

## Introduction

As someone who works on the issue of adolescent pregnancy prevention in your state or community, you hardly need to be told that disagreements exist on this issue. In many states and communities, preventing teen pregnancy has become a lightning rod for controversy.

Quite often, people argue over specifics, such as the existence of a teens-only clinic in the local health center or the content of family life education curricula in school. But these specific arguments usually tap into deeper questions of personal values and, often, religious belief. What begins as a focused argument over whether contraception should be discussed in a classroom, for example, often reveals strongly felt concerns over the proper role of parents versus schools as sexuality educators, the sexual standards we want our children to follow, and similarly important topics.

The issues become even more explosive when communities approach teen pregnancy prevention as though there were only one magic solution. If you ask five pregnant young women or five different teen fathers, each can give a set of different reasons for the pregnancy. Yet, often, one single program is highlighted as *the* way to solve the problem for the community as a whole.

Obviously, not all controversy can be avoided or resolved. But helping our young people avoid pregnancy demands that every effort be made to do so. This chapter will assist those who are just starting out, starting all over again, or are in the midst of what seems like an impossible battle. It articulates a number of guiding principles and strategies for preventing, minimizing, or resolving conflict. These principles and strategies are summarized in the following matrix.

## Principles and strategies for handling conflict

Guiding Principles to Minimize Conflict	Community Organizing Strategies to Minimize Conflict	Addressing Conflict When It Arises
Unite around teen pregnancy prevention as a goal	Form a broad-based and inclusive organization	Clarify the areas of disagreement
Avoid the abortion controversy	Select leadership thoughtfully	Agree to disagree about strategy
Take a “big tent” approach	Establish clear ground rules	Find common ground
Base your decisions on sound research	Develop organizational rules and policies early on	Work on mutually agreeable projects
Note that teens need a wide variety of preventive strategies to avoid pregnancy	Learn about the issues together	
Choose strategies with the greatest yield in reducing teen pregnancy	Take early, successful action	
Be in it for the long term	Build ongoing support for your work	
Be open to reevaluation		
Respect deeply felt beliefs and refrain from trying to change others’ values		

### Guiding principles to minimize conflict

A few years ago, a particular community’s well-organized effort to prevent teen pregnancy was dismantled because of arguments over whether or not to have a health center in a high school. A new effort has since been launched, but this time, community members are working hard to develop a broad-based coalition with strong leadership. The hope is to minimize controversy and actually reduce the community’s high rates of adolescent pregnancy. The specific

issue of the school-based health center has taken a back seat to other strategies with broader support.

You can structure your efforts to minimize conflict right from the beginning. Some conflict can be avoided or resolved by planning ahead and laying positive groundwork in your state or community. The following principles have helped teen pregnancy initiatives around the country get their work off to a good start.

### **Unite around teen pregnancy prevention as a goal**

Keeping this as the focus of your efforts will help you avoid being sidetracked by other issues, such as abortion and premarital sex, that can cause controversy. It is important to help people understand that one of the most compelling reasons to support your work to reduce teen pregnancy is that it helps to reduce persistent child poverty and builds strong families and communities. All children deserve to be born to families who eagerly anticipate their arrival and are able to provide adequate care and nurturing. By reducing teen pregnancy, we increase the chances that all children will get a good start in life. Defining a program to reduce teen pregnancy as a step toward child and family well-being is often less divisive than framing it as a “reproductive health” or “healthy sexuality” program.

### **Avoid the abortion controversy**

Your goal is to help teens not become pregnant in the first place. Keeping this goal in mind can help you avoid contentious arguments over abortion.

### **Take a “big tent” approach**

Include a wide range of perspectives and approaches to preventing teen pregnancy. This can help dilute extreme

## **SLOGANS SERVE A USEFUL PURPOSE**

***They keep the issue of teen pregnancy in focus:***

- **“While the adults are arguing, the teens are getting pregnant.”**
- **“‘X’ number of teens get pregnant every week in our community.”**

***They articulate the “big tent” principle:***

- **“Unity of purpose, diversity of means.”**

positions and offer the option of de-emphasizing any one program area or focus that is causing intense conflict.

### **Base your decisions on sound research**

Having a scientific basis for your approach shifts the focus from opinions about the best way to go or about the consequences of taking a particular action toward the firmer ground of facts and validated experiences. A scientific grounding will help make your decisions more compelling and your program more effective. At the same time, recognize that people make decisions about tough social problems on the basis of more than just facts and data. Values and beliefs are often more central.

