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Guide to Unexpected Pregnancy

#1 Youth Leader
Pregnancy Test



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.

Share this resource with others!

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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2. Send them a link to our website: TastyFaith.com
3. Drop us an email and tell us what you think of this resource at Ginger@TastyFaith.com

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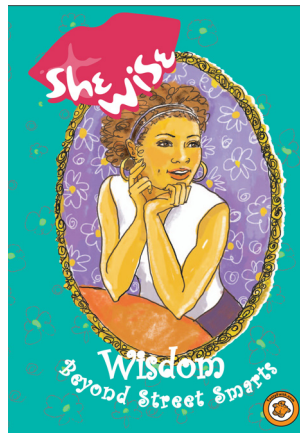


Hot Resources. Non-sugarcoated Issues.

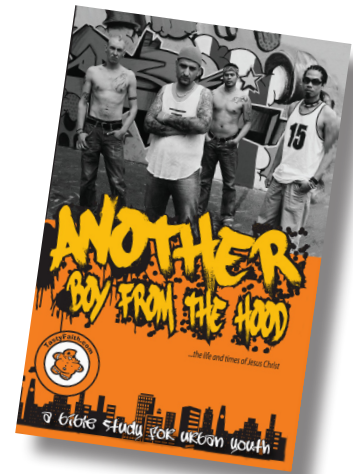
TastyFaith can help you connect the hope of Christ to church-ed and non-church-ed youth.



Life After Birth:
Bible Study for teen moms



SheWise
Wisdom Beyond Street Smarts:
Helping young ladies zone in on real wisdom from sexual choices to self worth.



Another Boy from the Hood:
Great for mentoring a fatherless generation.

Workshops-

If you find this material helpful, consider bringing TastyFaith's School of Hard Knocks to your community for a day of intensive training.
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Guide to Unexpected Pregnancy

Today's Lesson

The Youth Leader Pregnancy Test

If a teenager in your youth program got pregnant, would you know what to do? Or would you be frozen like a deer in the headlights? Considering one out of three teen girls will get pregnant by the age of twenty¹, there's a good chance this issue will affect you or those involved in your outreach program.

To make sure you don't end up religious road kill, take the pregnancy test.

Can't Wait:
Abstinence
pledgers are
less likely to use
contraception
at initial
intercourse.
The Heritage
Foundation

Not the kind of pregnancy test you get in aisle five of the corner drug store, but the kind any faith based organization needs to take to prepare for unexpected pregnancy. This test will give you a cheat sheet of the questions you need to ask yourself, staff and volunteers. Just don't pee on the pages.

Pregnancy Test Question #1.

Are You Confusing the Messin' with the Blessin'?

It's easy to forget Psalm 127:3 in the midst of unexpected pregnancy: Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord. It sure doesn't seem like a blessing according to old ladies at the prayer meeting. Some confuse the sexual immorality (which is a sin -- Hebrews 13:4) with the pregnancy, which is a blessing, in spite of the non-ideal situation.

The reality is, the pregnant teen isn't the only one in your program having sex. She's the one who got caught.



According to research findings of the American Social Health Association², about 62% of students in the twelfth grade have had sexual intercourse. Even abstinence pledgers are at risk of getting pregnant: they are less likely to use contraception the first time they have intercourse³.

Don't confuse the messin' with the blessing. That can make those in leadership give birth to a few emotions of our own, including anger and frustration as I did with Elona*, teen mother number #18 of the twenty-one I dealt with during my years of urban youth ministry.

Elona was in my youth group when I got engaged. She was a wild child who grew up in the church but had a heart made of Teflon®. Lessons didn't stick, but would slide off her heart like eggs over easy. Elona's granddad was the church custodian with one of those big key rings that jingled when he walked. He was always upset with the youth department, convinced that leaving gum wrappers on the floor was the lost 11th commandment. But his Elona was having sex. I knew she was having sex. Elona knew that I knew she was having sex. Mr. Jingle Jangles secretly suspected she was having sex.

