VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Parents and Teen Pregnancy

This community-specific video was created by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to provide grantees of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention a resource for use in their community-wide initiatives to reduce teen pregnancy. The primary goals of this video—as well as a companion video focused on faith leaders—are to:

- Increase viewers’ knowledge about teen pregnancy.
- Increase viewers’ belief in the importance of preventing teen pregnancy.
- Increase viewers’ awareness of your community-wide effort to prevent teen pregnancy.
- Increase viewers’ knowledge about the important role parents and other adults can play in helping prevent teen pregnancy.
- In particular, help viewers understand that teens consistently say that parents most influence their decisions about sex.
How to use this video:

• Watch the video before sharing with your audience. This will ensure that you are familiar with the videos and have a sense of how to guide the conversation.

• We recommend sharing the video in small groups or in a one-on-one setting if possible. The video is approximately nine minutes long and includes interviews with teens, parents, community leaders, and professionals from around the country. It provides information about the critical role parents have to play in preventing teen pregnancy.

• Make sure you preface the video with an overview of your community-wide initiative. Tell the audience what you do, what you hope to accomplish, and why your work is important. Even if the audience is already familiar with the work you do, this is the time to remind them and to share your elevator pitch, explaining your project in a clear and concise manner. For example:
  - Our organization works with other partners throughout the community to improve the lives of children and families by preventing teen pregnancy. In particular, we are working to ensure that teens have access to accurate information and clinical services so they can make healthy decisions and achieve their full potential. This project is part of the President’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative and is funded through the Office of Adolescent Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information on our community-wide initiative, please visit http://www.cdc.gov/TeenPregnancy/PreventTeenPreg.htm.
  - Our hope is that this video will help raise your awareness of the importance of teen pregnancy prevention, and specifically, the powerful role parent-child communication can play in preventing teen pregnancy. The video provides examples of how you, other parents, your organization, and other supporters can support teen pregnancy prevention efforts in your community.

• Follow the video with a discussion about what viewers have learned (see discussion ideas below), what ideas and questions they may have as a result of watching the video, and how they might want to get involved with your community-wide teen pregnancy prevention project. Note that the video does not include a specific appeal or invitation for parents and others in your community. You may want to tailor your discussion to include next steps and specific ways viewers can support efforts to prevent teen pregnancy in their community.

• Please remember that the discussion should be tailored to meet your needs. In short, the discussion should be guided by your needs and your goals for the meeting.

Why care about teen pregnancy?

• Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues—including poverty and income, overall child well-being, health issues, education, and workforce development.

• Less than half (40%) of teen mothers ever finish high school.

• Although the nation has made extraordinary progress in reducing teen pregnancy rates—down more than 40% since the early 1990s—it is still true that the U.S. has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth in the industrialized world.

• Despite impressive declines in teen pregnancy in all 50 states and among all racial/ethnic groups, nearly one in three girls in the U.S. gets pregnant at least once by age 20.

• Teen childbearing cost taxpayers $10.9 billion in 2009.

• Cite data from your community needs assessment here if appropriate.
Topics of discussion, common questions, and responses:

- **What influence do parents really have concerning teen pregnancy?** Quite a bit, according to teens. In nationally representative surveys teens consistently say that parents—not peers, not popular culture, not partners—most influence their decisions about sex (see Figure 1 in the Appendix).

- **Still not convinced about parental influence?** The overwhelming majority of teens say that it would be much easier for them to postpone sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents (see Figure 2 in the Appendix).

- **Concerned you’re not sure what to say?** You’re not alone. Fully 88% of adults freely admit, for example, that parents should talk to their kids about sex, love, and relationships but many don’t because they simply don’t know what to say, how to say it, or when to start (see Figure 2 in the Appendix). Remember, teens say they want to hear from their parents.

- **Concerned about sending young people a mixed message?** Research makes clear that teens whose parents are clear about the value of abstinence, and/or about the dangers of unprotected intercourse, are more likely to delay having sex and to use contraception if they are sexually active. Put another way:
  - Parents who provide clear messages about the value of delaying sex have children who are less likely to have intercourse at an early age.
  - Parents who discuss contraception are also more likely to have children who use contraception when they become sexually active.

Remember, of course, that young people in your community come from a variety of different home situations. Some teens have two parents at home, some may have one parent at home, and others may be looked after by a relative or another caring adult. It is also the case that some in your community may be unable to spend as much time as they would like with their children because of work schedules and commitments. Consider having resources on hand for adults to consider such as free afterschool activities for kids, free homework tutoring programs, and the like.

Three-quarters of adults wish teens were getting more information about abstinence and contraception rather than either/or.

