

Celebrating Being a Teen Mom

Tara Letourneau

In the United States, many teen girls get pregnant and drop out of high school. According to statistics, 3 out of 10 teen girls will get pregnant at least

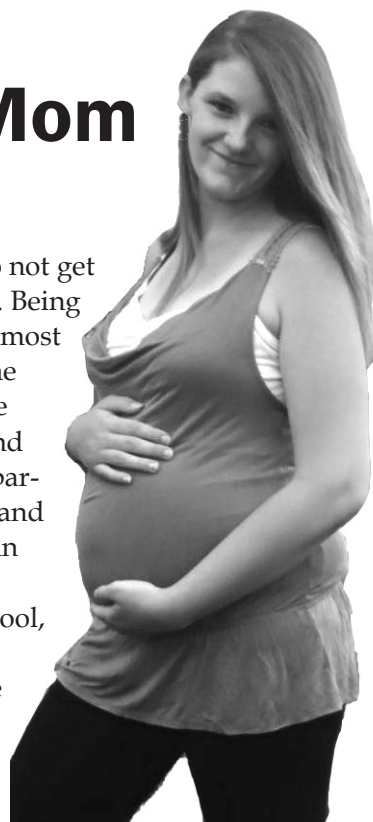
The reason most pregnant teen girls drop out is because of discrimination.

once before the age of 20. There are nearly 750,000 teen pregnancies every year. Statistics say that 50% of teen girls who drop out do it because they are pregnant. Also, about 25% of teen moms will have their second child within 24 months of their first.

The reason most pregnant teen girls drop out is because of discrimination from teachers and peers. For example, many pregnant teens are called names, like whore or slut. Teachers might imply to the pregnant girl that she has ruined her

life. Many girls just do not get the support they need. Being pregnant is one of the most wonderful things in the world. It should not be hard to be pregnant and be in school. I am preparing to be a teen mom, and I am planning to stay in school.

In my current school, no one puts me down. My peers celebrate me by bringing in journals that I can use to record my child's life from birth until age five. My peers and teachers compliment me and encourage me when I'm just not feeling right. They help me lift myself up. Statistics mean nothing to me. There are plenty of teens out there who will agree with me on this. Just because you have a baby doesn't mean your life is over, and it doesn't mean you can't get a high school diploma. Every day I make the choice to work my butt off to earn my diploma so my baby has a good life and has everything he needs.



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Tara Letourneau is a student at Vermont Adult Learning in Saint Albans, VT. She is 19 years old and 6 months pregnant with a baby boy, Emmytt James. She says, "I look forward to having my precious baby boy in my arms and a diploma in my hand. I want to say thank you to the VAL staff for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself."

Sources: <www.prikruby.com/2015/05/07/teen-pregnancy-rates-stds-and-other-american-facts-and-figures-2>; <www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-teen-pregnancy>; <www.advocatesforyouth.org>.

Sexual Double Standard

In the graphic below, what is the illustrator saying?



Illustration by Hayley Lim

November 9, 2015

Dear Tara,

I read your article "Celebrating Being A Teen Mom". I would like to share some things I noticed. I would also like to share my personal experience.

In the article, you talked about celebrating. You were celebrating about your pregnancy during your teen years when you were soon to be a mom.

You celebrated through your friends' gift. They gave you a journal for you to record your child's life, from birth until age 5 years old. I think it is great idea for you to record this because in the future, your son will read it and see what he did. You celebrated because you get along with and were supported by teachers, friends and students who really respect you. Your teachers encouraged you when you did not feel right. Teachers were always there for you. You are on the way to being successful!

You wanted the reader to understand that you did not drop out of school, and I understand you did do a lot of hard work in school. I understand that you will be a good mother to your baby, and you will keep your goals to get your high school diploma. Your life will be awesome! Your life in the future is very precious.

