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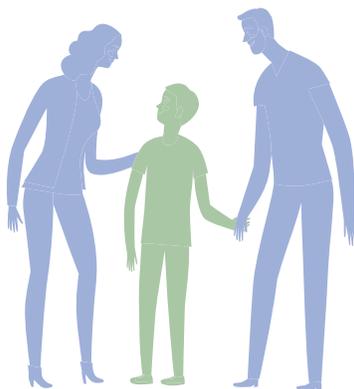


Strategies for Engaging Parents and Caregivers Tip Sheet

Engaging parents and other caregivers in programming for teen pregnancy prevention can be useful to reinforce lessons that youth receive through a program. Parent-focused programming can improve parent–child communication about sexual health, decision-making, risk behaviors, and healthy relationships, as well as the nature and frequency of that communication. Parent engagement includes (1) involving parents in youth-focused programming so they are aware of the content and can effectively interact with their adolescents about program lessons or (2) working directly with parents in parent-focused programming that provides strategies for having conversations with their adolescents. The level of parental engagement that programs use varies depending upon a program’s theory of change and intended activities. Specifically, youth-focused programs might encourage youth to complete assignments and have conversations with parents that reflect on program lessons. They also might complement this by offering parent-focused components, in which facilitators work directly with parents for a lesson or weekend session. Parent-focused programs might work exclusively to deliver content directly to parents and have the primary goal of educating parents on specific topics, such as strategies for having conversations with youth about healthy relationships.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention program (TPP) grantees are implementing a range of approaches to engage parents. It can be challenging, however, to secure parent participation in programming because of different attitudes and perceived need for programming, a lack of existing relationships and connection to program providers, or structural barriers that limit parent’s ability to participate.

This tip sheet identifies strategies to engage parents in teen pregnancy prevention programming, focusing on ways to address attitudinal, interpersonal, and structural barriers to participation. This tip sheet has been developed based on specific approaches used by current TPP grantees who are actively implementing strategies to engage parents. By implementing strategies that others have used, grantees might be able to enhance parent and caregiver recruitment and participation in both program and evaluation activities.



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Share program content and relevant data to address parents' attitudes and perceived need for programming

Parents' attitudes and perceived need for programming can influence their willingness to participate in programming for teen pregnancy prevention and to allow their adolescent to participate. Grantees have identified the following ways to overcome these barriers:

- **Share curricula with parents beforehand to increase their comfort level with topics and allow opportunities to ask questions.** Parents may appreciate opportunities to review actual content for youth- or parent-focused programming. Providing parents with an opportunity to view materials on their own time and setting up times to review curricula enables them to see the language and topics that the programming will cover as well as *how* the content is going to be shared with their adolescent.
- **Develop supplemental materials for parents to address common questions.** Parents might also benefit from materials that address questions they might have as they consider providing consent for their adolescent to participate in youth-focused programming. Supplemental materials may also address concerns parents may have about their own participation in parent-focused programming. Parents have different comfort levels discussing sexual health with their adolescent and other adults. They might struggle with questions, including those identified in Exhibit 1, as they determine whether they or their adolescent should participate in programming. Grantees might want to consider how they can create frequently asked questions (FAQs) that specifically address concerns that could discourage parents from participating in programs or allowing adolescents to participate. Some grantees have also developed handbooks for parents that include FAQs about their programming and ways for parents to be involved in order to help address these concerns.



Exhibit 1. Concerns and questions parents might raise

- Is participating worth my time?
- Will talking about sexual health with my adolescent encourage them to have sex?
- Are other people in my community going to be there during the discussion?
- I'm not sure if I'm comfortable having these discussions with my adolescent yet.
- I've had experiences with this kind of programming in the past and I already know the content.
- I've had negative experiences with this kind of programming in the past.
- I'm not sure why you're bringing this program to our school.

For organizations working with youth who might be disconnected from families:

- Am I the right person to discuss this topic with the adolescent?
- How can we identify the right caregiver or adult who needs to have these conversations with youth?

- **Provide up-to-date data on need and demand to reinforce the purpose of the programming.** Collecting data on the need and demand for programs is an ongoing activity that can provide information relevant to many stakeholders, particularly parents. Grantees can incorporate local community statistics on teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates in their FAQs, to provide parents with a sense of the need for programming in their area. Many grantees have used data they collected during prior program cycles to share parents' feedback about their satisfaction with programming.



