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Guide to Unexpected Pregnancy

#2 The 3-motions
of Teen
Pregnancy



Meet the School of Hard Knocks Professor



Ginger Sinsabaugh MacDonald is the founder of TastyFaith resources for urban ministry. During her twenty some years as an urban youth worker, she has experienced the life changing effects of twenty-one pregnancies, that resulted in eighteen babies, two miscarriages, one abortion, only two marriages and the most disheartening, twenty one empty seats at church.

Ginger learned what couldn't be taught in a classroom, only by experience. Graciously, she offers her best advice in these FREE Hard Knocks courses from TastyFaith.com.

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Here's how you can help others deal with unexpected pregnancy, from ministering to teen moms, their staff, to better baby-proofing their ministries:

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Guide to Unexpected Pregnancy

Today's Lesson:

The 3-motions of Teen pregnancy

So many things change with teen pregnancies. So many things are the same. The teen could be an atheist with emerging hormones or a pastor's kid from an emerging church. She could've been using birth control or playing Russian roulette. She might be the captain of the soccer team or a high school dropout. Whatever her story, these young ladies have one thing in common. A baby erases life as she knew it, shaking up her carefree world like an Etch-a-Sketch®. There is no way to go back to how it was.

Everything changes, from her morning routine, her tweets on Twitter, to how she'll use a Target gift card. Her purse is replaced with a diaper bag, her friends drift away when they see her hauling the car seat.

But the biggest changes facing a teen mom are often overlooked. They are the changes happening on the *inside*, not outside. Teen moms give birth to a new trilogy of feelings that replace the popular teen mantra of "I'm bored."

Those feelings are: *shame, anger and loneliness.*

Mind you, I am not a professional therapist with a fancy degree from a prestigious university. What I know about this stuff comes from my experience at the School of Hard Knocks, dealing with pregnant teens and listening to others who are experts on this issue as well. Shame, anger and loneliness plague the teen mom, no matter her zip code, faith or story. If you are a newbie working with a young teen mom or pregnant teens, I encourage you to have these 3motions on your radar. Talk about these 3motions with those in your program--both staff and student--offering listening ears and lots of Kleenex®.

Teen moms
give birth
to a new
trilogy of
feelings:
shame
anger and
loneliness



3motion #1: Shame

Shame is the built-in confessional booth in your conscience. It's what you feel when you know you did something you shouldn't have, like eating the last row of Oreos® you were supposed to save for your husband. Or like with Carrie*. Carrie, a teen mom who wasn't "saved" at the time of getting pregnant, got pregnant by a boy from a strict Baptist home. Her greatest fear wasn't how she would raise the child or how she would finish school, but the fear of telling his parents! Even though Carrie never stepped foot in a church, there was something inside of her telling her that sex outside of marriage was wrong. She knew that being an unwed teen mom was not a good thing. So Carrie felt shame. His parents magnified the shame by not talking to Carrie and their son for months, pressuring the young couple to marry. His mom thought the pregnancy happened because of sins in her past. She too was a teen mom, and Carrie's pregnancy was her punishment, piling on more shame.

But shame didn't start with unexpected pregnancy. It was the free prize Eve found inside the apple she bit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis chapter 3). After one sweet bite, Eve knew what she did was wrong. Her eyes were opened to her sin and she tried to hide from God. It was the birth of Fig Leaf Fashions and shame.

In a pregnant teen's case, her "wrong" is visible for the public to see and judge. And that's not fun. Shame can lead her to hide from your programs. School, youth group and church can be unbearable activities. The pregnant teen feels like she did the unpardonable sin, when in truth, she wasn't the only one having sex, but was the one who got caught.

The big question is, is shame an emotion teen girls feel because they are caught in their sin, or is it because of the sin itself?

It might be the pregnancy—not sexual activity outside of marriage-- that's the shameful sin in teens' eyes. A 2003 Northern Kentucky University¹ study showed that 61% of students who signed sexual-abstinence commitment cards broke their pledges. It doesn't stop there. Of the remaining 39% who kept their pledges, 55% said they'd had oral sex and did not consider oral sex to be sex. Is that because oral sex can remain a secret unless it happens in the Oval Office? Maybe it's pregnancy they are pledging and praying to avoid.