### **Note that teens need a wide variety of preventive strategies to avoid pregnancy**

Teens need different messages and programs at different times in

## FOR MORE ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT...

**See Chapter 12 (Volume 3), “Tailoring a Program to Your Community Through Needs Assessment.”**

their development. No *one* right way to proceed exists. In fact, some researchers believe that it is a high level of intensity of activity, rather than any one program approach, that reduces teen pregnancy rates most effectively.

### **Choose strategies with the greatest yield in reducing teen pregnancy**

If you have done a needs assessment, you understand the teen pregnancy problem in your area and can choose strategies that are well suited to your community. Programs that can be defended with logic and data will strengthen your case and can dampen controversy.

### **Be in it for the long term**

Teen pregnancy is not a problem that can be solved with a one-year

or even a three-year strategy. Patterns of early pregnancy and childbearing can be very hard to change, so take the long view. Do not abandon your efforts in the face of conflict.

### **Be open to reevaluation**

You may start with a strategy that you are certain is the best possible approach and then find that you lack support for the strategy or that it generates controversy. Look for ways you can move forward anyway. Consider shelving your initial idea for the time being and resurrecting it later. Or, think about finding another way to get to the same end. Experience teaches that it is eventually possible for community coalitions to embark on relatively controversial initiatives, but only after a long start-up period of building trust and learning to work together. Be patient and flexible.

## **Community organizing strategies to minimize conflict**

Creating and maintaining a successful “big tent” approach—where many points of view are entertained but in which conflict is minimized—requires some careful thought about the nuts and bolts of running meetings, making decisions, and building

support. Here are some strategies that can help.

### **Form a broad-based and inclusive organization**

A broadly representative group of people and organizations helps most people feel that they

have a voice in shaping the work. Such a group can more easily come to centrist positions, thereby marginalizing extreme opinions and defusing the power of any single voice. Be thoughtful about how you approach your community and think strategically about whom to involve and in what capacity.

As you build your inclusive organization, pay particular attention to the following to help reduce conflict:

*Invite a wide range of people and ask them who else should be involved.* Make sure the people they refer are reasonable, willing to compromise, committed to the issue, and willing to work.

*Hold one-on-one meetings ahead of time with people whose perspectives you would like included.* Be sure to get their suggestions and ideas and encourage them to participate.

*Have “peers” approach their “peers” to become involved.* For example, a minister is more

likely to get involved if asked by a fellow minister.

*Do not worry about who is not participating.* Make a good faith effort to get them involved and then move forward. As your efforts become successful, they may decide to join. Perhaps there may be other ways to build bridges to those who stay away.

*Build strong personal relationships within the coalition.* The greater the level of trust, the greater the likelihood of preventing or successfully resolving conflict.

Be sure to invite participants who can make a difference in reducing conflict. These include:

*Young people themselves.* Youth voices are compelling and can help keep the group focused on its mission. Be sure to involve them in a significant and meaningful way from the very beginning.

## FIELD NOTES

### The Michigan Abstinence Partnership

The Michigan Abstinence Partnership is a coalition of over 70 organizations from around the state that is working to help youth aged 9-14 abstain from sexual activity. It attributes its

success to the diverse and broad base of its membership, which includes people with various and often differing perspectives on how to prevent teen pregnancy.

*Parents of school-aged children and youth.* Parents from a range of communities, neighborhoods, and schools are often actively involved in local civic issues. These voices can either make or break a group's efforts. Make a special effort to meet with parent leaders, such as those involved in the local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

*Faith community leaders, members, and representatives of area religious groups.* Faith community leaders have a significant influence, not only with the members of their own congregations, but also with other community leaders. Their perspectives, often crisply focused on values and ethics, need to be part of any core group.

*Business leaders from large and small businesses and business*

*associations.* Business leaders are often powerful and effective voices in a community and, by nature, are primarily concerned with action and results.

*Social service organizations and professionals working with youth in schools and in other youth-serving organizations.* These professionals can provide a window into the lives of youth at risk of teenage pregnancy, and many are in touch with young people directly through their programs.

*Health organizations, including hospitals and community clinics.* They can provide relevant data so that discussion and decisions are informed by facts. They also provide health services, including family planning, that are part of many programs to reduce teen pregnancy. And finally, their leaders—often doctors and nurses—are well respected leaders who often know young people well and can speak eloquently on their behalf.

