Research indicates that family dysfunction has long and negative health consequences for women during the adolescent years, the childbearing years, and beyond.<sup>9</sup>
- *Safia has had trouble with teachers since middle school, and now that she is 16 she has quit. She has never liked school and she usually thought of it as a waste of time. No one has ever encouraged her to continue her education. She and her boyfriend do not always use contraception. If Safia gets pregnant they will not be too concerned.*<sup>5</sup> The relationship between academic failure and teen pregnancy is very strong and this relationship works both ways. Teen pregnancy often has a negative impact on educational attainment.<sup>6</sup> And, school achievement, attendance, and involvement helps reduce the risk of teen pregnancy; staying in school and getting an education helps prevent teen pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> "Important aspects of school engagement include grades, test scores, class participation, homework completion, and a perception of support and connectedness with teachers and administrators. Planning to attend college after high school is also associated with a lower risk of teen pregnancy."<sup>6</sup>

Beliefs and values differ among groups of people and so do views on what it means to be healthy. The context in which we live and the beliefs and values we hold shape what we hear, think, say, and do. To communicate effectively about social determinants of health, a common understanding and clear language are crucial. The steps below describe how to initiate conversations with community partners and stakeholders to establish an understanding of health and the social determinants of health that impact teen pregnancy.

### ***Discuss What It Means To Be A Healthy Teen***

*Pose the following questions to your audience to initiate a conversation on what health means.*

**Question:** **What does health mean? What does good health mean? Poor health?**

**Question:** **What does it mean to be a healthy teen?**

**Question:** **What influences the health of our teens?**

**Question:** **Why are some teens healthier than others?**

*Remember:* Generally, we tend to think about health and illness in medical terms. We may think about going to the doctor's office, the hospital, or the pharmacy, and think about the role of health care on health. We may think about the importance of prevention, but tend not to think about how social factors impact health.

When primed however, we may recognize social factors and see how they have the potential to influence health, and particularly teen health.

*Prime the audience using the following questions to get them thinking about social determinants of health.*

**Question:** **What about household income? How does household income influence the health of our teens?**

**Question:** **What about education? How does education influence the health of our teens?**

**Question:** **What about neighborhood? How does neighborhood influence the health of our teens?**

## ***Choose Your Words Wisely***

Words can be unifying or divisive, so be sure to find common ground in the language used to talk about social determinants. Using unsuitable words can quickly lead to a gridlock in the conversation or lessen the impact of your communication efforts. For example, terms often used to describe health disparities, such as “unjust” or “unfair”, can act as a barrier to people accepting the concept of social determinants of health.<sup>1</sup>

As you facilitate discussion, be sure to use the following language, which is less likely to alienate people, when talking about social determinants of teen health:

- Fair chance for good teen health
- Opportunities for teens to make better health choices
- Giving a fair shot in all communities, to all teens
- Enabling teens to choose the right path
- Giving teens tools to make better decisions
- Raising the bar for all teens

## ***Use Phrases That Work***

There is no single word or fact that will suddenly transform how people think about health and the social factors that play a role in teen health. However, some phrases can be used as a proxy for the phrase “social determinants of health”. The following phrases have been shown to work well in describing and helping people understand the concept of social determinants of health. The use of common, values-driven language that includes lifestyle references an audience can relate to and connect with may be very useful. Focusing on the solution instead of the problem, and using phrases that include the notion of personal responsibility are also recommended.

Frame the idea of social determinants of health by using the ‘Phrases That Work’ listed below as you talk and facilitate discussion. By incorporating these phrases into your discussion they will help people to begin thinking about and talking about social factors that influence teen health.

### ***Phrases That Work***

- Adolescent health starts—long before illness—in our homes, communities, schools, and jobs.
- All young people should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education, or racial/ethnic background.
- Where a teen lives or works shouldn’t be hazardous to their health.
- A teen’s opportunity for health starts long before the need for medical care.
- Health begins where teens live, learn, work, and play.
- The opportunity for health begins in our families, neighborhoods, schools, and jobs.

## II. Making Presentations

To translate the concept of social determinants of teen health into dialogue that engages stakeholders, it is important to know the audience, capture their attention, and establish common ground.

### *Know Your Audience*

Identify who the stakeholder audience is and determine what their perspectives and worldviews are. By being aware of who the audience is, the best ways to communicate can be determined using phrasing and language that appeals to them.

- People that view health as a right tend to view equality as both a solution to social determinants of health (giving everyone equal services and access) and a desired outcome (equal levels of health across all communities).<sup>1</sup>
- People that view health as an individual choice may value personal responsibility and view equality, including equality in health, as unrealistic and unfair.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking to these different perspectives during the presentation can connect and appeal to a broader audience.

