

Coping with the hard realities of teen pregnancy

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

They're just about the most heart breaking words a parent can hear from their teen ... "I'm pregnant." It's terrifying for both the parents and the teens themselves. After the crying, shock, grief, and maybe some yelling, what comes next?

Open communication will be vital in the next few months. You'll need a plan and your teen is going to need you more than ever. Aside from the medical aspects of care, like prenatal visits, your teen will have a lot of emotions to process and may need counseling, individually or with you as a family. Try to remain calm. It may seem like it, but it actually isn't the end of the world.

Teens have been getting pregnant since the beginning of time. In fact, in the Middle Ages, if you weren't married and having children in your teens, you were considered a spinster. Well, it isn't the Middle Ages anymore, so you aren't going to die from the plague, and thankfully you're not over the hill at 35. Still, the human body is pretty self-sufficient at this baby growing thing. Most of your time and efforts will be dealing with the emotional and financial aspects. How can you best handle the situation as a family?

Job number one is to get an ultrasound. Whether at your doctor's office or a pregnancy clinic, having an ultrasound makes this baby a reality for his or her young parents. Pregnancy Care Services in Pendleton and TruCare in Hermiston provide counseling, parenting classes, and consultations with OB nurses. By attending classes, parents can earn points that they can

then "spend" in the onsite store to purchase diapers, formula, clothing, etc. They even offer classes for young fathers taught by men, giving them a reprieve from the "women's world" that is pregnancy. The center in Pendleton is due to have an ultrasound machine up and running this winter.

If your son is the father, then he's already taken some responsibility by telling you. Consider meeting with his girlfriend's parents to help support, plan, and make decisions. Support your son by encouraging him to do his part in taking care of the baby and the baby's mother.

Help him finish school and attend parenting classes.

Be sure to communicate, but don't continually play the blame game. Reminding your teen that it's his or her fault isn't going to help in the long run. You can help by making sure the girl (with or without the father) has rides to appointments, access to healthy food, prenatal vitamins, and lots of rest. Contact the school and let them know what's going on. They can help with making decisions about schooling. If your daughter isn't able or doesn't want to continue to attend school in person, online school and homeschooling are great options. Without the sup-

port of family, teen parents almost invariably end up living in poverty and being at risk for dangerous behaviors that include drinking



and drugs. Once the baby is born, if he or she isn't placed for adoption, look for daycare at the school. Umatilla High School's child care is due to open this January, Pendleton has a free, onsite child care, and Umatilla-Morrow Head Start runs a child care center near Hermiston High School.

According to Laura Jensen, Executive Director of the Pregnancy Care Services in Pendleton, the best advice you can give a young pregnant girl or couple is to take their time. Know the facts – the good, the bad, and the ugly – before making any big decisions.

It's common for society to want young people to pay for their mis-



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takes. Sometimes, parents might feel like helping their expecting teens is making it too easy on them, and making it seem like everything's okay when it isn't. You can be there for your teen by helping them find resources, showing them how to make a budget, and loving them the most during this difficult time. That can never be mistaken for making it too easy.

Having a baby as a teen is life changing, but it doesn't mean their life is over.

Suzanne Kennedy is a former middle school teacher who lives in Pendleton with her husband and four children.