### Select leadership thoughtfully

Choose leaders carefully and clearly define their responsibilities. Consistent leadership by one or two highly regarded people is important in forestalling conflict and defusing it when it does occur. At times of disagreement or conflict, it also may be helpful to bring in an outside, neutral

#### FOR MORE ON...

**involving youth, see Chapter 5 (Volume 1)**

**involving parents, see Chapter 6 (Volume 2)**

**involving the faith community, see Chapter 7 (Volume 2)**

**involving the business community, see Chapter 8 (Volume 2)**

**involving schools, see Chapter 9 (Volume 2)**

**involving health professionals, see Chapter 10 (Volume 2)**

facilitator, whose expertise is not teen pregnancy but group process. This person can do a lot to reinforce the efforts of your leaders.

While your initial leaders are in place, cultivate the next generation. It is important to know who will take over when current leaders move on.

### **Establish clear ground rules**

Ground rules prevent disruption because they encourage people to listen respectfully during meetings. Group members will be more willing to follow the rules if they set them. At your first meeting, have group members develop a list of ground rules together. Ask everyone to sign the agreed-upon list. The document can be used as a reminder if someone becomes unreasonable or attempts to obstruct the work of the group. If you are experiencing conflict,

### **A LEADER SHOULD...**

- **be well respected in the community or state**
- **have skills to lead a group and stimulate action**
- **be focused on the goal of preventing teen pregnancy**
- **be knowledgeable about the community**
- **be able to unite people with multiple opinions**
- **be open to the diverse approaches needed to prevent teen pregnancy**

the list may help guide you. Reevaluate your ground rules as your members gain experience working together.

### **Develop organizational rules and policies early on**

One of the first orders of business should be to determine the way in which you will make decisions. The two major methods are:

*Consensus.* Consensus decision-making requires 100 percent agreement. If you select consensus and at some point are unable to reach it, agree that you will seek additional view-

## **CASE IN POINT**

### **The Wisconsin Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Services Board**

This 13-year-old statewide board was established through a piece of legislation fashioned from compromise. It has six voting members appointed by the Governor and six appointed by the state's Women's Council. The Board found that having strong leadership at the beginning of

their effort helped establish important policies still in effect today. Its comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention programs were based on sound research. Board members have devoted significant time to talking issues through until they find common ground.

points. Decide what information you need to reach a decision and when you will revisit the issue, then move on to the next issue.

*Majority vote.* This method may upset those who end up in the minority after a vote, but may make it easier for the whole group to move forward. Decide ahead of time what you will do if there is a strong minority view. For example, you may allow this group to express its opinion formally in writing as part of the record.

You will also need to consider other policies early on in your work, such as:

*How to handle media inquiries.*

Determine how you will decide who talks to the media on behalf of the group. It is helpful to specify a procedure for authorizing someone to represent the organization to the media.

*How to integrate new members so they can participate fully.*

Deciding this in advance can save time by not having to

## FIELD NOTES

### Sample ground rules for a teen pregnancy coalition

The following ground rules come from teen pregnancy prevention coalitions around the country:

- Start and end meetings on time.
- Each group member has an equal voice/vote.
- Each person gets a turn to speak if he or she wants one and can also pass if desired.
- No one is permitted to monopolize the discussion.
- No one can interrupt except for the person leading the meeting, who can interrupt to keep discussion on task.
- Because of the focus on pregnancy prevention, there will be no discussion of abortion.
- Listen respectfully.
- Respect others' opinions and do not try directly to change the values and heart-felt beliefs of others.
- Be open to new and different points of view.
- Be open to ideas/suggestions.
- No put-downs are allowed.
- Where appropriate, agree to disagree.
- In order to present a unified voice, no one may talk to the press until the group decides to do so.
- Make every attempt to attend meetings; take them seriously.
- What individuals say at meetings is confidential.
- The way decisions are made is agreed upon at the outset, understood by all members of the group, and binding.
- Concerns about meeting process are to be raised in a timely manner with the chair or the group and not be allowed to fester.



spend meetings revisiting past discussions and decisions. Some groups appoint a mentor for each new member.

*How to handle people who cannot attend many meetings.* Many options exist. You may consider requiring a certain level of attendance of all members. Another approach is to allow people to attend periodically, but ask that they express opinions in writing when they cannot attend. You do not want the people who are able to come regularly to lose patience, nor do you want to lose potentially important ideas from someone not yet as involved or not able to attend regularly due to scheduling difficulties. Some groups are exploring listservs, web pages, and other electronic means of keeping groups connected.