So when Elona got pregnant, it was no surprise that a few church members were angry. The church was angry because Elona was church kin. Her grandfather was angry because he was always angry. But me? I trumped them all. I was angry because my body wanted to have sex, but I was waiting patiently for the right time, the way I waited for a scoop of butter brickle ice cream as dessert after dinner.

I was angry because I felt like a failure trying to teach teens values they didn't value. I was angry because I could have been on my couch watching *Law and Order* instead of getting yelled at for orphaned gum wrappers.

That's when I realized I had to separate Elona's choice of having a baby (choosing life over termination) from her sexual promiscuity. Getting angry at Elona for being pregnant was the wrong thing to be angry about. She might view her pregnancy as a punishment, a booby prize instead of a blessing, then not treat the blessing as such. She would say stuff like, "Why did God allow this to happen to me instead of my friends who were having sex? Worse yet, getting angry would shut down communication.

Tip: commend your Elona for the right decision of choosing life, separating it from her not-so-wise decision of having sex. Focus your energy on her future instead of the past mistakes you can't undo. You can discuss sexual boundaries later.

Tip: commend the pregnant teen for choosing life, separating it from her not-so-wise decision of having sex.



Pregnancy Test Question #2: Is it About You or About Her?

Okay. Unexpected pregnancy can seem like the pimple on any youth pastor's reputation. You're afraid the pregnancy will be a reflection on you more so than her. *Were you really doing your job?* So shut your office door and have a pity party. You have my permission. Be sure to eat a few of the fund raising candy bars you squirreled away in your bottom desk drawer (calories don't count during pity parties). Then after you've written yourself off and googled job listings in parts of the world where church gossip won't reach, you need to realize something important: *the pregnancy is not about you*, even if it feels like it. You're not a failure, either. If the pregnant party (whether the expecting mother, father or both), had the courage to tell you about the pregnancy, you did something right. They made a mistake but they know you are approachable. You are there to help. *They need you more than ever.*

What you don't want to hear is, "I thought the church was a place to get help" as she slams your office door shut. If you offer guidance for other unwise choices imperfect people make, such as secret addictions, school expulsion, eating disorders, legal problems, or a partial tattoo of Miss Piggy, you need to have grace and compassion for her situation as well.

Pregnancy Test Question #3: Is Pregnancy a Temporary Issue or is it Life Changing?

For some reason, I thought an unexpected pregnancy was a temporary issue, like Bible camp. Bible camp is Christianese for "the toughest week of one's life", seven days that could make a seasoned Marine cry uncle. And the only thing tougher than regular Bible camp is urban Bible camp. Kids who sleep soundly through police sirens, cars alarms and gang banging gunfire are frightened by the sound of a cricket. A five-day trip might as well be five lifetimes, with amenities including one scratchy towel and a mildewed plastic mattress just a bit thicker than a yoga mat.

Your skin is sticky thanks to loads of bug lotion and s'more goo, your hair smells like a mixture of roasted hotdogs and the toxic fumes of Styrofoam cups you weren't supposed to throw in the campfire but you did. And of course, you didn't pack enough socks. Once your cabin of teens stop talking at 3 am, the mosquitoes start their humming. You make it through the week because you know the situation is temporary and that next year, you'll use your week of vacation at an all-inclusive resort in Jamaica.

Angry about
the situation?
Have a pity
party then
move onto
how to
help her.



You survive the five longest days in your life, even the bus ride, the embarrassing You Tube video clip of you covered with shaving cream in your slumber, thinking all of this will earn a few brownie points for heaven. You made it through the week and can go back to life as normal with a bit of calamine lotion. But that mentality can't transfer over to pregnancy. After the nine months the pregnancy is over for you, your life is back to normal, but not for your Elona. Her life is forever changed. She can't go back and rewind. Life as she has known it is out the window, no matter if she chooses parenting, adoption or terminates the pregnancy. *Pregnancy is life changing, not just for the teen parent, but for those close to her as well.*

Pregnancy Test Question #4:

Do You Know Why Young Females Get Pregnant?