### *Capture Their Attention*

Start your presentation using one strong and compelling fact or statement to pique stakeholder interest in the idea of social determinants of health. Present a surprising point that arouses interest, attention, and emotion. For example: Teens who drop out of school are four times more likely to become pregnant than their peers who stay in school.<sup>10,11</sup>

#### **Checklist of words and phrases to AVOID using:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equal, equality, or equalizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Immoral          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outrage                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating balance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Level the playing field        | <input type="checkbox"/> Unconscionable   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Unjust/injustice |

\*These words and phrases can be divisive when discussing the idea of social determinants of health that impact teen pregnancy.

## ***Establish Common Ground***

Deeply held beliefs about social factors make communicating on social determinants of health across a broad spectrum of stakeholders sensitive and complex. Establishing shared language and a common understanding of the idea of social determinants of health can help increase stakeholder receptiveness around the issue.

Use the following tips to establish common ground across stakeholder groups. Frame social determinants of health using “journey,” “connection,” and “resource” related language and metaphors.

- Use language of fairness and choice (avoid using language of equality).
  - ▶ Lack of options, choices, tools, resources, or opportunities in poor neighborhoods.
- Use language that includes the notion of personal responsibility.
  - ▶ Choosing better paths, moving in the right direction, or enabling the pursuit of health goals.
- Avoid politically charged or religious language.

## **III. Messages that Motivate**

Effective messaging is critical to translating the concept of social determinants of health to stakeholders. Language and messages need to convey the idea of social determinants of health in a way that is meaningful and convincing to a variety of people.

**How to use messages:** Once developed, messages can be used and disseminated in a variety of formats. Messages can be communicated to an audience using print, audio, and video. Many options are available for disseminating messages, such as posters, brochures, the web, television, social media, or public service announcements. Decide how to best distribute messaging based on your intended audience.

### ***Craft Understandable and Compelling Messages***

Develop messages to make clear and compelling points about the role of social determinants of health. Many of the tips and strategies offered in the previous sections, “Starting Conversations” and “Making Presentations”, apply to messaging as well. The “Tips for Messaging on Social Determinants of Health” summarizes guidance for designing messages that resonate with your audience and make the concept of social determinants of teen health more tangible.

***It takes a village to raise a child.***

## Tips for Messaging on Social Determinants of Health

The callout boxes offer examples of messages one might use when communicating about teen pregnancy and social determinants of health.

- ▶ **Use common, values-driven and emotionally compelling language.**  
Academic phrases such as “social determinants of health” or “social factors” often do not make sense to or engage the audience.
- ▶ **Include beliefs already accepted within the message.**  
Prime the audience with a message or idea they already believe, to help make the concept of social determinants that follows more credible.

*All teens deserve the opportunity to have education and career goals and the opportunity to reach them.*

- ▶ **Use just one strong and compelling fact within a message.**  
More than one or two facts within a message can be overwhelming, confusing, and lessen the impact of the message.

*Teens who are in school and doing well are more likely to protect themselves against negative sexual health outcomes, such as teen pregnancy.<sup>5</sup>*

*Education. Employment. Good health. Family involvement. Self-esteem. It's the total fabric that is important.<sup>5</sup>*

► **Identify the problem and offer potential solutions.**

Include positive guidance or specific solutions to increase acceptance of the message.

*"Askable parents" and "askable adults" play a complementary role in helping youth make responsible decisions about their sexual behavior.<sup>12</sup>*

► **Incorporate the role of personal responsibility.**

Making choices that lead to good health is important to most all Americans. Include this notion within messages to make the idea of society having a role in ensuring that healthy choices are available more acceptable.

*When kids are empowered with information and stimulated by hope for the future, it has a contraceptive effect.<sup>5</sup>*

## **MESSAGES THAT WORK**

Use these key messages, which include the tips and strategies presented in this tool, to communicate with stakeholders in a clear and compelling way.

### ***Messaging on the Importance of the Social Determinants of Health***

***Where we live, learn, work, and play can have a greater impact on how long and well we live than medical care.***

- ▶ *Our zip code may be more important to our health than our genetic code.*
- ▶ *A person's health and chances of becoming sick and dying early are greatly influenced by powerful social factors such as education, income, nutrition, housing, and neighborhoods.*
- ▶ *There is more to health than health care.*

### ***Messaging a Call to Action***

- ▶ *Health care reform is essential, but improving the health of all Americans requires broadening our view beyond medical care.*
- ▶ *We must find ways to enable more people to lead healthy lives and avoid getting sick in the first place.*

### ***Ensure Quality Messaging***

When possible, involve your target audience in developing and disseminating messages to ensure that the messages meet their needs and speak to them. Check that the audience understands, accepts, and responds to the messages using the following checklist. When possible, test the messages with stakeholders. Ask them what appeals to them, and what does and does not resonate. Check for perceptions, understanding, and impact, and alter messages accordingly.

---

## CHECKLIST: ENSURING QUALITY MESSAGING<sup>13</sup>

### Are messages accurate?

- Messages were reviewed by a technical expert to ensure they are accurate.