### **Learn about the issues together**

The process of learning together as a group can help defuse conflict by creating a shared understanding of key information.

## CASE IN POINT

### **New York State Teen Pregnancy Task Force**

In New York State, the Governor established a task force of pro-choice and pro-life members to address out-of-wedlock pregnancy and poverty. One reason

The dynamic of learning together builds relationships and develops cohesiveness. Do not assume everyone in your group is an expert on teen pregnancy. Even those who are knowledgeable may not be aware of some of the attitudes and values in your state or community. Decide together what information you would like to learn and from whom.

*There are many ways to learn together.* Invite experts as well as people from similar communities or states to share their ideas about preventing teen pregnancy.

*Together, examine the data for your community or state.* Examine trends in adolescent pregnancy and select a few motivating numbers to share widely.

*Make site visits together to programs serving youth.* Include schools and recreation facilities to better understand the environment of the youth in your state or community.

*Commission polls and hold focus groups.* Learn about the

they have been able to work together is that they established ground rules early on, including “no discussion of abortion.”

attitudes, values, and views toward various approaches to teen pregnancy prevention in your state or community.

Publicize the results. A community foundation or group of them around the state might be an underwriter. Avoid using a pollster identified with any particular ideology or point of view.

*Survey youth in your state or community.* Or, use existing surveys, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is used widely and can provide valuable information.

*Hold meetings to share your findings.* Consider holding community forums in strategic locations across the state or community. These will not only provide an opportunity for you to widely describe your findings, but will also allow you to learn together about the community's reactions, attitudes, and ideas. Try these approaches for such a meeting:

- involve teens;
- have a local, state, or national leader discuss issues related to adolescent pregnancy;
- have a one-page sheet summarizing the issues in one column and concrete actions to deal with them in another column; and
- provide an opportunity for discussion and invite participants to get involved in your organization.

### Take early, successful action

If one strategy is causing conflict and impeding action, be flexible and move on. Find and implement an activity that nearly everyone can support and that is likely to be successful in some visible way. Action and success motivate people to stay involved. Here are two possible approaches:

*Assess community readiness for more complex strategies.* If the support for a particular intervention does not yet exist, do something else and work instead to build support.

*Be flexible about locations of programs.* If there is conflict over placing a program in a school, look for another location to reach young people. For example, rather than arguing over school-based health clinics, some communities have located adolescent clinics in a mall near the school.

### Build ongoing support for your work

Once you have established a strong base of support, it is important to build recognition and support for your program or coalition. A good communications effort will tell the community

what you are doing, help it better understand your activities, and diminish opportunities for misunderstanding and mistrust. Be sure to include the following strategies.

*Widely publicize and explain your work.* Controversy often arises when people do not fully understand a program, and supporters do not have the knowledge to counter misinformation. Actively explaining your work as widely as possible can defuse misinformation and provide people with the facts.

*Develop a communications plan.* To make sure that various audiences are continuously—and accurately—hearing about your work, think about developing a communications plan that links your overall mission, goals, and activities to publicity efforts.

*Create a positive image of your work through the media.* Invite reporters to visit your offices and programs and give them relevant story ideas to help educate them and the community about your services and strategies. Train teens and parents to work with the media so you have many varied, effective spokespeople.

Focus your messages broadly on the health and well-being of children and youth, rather than narrowly on teen pregnancy

## CREATE SIMPLE MATERIALS TO DESCRIBE YOUR WORK

### ***Make them:***

- **brief and easy to read and reproduce**
- **targeted for different audiences—parents, funders, elected officials, teens**

### ***Consider creating:***

- **a fact sheet on your program**
- **an information packet with letters of support from people who know your programs first-hand—ministers, parents, teachers**

prevention. Everyone should work to get the word out about the project or coalition and its successes. It is harder to create controversy around something that many people understand and find exciting and compelling.

*Train staff and coalition members to field questions and ward off conflict.* Everyone involved with your effort should understand the basis for your program or approach. They should know your research on the needs and concerns of youth in your state or community. If anyone is uncomfortable answering a particular question, they should politely refer it to someone else. Identify spokespersons who can field questions. Provide training for all staff and coalition members in internal and external public relations, as well as in how to work with the media.

Possible places for media training include your local United Way, advertising agencies,

## FOR MORE ON DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AND WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

**See Chapter 15 (Volume 3), “Working with the Media to Promote Teen Pregnancy Prevention.”**

political consultants, local media outlets, or university communications departments.