If you limit your answer to the birds and the bees, think again. *Pregnancy while unexpected is not always unintentional.* You won't find any research to back it, just like you won't find much documented research connecting Häagen Daz® with weight gain.

I have never heard a pregnant young lady say, "So that's where babies come from. I thought the stork delivered these from a cabbage patch." Weirdly enough, I've known expecting moms who believed the baby in their stomach had a lot in common with a magic genie in a bottle. Just rub their tummy and that new baby will grant their wishes. That wish list includes, "The baby will make me more responsible", "A baby will give me someone to love", "I can move out of my home with his family", "He'll have to love me now", "A child will force me to grow up." The hopes of what a baby will bring can result in pregnancy.

Take time to ask the pregnant teen about feelings that are hiding in her heart instead of what's showing in her belly.

Sometimes, that baby does have magic genie qualities and the young mom's wish does come true. She is forced into a role of responsibility. She might be kicked out of her home, a reality not as wonderful as she had imagined. The baby can give her someone to love, but not necessarily how love is defined in I Corinthians 13. She might be ready for the Hallmark card kind of love but not the "I'm-willing-to-give-up-a-night-with-the-girls-so-I-can-work-on-your-potty-training" kind of love.

Tip: Take time to ask the pregnant teen about feelings that are hiding in her heart instead of what's showing in her belly.

Pregnancy Test Question #5:

Can You Carry Her Heavy Burden?

Julie is a friend who has a secret, a two-thousand-pound gorilla that sits on her lap during church. I



know about her gorilla. Others know about her gorilla. We can see it jumping up and down beating its chest during “Sanctity of Life” Week, calling attention to mild-mannered Julie. Julie can’t believe no one can see it, jumping over the pews, doodling on bulletins, searching purses for Lifesavers®. She’s uncomfortable that it’s there, waiting to be ushered out, like the teens in the balcony shooting spit wads. Julie’s secret is her abortion. She might have had it during a previous life, her wild college days, when she was a *Chreaster*, attending church at Christmas and Easter. Or she might have had an abortion recently and members never suspected because she’s the one who always makes potato salad for the women’s luncheon.

Whatever her story, Julie’s secret is one she will share with close to one third of all women⁴ in the United States. While Julie didn’t choose life, she knows what she did is forgivable and erased off of her permanent record. God doesn’t have a good memory about those things. The question is, *How will she feel in your church?*

Then, there is the young mom with the anything but silent two-thousand-pound gorilla sitting next to her. Instead, it’s a baby weighing twelve pounds with a piercing scream that could be heard from here to Timbuktu. A baby everyone is wondering why she won’t trust with the nursery. Before the baby was born, everyone was cheering her on to have the child. You go girl! But now that her baby howls during sermons, it’s a different story. She’s singled out and given the dreaded stink eye.

Will she be welcome in your church even if she’s not yet comfortable with your nursery?

Make sure you are prepared to stand by her, sensitive to her emotional burden, regardless of the decision she makes.

Pregnancy Test Question #6: Are You Pro-Life Or Uh, Pro-Fetus?

I have many friends who say they are Pro Life, usually around their local Hike for Life, when they are out in masses in their new running shoes and free Hike for Life T-shirts, letting Chicago know their opinions on abortion. Unless of course the weather is lousy, then they stay home like everyone else. Some of these friends picket abortion centers openly, others do it their minds. They know precisely when a baby’s fingers develop (seven weeks) and can even tell you the Latin meaning of the word fetus (offspring). I know one pro-lifer who shudders when I mention Planned Parenthood.

At least half
of American
women will
experience an
unintended
pregnancy by
age 45 and
about a third
of them will
have an
abortion.
*Guttmacher
Institute*



Are you
encouraging
programming
for those
who do
choose life?

