

CO-PARENTING PROGRAMS BRIEF



Overview

In 2017, 194,377 babies were born to women aged 15–19 years in the United States.[1] Less than half of these young parents were cohabitating or married at the time they conceived.[2] Relationship mutability among young adults often means that romantic relationships between young parents will not be permanent and the possibility of both parents having new romantic partners before their child is grown is high. This reality illustrates the need for programs that equip teen parents with the skills to effectively co-parent outside the context of a romantic relationship. Fortunately, providers working with young parents can offer resources to help them overcome challenges and develop healthy co-parenting partnerships that allows the entire family to thrive.

Young parents often lack the maturity, skills, or confidence to create a healthy co-parenting dynamic. High conflict interactions between the parents can result in the father withdrawing and the mother feeling unsupported and alone. The caretaking influence of the parents of teen parents can further complicate interactions resulting in a potentially unhealthy situation for both the young parents and the child. According to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, support from the other parent and from the parents of the young mother are found to be among the most influential predictors of maternal functioning which, in turn, impacts child wellbeing.

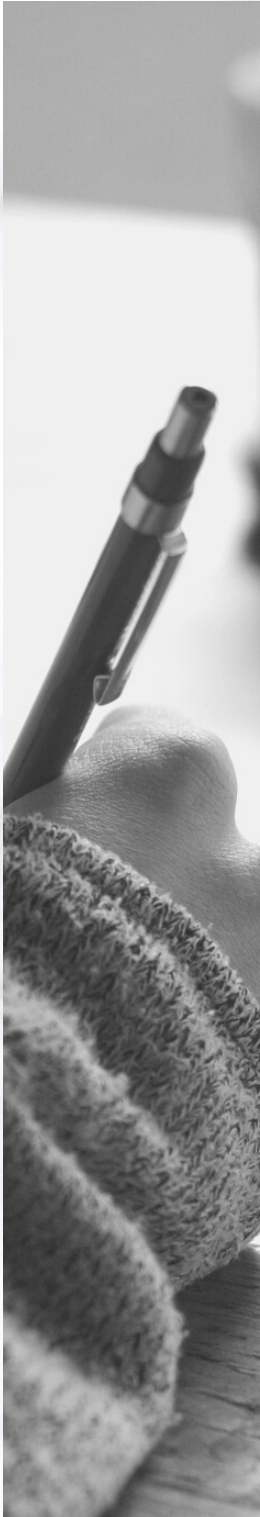
Co-Parenting Programs

Teen parent supports should include education on strategies for successful co-parenting. Programs that are tailored to the unique circumstances of teen parents and include consideration of two-generation parenting dynamics (active parenting by the teen parent but also the parent of the teen parent), will be most effective.

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/index.htm>.

[2] Teenage Cohabitation, Marriage, and Childbearing, Wendy D. Manning and Jessica A. Cohen, Population Research Policy Review, April 1, 2015.





Co-parenting resources should also be culturally relevant, considering different cultural norms and expectations about raising children, the role of extended family, and expectations about combining employment outside the home and child-rearing.

While co-parenting resources specifically designed to address the unique circumstances of teen parents can be difficult to find, there are strategies available to service providers who are interested in developing teen-specific co-parenting programming. Mark Feinberg, Ph.D., with Pennsylvania State University has developed a teen-specific co-parenting curriculum, *Strong Families*, adapted from *Family Foundations*, an evidence-based program designed to enhance co-parenting support among first-time adult parents.

Given the scarcity of teen parent-specific programming, *Family Foundations* set out to develop an intervention to enhance co-parenting among adolescent parents that was informed by clinical observations indicating that both mothers and fathers had a strong preference for fathers to be meaningfully involved in the lives of their children.

Strong Foundations participants were introduced to the concept of co-parenting as a partnership and were provided with strategies for working together to support their child's well-being and healthy development. Programming places a specific emphasis on developing good communication skills, problem solving, and relaxation techniques to diffuse conflict and promote positive interactions between the parents. To better tailor strategies to teen parents, these skills are presented in an experiential manner that incorporates role playing activities. Providers who are interested in adopting these strategies can access the *Strong Foundations* curriculum (see contact information below) or by making adaptations to other existing evidence-based programming to better suit the needs and perspectives and teen parents.

Technical Assistance

The Healthy Teen Network, a Baltimore-based organization, promotes better outcomes for adolescents and young adults





by advancing social change, cultivating innovation, and strengthening youth-supporting professionals and organizations. Training and technical assistance is available to help providers support co-parenting efforts and engage young fathers in programming. More information can be accessed [here](#).

Co-Parenting Education & the Colorado Courts

Another avenue for co-parenting education for many Colorado families is through the Colorado courts. Parenting classes are generally required for most individuals involved in divorce proceedings or actions to determine parenting responsibilities, but they are not developed with teen parents in mind.

Incorporating resources that are more responsive to the special circumstances and co-parenting challenges of teen parents would be one way to increase parenting education and improve family dynamics, among young families involved in domestic relations cases. One of the key providers of co-parenting education in Colorado, Parenting After Divorce, indicates that their curriculum is relevant to teen parents involved in divorce or APR (allocation of parental responsibilities) proceedings, but it is not specifically designed for teen parents.

It is believed that not any court-mandated programs in Colorado incorporate targeted teen parent programming. Parenting education providers and the Colorado courts alike may want to explore ways to incorporate teen parent-specific programming as a way of providing targeted training to a vulnerable population.

Additional Resources

To access the Strong Foundations curriculum, inquiries can be directed to info@FamFound.net or visit FamFound.net for additional resources.

For a full discussion of the Strong Foundations pilot trial, see *Strengthening Positive Co-Parenting in Teen Parents: A Cultural Adaptation of an Evidence-Based Intervention*, The Journal of Primary Prevention, Amy Lewin, et.al, March, 2015.