*Use community or statewide resources to broaden your base of support.* Involve (preferably on a pro bono basis or at a discounted rate) people from across your state or community, such as graphic designers, video producers, radio and TV stations, newspapers, universities, and businesses. Using these resources can provide opportunities to involve additional partners and make them aware of the issue and your work.

*Expand involvement on an ongoing basis.* Bringing in new voices can broaden your base of support as well as enhance your ability to sustain your program over the long term. Invite “less-likely partners” to join you on site

visits or for forums. Alternatively, ask to present to their groups. Consider including representatives of religious groups, health centers and nursing homes, local businesses such as barber shops and fast-food restaurants, social groups, and business associations such as the state or local chamber of commerce.

*Have visitors attend your events and visit programs.* First-hand contact with programs makes it easier for others to support your work. Bring community members such as elected officials (e.g., state legislators, school board members, superintendents of schools, mayor, governor, sheriff) and leaders from the medical, business, and faith communities to visit your program, meet with your coalition, or join you on a site visit or for a conversation with teens. If you are including elected officials, have people from their city or district invite them.

### CASE IN POINT

## Louisiana succeeds in minimizing controversy

The **Louisiana Adolescent School Health Initiative** is a statewide program that focuses on middle and high schools. It provides funding, collaboration, and quality control for comprehensive mental and physical health care. Coalition members

throughout the state work to educate the public and elected officials about the scope and impact of their services. The broad base of interest and support they have created has muted much potential for conflict over teen pregnancy issues.

*Conduct research.* Make sure you are aware of the pulse of your state or community. Continue to conduct community-wide polls

and focus groups to gauge attitudes and interests as well as to test messages for target audiences.

## Addressing conflict when it arises

We know that you often cannot completely prevent conflict in a teen pregnancy initiative. Rather than abandoning efforts in the face of difficulty, however, find some strategies to move forward in spite of controversy. Here are several promising strategies.

### Clarify the area(s) of disagreement

It may be helpful to categorize the issues that are causing controversy. Disagreements tend to fit into two broad categories.

#### ***Programmatic disagreements***

This is the arena in which most communities seem to have the greatest difficulty. For example, people argue over whether to implement abstinence-only or more comprehensive curricula in schools or whether to establish a school-based health center. If you are arguing over one specific program, it may be useful to delay implementation and establish a program that is more broadly supported. Alternatively, if you can identify and address the root of the argument, you may be able to defuse the

conflict. For example, if the basis for a conflict over school-based health is parental consent and control over health care, it may be that agreeing to require parental consent forms will allow you to move forward.

Another typical example of this type of disagreement is when an organization struggles over whether or not to apply for funding for a particular program.

#### ***Public policy and budget disagreements***

Communities often argue over whether to use public funds for teen pregnancy prevention. For example, disagreement often occurs over which curricula to use in a public school. Frequently, this argument occurs without learning about the students and their needs and with little parental involvement. Therefore, it may be prudent to begin your activities with work that is not publicly funded. At the same time, the group can survey students and parents about their values and attitudes.

Most of the controversies you face fit into these categories. Spend some time trying to categorize the controversies that are present.

### Agree to disagree about strategy

People with differing views on how to prevent teen pregnancy can move forward on their own projects and agree not to interfere with the work of *others*. Rather than arguing over the ideal strategy to prevent teen pregnancy, agree that many strategies can co-exist, even ones that may seem to be in conflict with one another. The concept here is unity of purpose, diversity of means. Focus your work on the activity that excites you the most instead of spending energy defeating another program or approach.

Here are some ways to move forward if you are disagreeing over strategy:

*Remind people that the goal is to prevent teen pregnancy.* There is likely to be no one sure path to get there. In fact, multiple

efforts are more useful than any single strategy.

*Bring in an outside, neutral facilitator.* Involve someone interested in the issue but who is not wholly invested in—or identified with—any one perspective. Choose a facilitation approach that suits your situation.

*Reexamine the data together.* Look again at local data on rates of adolescent pregnancy. For states, look at your ranking (if it is compelling) in comparison to other states. For communities, look at your ranking within your state. In some communities, looking at rates of sexual activity among local teens has jarred people to action. Review again the diversity of opinions and values in your state/community. Sometimes tolerance for diverse approaches increases when all concerned realize that their fellow citizens hold many different ideas about the causes of—and solutions to—teen pregnancy.