Some pro-lifers may think abortion is wrong, an unforgivable sin, one that God overlooked when He came up with this grace thing. You might know a few hard core Pro-Lifers. You might even be one. But while convictions run ocean deep on this issue, make sure your actions aren't mud puddle shallow.

Ask yourself, *are you encouraging programming for those who do choose life?* After all, a young mom's life will go through changes as fast as that baby in her stomach. She'll need encouragement to finish school, maybe even help getting to and from your services. This young single mom needs to feel as if her life is important, that it matters as much as her unborn child.

*Question #7 (essay question)
What is Your Plan B?*

Flash back to December 1999, the time when we all planned for the worst disaster mankind has ever seen: Y2K. My mother was terrified of this pending doomsday caused by the malfunction of computer clocks, even though she had never used one. Computers would crash, putting spammers out of luck, including the guy from your office who is always forwarding funny emails. Your ATM card wouldn't work on the rare occasion you did remember the PIN. It would be the high-tech equivalent of Armageddon.

But my family would be safe since Mom purchased everything on the survivalist's check list--including enough canned goods to feed a small army. But what happened at the stroke of midnight of December 31, 1999? Nothing. We had all these grand plans for pending disaster that we never had to use which is why we still have a few dusty cases of pork and beans in the garage.

Plans are important, especially when dealing with unexpected pregnancy. Make sure you have a plan. It'll help you navigate the territory when you are like a deer frozen in headlights. Start by scheduling a staff meeting to discuss unplanned pregnancy. To insure everyone will show up, spring for Starbucks. Once everyone has sipped the foam off their lattes, start all the questions you hope you'll never have to answer but someday will. *What if the person is in ministry? What if they are still a teen? What if it's an unwed father? What if it's all of the above?*

Plans will look different, depending on church size and demographics. A plan for an inner-city church with an outreach program will look different than small rural church where everybody knows everyone. But your unique plan will help you help her. And that's what it's all about.

1 out of 3 teen girls get pregnant
2 out of 3 will drop out of school
3 out of 3 churches can help!



Grading Scale

If this lesson made you think of the unexpected issues regarding teen pregnancy, you passed. Remember, one of three teen girls gets pregnant, two out of those three will drop out of school but 3 out of 3 churches can help.

Unexpected Questions

What issues regarding teen pregnancy are you aware of that you didn't think of before?

How would an unexpectedly pregnant young lady feel as a guest in your program?

Thoughts _____

Is a baby any less of a blessing because of the circumstances the baby could not control? How does viewing the child as a blessing change how the birth is viewed by:

- a. the teen parent
- b. you
- c. the rest of the Christian body
- d. non-Christians



How have you responded to unexpected pregnancy in the past: a deer in headlights, with a pity party, anger overload or a plan of action?

Bible Story: Messing or Blessing? *Tamar's Story (Genesis 38:1-28; Matthew 1:3)*

Tamar, who is mentioned in the lineage of Christ, is also remembered for her unusual way of getting pregnant. After her husband died, Tamar tried getting pregnant by two of his brothers. When these plans didn't work, she disguised herself as a prostitute and finally got pregnant by their father, Judah.

Discuss:

Why are both parts of Tamar's story important when understanding God's grace? How would "her messin" and "her blessin" be viewed differently if they were in the same Bible chapter?

What is easier to focus on—the messing or the blessing? How can they balance each other when helping someone who is unexpectedly pregnant?

NOTES

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

1. One third of girls get pregnant at least once before the age of twenty. Source: the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
2. Almost half of high school students nationwide and about 62% of students in the twelfth grade have had sexual intercourse. Source: State of the Nation: Challenges Facing STD Prevention in Youth. American Social Health Association, 2005).
3. Source: the Heritage Foundation
4. At least half of American women will experience an unintended pregnancy by age 45, and, at current rates, about one-third will have had an abortion SOURCE: Guttmacher Institute