### Are messages clear?

- Keep it short and simple—messages are clear, crisp, and easy to understand.
- Messages use plain language. They use as few technical terms as possible.

### Are messages and materials relevant to the audience?

- Message elements reach across groups and resonate broadly.
- Messages are in line with the culture and language of the audience. Images portray people that are similar, for example, in ethnicity or in dress, to the target audience.

### Are messages and materials consistent?

- All messages reinforce each other.
- All message and material elements have the same graphic identity (e.g., print materials use the same or compatible colors and typefaces).

### Are messages and materials appealing?

- Messages stand out and draw the audience's attention.
  - Materials are of high quality by local standards.
- 

## Conclusions

Raising awareness and understanding of the concept of social determinants of health is the first step to engaging stakeholders to address the social factors that impact teen pregnancy in their community. To effectively communicate the notion of social determinants of health and the influence of these determinants on health, including teen pregnancy, connections, messaging, and presentation are key. That is, establishing common ground and finding ways to connect with your audience will help to expand their view of health and have a better understanding of how social factors impact teen pregnancy.

To learn more about the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's work related to communicating about the social determinants of health visit their website at: <http://www.rwjf.org>

---

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *A New Way to Talk About Social Determinants of Health*. Copyright 2010 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- <sup>2</sup> Solar O, Irwin A. *A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health*. *Social Determinants of Health Discussion Paper 2 (Policy and Practice)*. World Health Organization. 2010.
- <sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. *Social Determinants of Health*. [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/) Accessed August 17, 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> SDH (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva, World Health Organization.
- <sup>5</sup> *Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Center and the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada. Teen Pregnancy Prevention: Exploring Out-of-School Approaches*. 2008
- <sup>6</sup> *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Education*. March 2010
- <sup>7</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. *KIDS COUNT Indicator Brief: Preventing Teen Births*. July 2003
- <sup>8</sup> Lesesne, C.A., Lewis, K.M., Fisher, D., Moore, C., Green, D., Wandersman, A. (2011). *Promoting Science-based Approaches Using Getting To Outcomes: Draft 2011*. Unpublished manual.
- <sup>9</sup> Guttmacher Institute. *Teen Pregnancy Risks Rises with Childhood Exposure to Family Strife. Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Vol. 36, no. 2 March/April 2004
- <sup>10</sup> Kirby D. *The impact of schools and school programs upon adolescent sexual behavior*. *J Sex Res*. 2002 Feb;39(1):27-33.
- <sup>11</sup> Manlove J. *The influence of high school dropout and school disengagement on the risk of school-age pregnancy*. *J Res Adolesc*. 1998;8(2):187-220.
- <sup>12</sup> Walker KE, Kotloff LJ. *Plain Talk: Addressing Adolescent Sexuality Through a Community Initiative; A Final Evaluation Report Prepared for The Annie E. Casey Foundation*. April 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Adapted from Salem, RM, Bernstein, J, and Sullivan, TM. "Tools for Behavior Change Communication." *INFO Reports*, No. 16. Baltimore, INFO Project, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. January 2008.

## About the Working with Diverse Communities Component

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) builds Part A Grantees' capacity to engage and serve diverse youth and youth in at-risk situations through teen pregnancy prevention programs, clinical services, and other partnerships that foster reproductive health equity. Because where youth live, learn, work, and play influences sexual and reproductive health behaviors, JSI assists grantees in raising awareness among community partners about the social determinants that have an impact on teen pregnancy and in creating feasible strategies to address them. This context, paired with evidence-based interventions that teach youth about pregnancy prevention and teen-friendly clinical services offers a holistic approach that actively engages communities in a process that supports and promotes positive youth development and healthy relationships and lifestyles. JSI supports grantees in using data-driven strategies and best practices to work with their diverse communities. This component focuses on building grantees' capacity to:

- Identify, reach, and serve hard to reach, marginalized, and diverse youth with TPP evidence-based programs and reproductive health services (e.g. African American and Latino youth, youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, GLBTQ youth, and pregnant and parenting teens).
- Engage and recruit a diverse group of community partners, including non-traditional stakeholders to collaborate in their community's TPP efforts.
- Ensure program facilitators and clinical providers have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and reproductive health services.
- Ensure program facilitators and clinical providers provide diverse youth with culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and reproductive health services.
- Engage and educate a diverse group of stakeholders (e.g., community action team, other community members) on how social determinants of health link to teen pregnancy.
- Plan and implement within each component, based on community needs assessment and other relevant data, strategies guided by the Working with Diverse Communities' best practices (developed by JSI).

## WORKING WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES COMPONENT

JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. • 44 Farnsworth Street • Boston, MA 02210 • 617-482-9485 • <http://rhey.jsi.com>



### **JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.**

This publication was made possible by Cooperative Agreement Number CDC-RFA-DP10-1009 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or HHS.