If pregnancy--something God designed to be a blessing--is the root of the shame-- that needs to be corrected. Imagine how those feelings impact the way a teen mom takes care of her child. Now replace that shame with a "God has blessed you with this responsibility so take it serious" attitude towards parenting. It's a whole different ball game.

WARNING:

A Pledge of Abstinence can break as easy as a condom.

61% of students who signed sexual abstinence commitment cards broke their pledges.



The only thing worse than shame, is the absence of it.

Meanwhile, more and more teens see having a baby outside of marriage as morally acceptable². You might even work in a community where teen pregnancy is status quo. Single parent households may be the norm. Marriage is not what they dream of: it's the nightmare they view on Divorce Court. Being a teen mom is acceptable. "I'm having a baby at the age of 14. You got a problem with that?" No shame, not even a batted eye. Or so the young teen mom may say.

Maybe the young teen mom has a heart of kryptonite and can fend off negative emotions. You never know. OR, more likely, maybe shame has been so engrained in her DNA that she feels being a statistic, that being a teen-mom-high-school-drop-out is her only option. It's a familiar future to her which is not as scary as daring to be different. Instead of thinking she'd better wait on a baby, she's thinking, "I don't have a dream, I don't have a bank account, I don't have an education, but I can have a baby." The baby isn't the cause of her shame, but is her hope in the midst of it.

Tame the Shame

Whatever the cause, shame can make a young teen mom feel worthless. She may refuse to make eye contact or refuse to make contact all together, being at risk for dropping out of youth group or high school.

If you know a teen moms whose self-esteem tank is running on E, help her see herself the way God does. Help her view the child as a blessing and not a punishment, and herself as worthy of blessings. This can have a ripple effect on her approach to motherhood. Plant a dream inside of her heart, encourage her to finish her education to be a better mom for her child. Remind her that while sex outside of marriage is a sin, she can learn from it and turn from it. God can forgive her; now she needs to forgive herself.

Your diaper duty of the day:

Work with teens to nip the shame in the bud. Get life-changing dialogue going by asking a few of these questions.

When you first found out you were pregnant, which emotions did you feel?

joy shame sadness pride fear other

Which of those emotions do you feel now?

Help the teen
mom view the
child as a
blessing, not
a punishment,
and herself as
worthy of
blessings.



Did you feel shame because of your sin OR because of being caught in the sin? Was it because of letting people down or letting God down? Thoughts:

Do you think God is ashamed of you or proud of you? Explain.

Verses to Share:

We've all made mistakes

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory God."
Romans 3:23

Jesus came to love you, not to JUDGE you

*"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through him."* John 3:17

Shame Busters

Encourage the young teen mom to try one of the following:

Keep a Diaper Genie Journal

Encourage teen moms to keep a journal where they can write bad feelings, discouraging thoughts, bouts of anger and shame to get it out of their system. Challenge her to write down exactly what she feels ashamed about: is it her sin or being caught in her sin? Is it letting people down or letting God down? And just like a Diaper Genie, she doesn't have to look inside of that journal. The pages are just to dispose of negative vibes.

Sunday Smile

Next Sunday after church, challenge the teen mom to say hello to one of the people she thinks she gets dirty looks from. Her smile can be a great icebreaker.

Does she feel
shame because
she sinned OR
because she
was caught?



Unlimited Minutes

Have her give Jesus Christ a call and let Him know how she is feeling. He's a great listener!

Shame on Us

You might know people in ministry who think shame is a good thing for the teen mom. The logic is, without shame, being a teen parent is accepted, making it more widespread. So how do you balance helping teen moms and pregnant teens without glorifying teen pregnancy?

3motion #2: Loneliness

Loneliness isn't anything new. A pregnant teen probably dealt with it before getting pregnant. Like the times she heard "this seat is saved" at a popular school lunch room table. Coming home to an empty house every night. Being the new girl at school.

Sheena, a former teen mom, remembers the loneliness with a capital L. "Everyone drifted away. I felt alone. They were all going out, going to college, and there I was being a mom. I had to bring my daughter wherever I went."

Another teen mom shared how hard it was going to sleep at night. That was when the loneliness really kicked in. "At night, when it's quiet, it's just you and your emotions." She had no one to share with. No friends to hang with. No one who really understood. So the little sleep she was able to get was hijacked by her thoughts.

While loneliness is as enjoyable as a root canal, it isn't unique to teen moms. The Bible is filled with stories of loneliness, from Jesus to Naomi.