- **What else can I do to help?** Overall closeness between parents and their children, shared activities, parental presence in the home, and parental caring and concern are all associated with a reduced risk of early sex and teen pregnancy. Teens who are close to their parents and feel supported by them are more likely to delay sex, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception more consistently.

For more data on the consequences of teen pregnancy, please see The National Campaign's Why It Matters series. These research briefs address topics including teen pregnancy and education, infant health, and poverty. [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/wim_teens.aspx](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/why-it-matters/wim_teens.aspx). The close parent-child relationships that help protect young people from early sex also help limit other risky behavior such as violence, substance and alcohol use, and school failure.
Questions for viewers:

- Did anything you saw/heard in the video raise questions or concerns for you?
- Did anything in the video surprise you?
- Teens in the video had lots of advice for parents about preventing teen pregnancy. What resonated most with you?
- What are some ways that you, parents, and others can get involved in the community-wide effort to prevent teen pregnancy?
- What challenges do you foresee? How might these be overcome?
- How can we support you in addressing teen pregnancy? What resources would you find helpful in your efforts to address teen pregnancy prevention as parents in the community?

Things you can do...

- Talk to your own children about relationships, love, sex, contraception, and avoiding teen pregnancy. There are some ideas below on what to say.
- Talk to other parents about the important role they can play in helping young people avoid teen pregnancy.
- Show your support for the community-wide initiative and their efforts to prevent teen pregnancy by attending community events, helping set up an event at your church, school, or community center, telling others about the initiative.
- Support the efforts in your community to use evidence-based programs. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health identifies a number of sex education and youth development programs—including those that do not necessarily focus on sex education—that have been shown through careful research to delay sexual activity among teens, improve contraceptive use, and/or reduce teen pregnancy. Many of these evidence-based programs include strong messages of abstinence and have been shown to delay the initiation of sex.
- Consider making a presentation to parents or other members of the community about the importance of helping young people avoid teen pregnancy and the critical role parents can play. Visit http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/woy/charts.aspx#parentpower for downloadable presentation slides that might be helpful.

Note to grantees:

- Be certain that your audience is aware of the evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs available in your area.
- Discuss the importance of using programs with evidence of success, that are age-appropriate, medically accurate, and that are designed to reach those in the community with the highest rates of teen pregnancy.
- Help parents learn how to connect young people with evidence-based programs. While some parents may feel uncomfortable addressing teen pregnancy with their children, they may be happy to be able to connect them with programs with evidence of success.
Advice for Parents from Teens

For 15 years, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned pregnancy has asked teens from all over the country a fairly simple question: If you could give your parents or other important adults advice about how to help you and your friends avoid pregnancy, what would it be? Here are the answers we have heard most often. Visit www.TheNationalCampaign.org/parents for more information.

Tip #1: Show us why teen pregnancy is not a good idea.
• For instance, let us hear directly from teen mothers and fathers about how hard it has been for them. Even though most of us don’t want to get pregnant, sometimes we need real-life examples to motivate us.

Tip #2: Talk to us honestly about sex, love, and relationships.
• Just because we’re young doesn’t mean that we can’t fall in love or be deeply interested in sex. These feelings are very real and powerful to us. Help us to handle the feelings in a safe way—without getting hurt or hurting others.

Tip #3: Telling us not to have sex is not enough.
• Explain why you feel that way, and ask us what we think. Tell us how you felt as a teen. Listen to us and take our opinions seriously. And no lectures, please.

Tip #4: Whether we’re having sex or not, we need to be prepared.
• We need to know how to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Tip #5: If we ask you about sex or birth control, don’t assume we are already having sex.
• We may just be curious, or we may want to talk with someone we trust. And don’t think that giving us information about sex and birth control will encourage us to have sex.

Tip #6: Pay attention to us before we get into trouble.
• Programs for teen moms and teen dads are great, but we all need encouragement, attention, and support. Reward us for doing the right thing—even when it seems like no big thing. Don’t shower us with attention only when there is a baby involved.

Tip #7: Sometimes, all it takes not to have sex is not to have the opportunity.
• If you can’t be home with us after school, make sure we have something to do that we really like, where there are other kids and some adults who are comfortable with kids our age. Often we have sex because there’s not much else to do. Don’t leave us alone so much.

Tip #8: We really care what you think, even if we don’t always act like it.
• When we don’t end up doing exactly what you tell us to, don’t think that you’ve failed to reach us.

Tip #9: Show us what good, responsible relationships look like.
• We’re as influenced by what you do as by what you say. If you demonstrate sharing, communication, and responsibility in your own relationships, we will be more likely to follow your example.

Tip #10: We hate “The Talk” as much as you do.
• Instead, start talking with us about sex and responsibility when we’re young, and keep the conversation going as we grow older.
Visit www.TheNationalCampaign.org/parents for more information.