Build relationships to minimize interpersonal barriers

For programs that have a parent component, interpersonal barriers can affect a program's ability to recruit and maintain participation from parents. In this context, interpersonal barriers can involve the relationships between local program provider organizations, their facilitators, and parents. Parents' relationship with a facilitator or organization, or lack thereof, can influence whether they are open to attending programming. When programming begins, the connection with the facilitator can affect whether the parent continues to participate in programming. Grantees have used the following strategies to reduce the interpersonal barriers that might prevent parents from engaging in programs:

- **Partner with family and parent engagement coordinators in schools.** Grantees can use parent engagement coordinators, if the school has them, to serve as liaisons between parents and schools. A school's parent engagement coordinator is familiar with parents in the school and has an existing relationship or name recognition with many parents through their outreach. They also know about the events that parents attend in a particular school, best practices for connecting with them, and strategies that have been tried in the past to increase parent participation. The parent coordinator might be able to make the first outreach to parents or brainstorm strategies for recruiting parents to participate in youth-focused and parent-focused programs. If a school does not have a parent engagement coordinator, grantees can reach out to the school's parent teacher association (PTA) or parent teacher student association (PTSA). They can attend meetings and determine whether there's an opportunity to have PTA or PTSA leadership help connect with parents.
- **Use teachers as partners to recruit parents to participate in parent-focused programs.** Teachers are valuable connections to parents and can be a bridge between parents and program staff. Some grantees have enlisted the help of school health teachers, who can serve as a direct point of contact within the school and who can send emails about the program and answer questions.

- **Engage partner organization staff, such as case managers or other key staff, that can also engage parents, or serve as critical caregivers for youth.** Many grantees working with populations of youth in out-of-home settings, such as foster care, juvenile detention facilities, or probation camps, may work with an extended range of caregivers that include the organization staff who regularly meet with youth. In these cases, it is important to use relationships with organization staff to encourage youth or parents to attend programming. Partner organization staff might also help engage in parent-focused programming because of their interactions with youth.
- **Establish a clear, accessible presence for your organization to build trust with parents.** Parents might be more likely to engage in an organization's activities if they recognize the organization. Many grantees seek regular opportunities to increase their face-time with parents by organizing tables at back-to-school nights and school orientations or attending community events and meetings. These opportunities allow organizations to meet with parents. They also provide parents a chance to pose initial questions about programming to people from the organization. Grantees have also expressed the importance of making contact information accessible and allowing parents to call with questions about program content or participation more broadly. In addition to attending key events, grantees can leverage their social media presence, encouraging parents to follow their accounts for more information.



Consider practical solutions that make it easy for parents to attend programming

There are several structural factors that can constrain parents' participation in programming for teen pregnancy prevention, including a lack of transportation and proximity to programming; scheduling of programming; a lack of child care; language or cultural barriers; or limited resources for providers to help parents overcome these barriers. Grantees have employed the following approaches to handle structural constraints:

- **Provide on-site child care while parents attend programs.** Grantees can have their organization staff, partners, or school volunteers provide child care so that parents can attend parent-focused programs.

- **Use multiple modes to communicate and deliver programming to parents.** There are many ways to deliver programming for parents to make it easier for them to participate in programming. Grantees are implementing strategies that involve sharing content via text messages, using videos, and sending supplemental materials home with youth.
- **Offer transportation solutions.** Possible strategies for minimizing transportation burdens include offering gas or car share gift cards as an incentive for parents.
- **Invite parents to participate in discussions over dinner.** Programming or focus groups may take place after school, which can interfere with family schedules in the evening. Providing an opportunity for parents to participate in programming over dinner is an important incentive that many grantees have used to encourage participation. Offering food also offers parents dedicated time to share thoughts. Grantees recommend serving food from known favorites in the community.

- **Invite parents to participate at the same time as youth.** Time and space permitting, grantees can opt to hold programs for youth and parents in tandem for programs that operate after school hours. This strategy can work when conducting programming or evaluation, such as conducting focus groups and interviews with youth and parents.

A range of attitudinal, interpersonal, and structural barriers can impede parent participation in both parent and youth-focused programming. Grantees can tailor the suggested strategies in this tip sheet to share program content with parents, build relationships with parents and adults that parents know and trust, and facilitate in-person participation in programs. Implementing these strategies can help enhance the level of parent engagement in TPP programming.

For more information about successful strategies for engaging parents, please see the following brief:

Aharpour, Delara, Erin Welch, Lexi Ouellette, and Katie Adamek (2020). Successful Approaches to Engage Parents in Programs to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. DC: Office of Population Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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