I have a personal connection, too. My friends, who are twins, got pregnant when they were teenagers. They dropped out of school because they were so embarrassed, for they experienced that their friends, teachers, and families insulted them. These important people in their lives were not happy to see them because they got pregnant during their teen years. After their babies were born, they studied for their GEDs, and they finished their GEDs! I haven't heard from them for long time, but I remember their success.

Something you said that caught my attention, is "just because you have baby that doesn't mean your life is over." This would help teenagers who are pregnant to realize and think about their future and know that their lives are not over. Saying this will positively impact them.

From reading your article, I learned you are sharing your experience and showing students in similar situations how to handle staying in school while they are pregnant. You encourage teen moms not to give up. I learned that you have a lot of faith and are very motivated. I learn that you are helping teen moms and encouraging them to think positively and think about their futures. Also, I learned not to give up on anything I think of as a failure, for I will stay strong, positive and hang in there. Though I'm not pregnant, I do have many challenges.

I would like to share that I have three teenage children. They are 18, 16 and 14. I will tell them what it is like to be a teen parent to a baby. If they accidentally get pregnant, I will guide them and help them to finish their school, and I will always be there for their baby and my teen children. I will remind them not to give up and that their futures are so precious.

Sincerely,
Jennifer

Father's Day

Carmen Ruiz

Since I was little girl, I have always thought about how different my life would have been if my father did not die when I was only one year old. My mom and our neighbors always told me how happy my father was when I was born because he took such good care of me. Everyone said he was a

This was one of those moments when I said to myself, "I miss my dad."

proud dad and I know my life would have been different with his presence.

Nowadays, when I have difficult moment in my life, especially in my relationships, the only thing in my head is how I miss my father. I think some

men respect you more when they know you have a father. I think some situations in my life could have been avoided by having him around.

The saddest moment I can never forget is the day I graduated from elementary school in Hon-

Explore Further

Use inference to make meaning. In the first paragraph the author says about her father: "My life would have been different with his presence." In the next two paragraphs, she identifies two ways she particularly missed her father, but she does not say *explicitly* what would have been different in her life if he had lived. As the reader, you can *infer* her meaning from the information given. Using inference, describe two significant ways her life could have been different if her father had lived.

How do you honor people who have passed? How do you express gratitude? (See the essay on the next page.)



A father holds his baby. Public domain, from pixabay.com.

duras and my mom told me, "Your teacher told me you are a smart girl. She said I should find a way to let you go to middle school, but I do not have money to pay for that. So, you must go live in the city with your aunt, help her with her kids, and go to the middle school at night." This was one of those moments when I said to myself, "I miss my dad, especially today."

I now work as a nurse's assistant in a hospice unit for people living with HIV. I honor my father's memory in this way, because I like to help those in need. Doing my job with love and taking good care of my patients reminds me of the way he used to be. I celebrate his legacy by showing my children how to be loving and kind in everything they do.

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Carmen is a mother of three children and a student at Mid-Manhattan Learning Center in NYC. Her goal is to become a teacher's assistant for children with special needs. She would also like to help those who have had difficult childhoods to believe in themselves and follow their dreams.

November 9, 2015

Dear Carmen,

I read your article "Father's Day" in The Change Agent. I would like to share things I noticed. I would like to share my personal experience.

In the article you talked about celebrating your father and how kind he was, how much he had a positive and tragic effect in your life. You said you celebrated by doing good & nursing in a hospital for people with HIV. Also, you celebrate by bettering yourself & your children to do good in everything they do! This is probably from the motivation your father gave you. Because you celebrated by keeping your father's heart warming legacy going, by passing your love and knowledge down to your loved ones showing them a gentler way to take life by, I thought that was very touching and a great way to honor your father.

A personal connection I would say is I have is I know a person who means a great deal to my life, so I see how hard it is for you to not have a father and have the positives and the negatives of not having a role model.

Your story did teach me to cherish my parents because not everyone has them, People should see the outcome and become a better person and do good. Someone can learn so much when they read this beautiful inspiring article you have written.

Sincerely,

Rocky Mehmedovive