Away from Home and Alone: Naomi (Ruth 1)

Naomi wasn't a teen mother, but an older woman who moved to a foreign country with her husband and two sons. She barely unpacked her boxes when her husband died. Her sons helped ease her loneliness for a bit, but soon enough, they cut the apron strings and took their own wives. But Naomi's heartache doesn't end there. Both of her sons die! This was hard enough on the young widows, but it was so hard for Naomi that she changed her name to Mara, a word that meant "the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me."

"Everyone drifted away. I felt alone. They were all going out, going to college, and there I was being a mom. I had to bring my daughter wherever I went."



Naomi wanted to return to her home country, go back to Bethlehem, to escape this nightmare. She told her two daughters-in-law to look up their mothers and stay with them. One took her up on the offer. But one stayed by Naomi's side when she needed a friend the most. Her name was Ruth.

Be Her Ruth

Just like with Naomi, a pregnant teen doesn't need someone who has experienced exactly what she is going through to help her through it. Sticking by her side can be life changing. Your listening ears can be enough. But find out what other listening ears are in the young teen mom/pregnant teen's life:

Who can she talk to about what's heavy in her heart?

- Friend
- Mentor who has been through a similar situation
- Youth leader
- Teacher
- Parent
- The baby's father
- Nobody
- Other

Lonely? Cuddleth up with this verse:

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Psalms 147:3

3motion #3 Anger

Take a deep breath and count to ten before reading this section.

Who doesn't deal with anger? Anger is hard enough to wrestle in your twenties, thirties and forties, but by then, you should have more experience controlling your emotions instead of letting them control you. But as an adolescent? All bets are off. Anger may be her BFF. She might be angry at the baby's father for breaking up during her fourth month of pregnancy. She might be angry at a friend who told everyone her business. Maybe she is fuming at a family member who did something hurtful to her during this difficult time. She might be angry that she got pregnant while her SABFF (sexually active best friend forever) did not.

And what do you get when you take the "d" from the *devil* and add it to anger? Danger. The devil turns to evil and anger turns to DANGER.



While anger itself is not sin, what a young mom does with it can be damaging to herself and others, especially if that anger festers in her heart like a half-eaten burrito in a hot car. It can stink to high heavens for a long, long time. The good news is there is something to remove the stench of anger better than a pine tree air freshener. It's forgiveness. Not a quick "I'm sorry", but the real deal from the bottom of one's heart. Start by discussing the advice in these verses:

Anger Management

"In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Ephesians 4:26-27

Nudge that Grudge

"This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God." Matthew 5:22-24 The Message

Anger at Herself

The most important person a pregnant teen has to forgive doesn't go to her school and isn't a family member, it's the young lady in the mirror. After all, wherever she goes, that enemy will be there. The teen mom might as well make up with her first. Since she can't cut and paste your past, deleting moments she wished she didn't do, she needs to make amends with herself now. Help the young teen mom forgive herself. Her life isn't over; it's just taking a different path.

In what ways does the pregnant teen/teen mom get angry at herself? Is she ready to forgive herself?

Two-Way Street

The Bible also reminds us to treat others the way we want to be treated. Ask the teen mom if there's someone she might have hurt during her pregnancy. It could be a parent, relative, the new girlfriend of the baby's father or friends she is jealous of because they don't have the responsibilities of motherhood. She may need to ask them for forgiveness.



Who might be angry at you? Who do you need to ask forgiveness from?

How Would Jesus Forgive?

Jesus reminds us to forgive others the way that we want to be forgiven in the verse below:

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15

Forgiveness: The Anger Eraser

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Matthew 6:15

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do." Colossians 3:13

Other Emotions

Shame, loneliness and anger aren't the only emotions that are common with teen moms/pregnant teens. They are just the tip of the emotional iceberg. Discuss other emotions with the pregnant teen/teen mom:

happiness	surprise	hopelessness	fear	satisfaction
hope	envy	love	hate	desire
anger	jealousy	sadness	hope	
courage	depression	joy	insecurity	

NOTES

* All names of the young pregnant ladies have been changed.

1. "Virginity Pledges: Who Takes Them and How Well Do They Work?" Authors: Angela Lipshitz, Paul D. Bishop, and Christine Robinson, Northern Kentucky University 2003 Presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

2. "Teens' Marriage Views Reflect Changing Norms", Linda Lyons. The Gallup Organization, 18 November 2003.