

CLASS MATERIAL TO WORK TEENAGE PREGNANCY WITH STUDENTS

COMENIUS PROJECT: THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN WOMEN THROUGH THE CENTURIES

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CANTABRIA – SPAIN
2008-2009



The material was taken from the following web page:
http://www.likeitis.org/teenage_pregnancy.html



TEEN MUMS

It's 8:10 on a sunny morning, and Kristen, 18, rides the bus in London. She's on her way to an alternative learning program she attends weekday mornings. Beside her, sleeping in his pushchair, is her nine-month-old son Darren, who she drops off at the day-care centre next to the school. A woman attempting to get off at an approaching bus stop loses her balance and trips over the heavy blue carriage. She curses Kristen under her breath while exiting the bus. Like many teen mums, Kristen has grown accustomed to the occasional looks of disapproval from the public.

Teens who become pregnant face few options: to have an abortion, give the baby up for adoption, or to raise the baby – more than likely alone and with little support.

For Kristen, abortion wasn't an option. "I made the choice to have unprotected sex and now I have to live with the consequences," she says.

Not all pregnant teens are as fixed in their ideas as Kristen was. Those still in high school often ponder long and hard the decision to enter motherhood before finishing school. Some reluctantly choose adoption.

Jamie, 20, says she wouldn't have given up her daughter for adoption five years ago if she'd had access to resources or family support, including that of the father. "I didn't feel that I could have taken care of her the way she would've deserved. I had no job, no education and not even my family was there for me," she says. "But I didn't feel she deserved to die for my mistakes."

Those who choose to keep the child face many challenges. After experiencing the ordeal of labour and delivery, many teen mums soon realize that raising a child isn't easy – most are still children themselves.

It was "hard to face reality" when Jovani, now 14 months old, arrived, says Malika, 17. "I thought having a baby would have been easy but I was wrong. My son had colic and wouldn't sleep through

the night until he was six months old . . . I didn't have anyone to help me and sometimes I didn't know how to cope," Malika says.

For teenage mothers with little or no support from family and friends, outside help may come from social services agencies. Child and youth workers at these centres can offer support to young mothers. Resources such as prenatal, breastfeeding, parenting and nutrition classes encourage teens to live healthy lifestyles while offering a helping hand to raise their children. The chance to interact with other teen mums can have a positive impact on both mother and child.

Still, statistics show that teen mums' lives are difficult, no matter how much support there is. Young mothers can expect lower levels of employment and income.

Malika says she learned this the hard way. "Having a baby isn't fun like many girls think," she says. "It's a full-time job in itself on top of going to school and working part-time. I just hope that my friends realize that it's not easy."

Of course, it's one thing to understand how difficult raising a baby is. Preventing a pregnancy is another matter. Amanda, 16, and the mother of five-month-old Jessica, says many teens feel pressure from partners and peers to have sex. "When you get to my age, sex becomes a big deal, especially in high school," she says. "Everyone talks about when and who they're having sex with." She says this pressure sometimes leads to young people having sex without using a condom or other form of birth control.

Alcohol and drugs often are a factor when contraceptives are not used. In a recent poll of unplanned pregnancies in 14- to 21-year-olds, one-third of the girls who became pregnant had been drinking when they had sex. And 91 per cent of them reported that the sex was unplanned.

Other factors also play a role and can influence the options a young woman feels she has. For those seeking an identity and a legitimate role in life, pregnancy may seem a positive choice.

"The only love I got was from my boyfriend, not from my parents," says Amanda. "I thought having a baby would keep us together." Many, like Amanda, think that by having a baby the father will stay in their lives – or perhaps that the newborn will give them the love a partner or parents couldn't provide.

And while their lives get a lot tougher, many young mothers realize how important it is to reorganize their priorities. “Now that my daughter is here, I have no choice really but to get my act together – get an education and a job so that I can give my daughter a life that she deserves,” Amanda says. She adds that she wouldn’t trade her daughter for anything. “She’s my life and I love her more than anything in this world, and I would do anything to make us happy.”

Kristen agrees, “I just want Darren to have the best life possible, and I will do the best I can to ensure that.”

Translate these words:

Day-care

Carriage

Ponder

Peers

Disapproval

Raise (a baby)

Support

Prevent a pregnancy

Play a role

Answer these questions:

- 1) Why do you think teenage mothers get looks of disapproval from others?
- 2) Why did Jamie think adoption was the right option for her?
- 3) What kind of help can teenage mothers get if they decide to keep their baby?