**Tip #1: Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.**

- Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you are certain in your own mind about these issues. To help clarify your attitudes and values, think about the following kinds of questions:
  - Is it important to encourage teenagers to abstain from sex?
  - Is it important to talk to teens about contraception?
  - What do you think of school-age teens becoming parents?

**Tip #2: Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific.**

- Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they’d most like to go to for answers is their parents. Start the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open, and respectful. If you can’t think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Tell kids candidly and confidently what you think and why you take these positions; if you’re not sure about some issues, tell them that, too. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture.

**Tip #3: Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents.**

- Establish rules, curfews, and standards of expected behavior, preferably through an open process of family discussion and respectful communication. If your children get out of school at 3pm and you don’t get home from work until 6pm, who is responsible for making certain that your children are not only safe during those hours, but are also engaged in useful activities? Where are they when they go out with friends? Are there adults around who are in charge? Supervising and monitoring your kids’ whereabouts doesn’t make you a nag; it makes you a parent.

**Tip #4: Know your children’s friends and their families.**

- Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents of teens even arrange to meet with the parents of their children’s friends to establish common rules and expectations. It is easier to enforce a curfew that all your child’s friends share rather than one that makes him or her different—but even if your views don’t match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children’s friends into your home and talk to them openly.

**Tip #5: Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.**

- Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Let your child know about your strong feelings about this throughout childhood—don’t wait until your teen proposes a plan that differs from your preferences in this area; otherwise, he or she will think you just don’t like the particular person or invitation.

**Tip #6: Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is.** And don’t allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is.

- Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl—sometimes they even have money and a car to boot. But the risk of matters getting out of hand increases when the guy is much older than the girl. Try setting a limit of no more than a two- (or at most three-) year age difference. The power differences between younger girls and older boys or men can lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection.

**Tip #7: Help your teenagers have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.**

The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright. This means helping them set meaningful
goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true, and helping them reach their goals. Explain how becoming pregnant—or causing pregnancy—can derail the best of plans.

**Tip #8: Let your kids know that you value education highly.**

- Encourage your children to take school seriously and to set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood. Be very attentive to your children's progress in school and intervene early if things aren't going well.

**Tip #9: These first eight tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age.**

- Strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, and rich in communication, and one that emphasizes mutual trust and respect. There is no single way to create such relationships, but the following habits of the heart can help:
  - Express love and affection clearly and often. Hug your children, and tell them how much they mean to you. Praise specific accomplishments, but remember that expressions of affection should be offered freely, not just for a particular achievement.
  - Listen carefully to what your children say and pay thoughtful attention to what they do.
  - Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their ages and interests, not just yours. Be supportive and interested in what interest them.
  - Help them to build self-esteem by mastering skills; remember, self-esteem is earned, not given, and one of the best ways to earn it is by doing something well.
Appendix

Figure 1

PARENT POWER
When it comes to your/teens’ decisions about sex, who is most influential?

- **TEENS AGE 12-19**
  - 38% PARENTS
  - 22% FRIENDS
  - 9% THE MEDIA
  - 6% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 6% SIBLINGS
  - 10% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 4% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS

- **TEENS AGE 12-14**
  - 43% PARENTS
  - 19% FRIENDS
  - 8% THE MEDIA
  - 6% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 6% SIBLINGS
  - 8% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 5% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS

- **TEEN GIRLS AGE 12-19**
  - 41% PARENTS
  - 20% FRIENDS
  - 9% THE MEDIA
  - 6% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 6% SIBLINGS
  - 9% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 5% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS

- **TEEN BOYS AGE 12-19**
  - 35% PARENTS
  - 24% FRIENDS
  - 9% THE MEDIA
  - 6% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 12% SIBLINGS
  - 12% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 4% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS

- **TEENS AGE 15-19**
  - 36% PARENTS
  - 24% FRIENDS
  - 9% THE MEDIA
  - 6% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 12% SIBLINGS
  - 12% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 4% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS

- **ADULTS**
  - 41% PARENTS
  - 34% FRIENDS
  - 9% THE MEDIA
  - 7% RELIGIOUS LEADERS
  - 9% SIBLINGS
  - 9% SOMEONE ELSE
  - 4% TEACHERS & EDUCATORS
Appendix

Figure 2

PARENT POWER

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It would be much easier for teens to postpone sexual activity and avoid pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.”

TEENS AGE 12-19

87% AGREE
53% STRONGLY AGREE
34% SOMewhat AGREE
11% DISAGREE
8% SOMewhat DISAGREE
3% STRONGLY DISAGREE

ADULTS

90% AGREE
71% STRONGLY AGREE
19% SOMewhat AGREE
8% DISAGREE
5% SOMewhat DISAGREE
3% STRONGLY DISAGREE