## CASE IN POINT

### Wisconsin resolves conflict over family life curricula

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the school district was in conflict over discussing contraception in their family life education program. After much discussion and

examination of the reasons behind the conflict, people agreed to teach contraception within the context of marriage. The conflict was defused.

*Do not get deadlocked.* At some point, when it is clear that no work is being done because of disputes, someone must suggest that members each undertake the strategy they think is most likely to reduce teen pregnancy. This person could be an outside facilitator, a group member of high regard, or perhaps an elected official, such as a mayor, governor, or state legislator.

### Work on mutually agreeable projects

Sometimes, communities experiencing conflict need a formal intervention, such as the “structured community dialogue” model described on the next page, to help them find areas of agreement. Often, though, com-

munities can move forward by agreeing to put aside the activities that are causing disagreements. In their place, they identify mutually agreeable projects. The key point here is to select an activity, not to debate extensively the nature of the activity. Early action equals early success.

*Hold a youth forum.* The authenticity of youth voices often helps a group in conflict refocus their energies on what holds it together: helping young people. Quite often, those in disagreement with one another find that the young people in their community have entirely different (and usually less divisive) concerns.

## CASE IN POINT

### Agreeing to disagree makes a difference in Tillamook, Oregon

In 1990, data showed that the rural county of Tillamook, Oregon, had one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the state. In response, the county health department proposed creating a school-based clinic that would provide contraception. This provoked intense community conflict.

While the proposal was defeated by the school board, the community agreed that something had to be done to bring down the high rates of teen pregnancy. Various segments of the community developed intensive

initiatives—ranging from creating new church-based abstinence education programs, to improving access to family planning clinics, to expanding YMCA programs for girls—and agreed not to fight each other’s efforts.

By 1994, the county teen pregnancy rate had dropped by 70 percent, becoming the lowest in the state. This decrease may have been due to the high intensity of adolescent pregnancy prevention activities, not to any one effort alone.

## Building common ground through structured community dialogue

Communities have found that one effective way to find common ground is through an approach called “structured community dialogue.” This approach was developed by The Common Ground Network for Life and Choice and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy for use in teen pregnancy prevention. A state or community initiates the process by issuing an invitation for a Structured Community Dialogue. Staff, as neutral parties, visit and are introduced to the community. Initial meetings are designed to clarify the issues causing conflict and to build trust between the neutral convener and community members. Once the neutral party has met with many key people, a two-day formal dialogue is planned. The dialogue is held in a neutral location. Approximately 30-80 people participate, attending as individuals, not as representatives of organizations. Strict ground rules, which insist on mutual respect and open mindedness, are agreed to by all participants. The goal is for people of differing perspectives to come together to explore possible areas of agreement.

In **Buffalo, New York**, the Common Ground Network was invited to hold a forum because of conflict over curriculum in the schools and adolescent pregnancy prevention services in the community. As a result of the dialogue, building after-school programs became a community-wide priority. Another significant result was the opportunity to learn about the work of other participants

and how it interrelated. One year later, there continues to be less conflict among service providers and many have found that there has been a marked increase in referrals between programs. In addition, the Buffalo Coalition for Common Ground is currently developing a funding proposal for a widely supported program on working with young males.

**San Bernardino County, California**, held its first structured community dialogue on March 12-13, 1998. The dialogue was a broad-based collaboration consisting of two local coalitions, a county-wide agency, and a development committee made up of local leaders. Even among the Development Committee members, there was a broad representation of perspectives on how best to prevent teen pregnancy. This diversity was also present among the nearly 60 participants involved. After a carefully structured and facilitated dialogue over two days, the communities involved were able to define a common ground action agenda. Among the items discussed were allowing students in the public schools to evaluate the sexuality education curriculum after they have taken the course, conducting parent/child communication workshops, and developing a community-based youth advisory board that would help translate the needs of young people into local public policy.



*Work with the faith community.* Whether at the outset or in the midst of challenges, faith leaders can bring a new perspective to teen pregnancy prevention work. Consider holding a prayer breakfast on teen pregnancy to capture their interest. Approach them with a range of ideas they are comfortable with, such as:

- holding youth forums at their church;
- inviting church members to find youth summer jobs;
- holding seminars on parent child-communication (not necessarily about sexuality); or
- organizing a particular day of worship during which all clergy talk about teen pregnancy and the well-being of youth.

*Reach out to new and less likely partners.* Community members not traditionally involved in adolescent pregnancy prevention can offer new perspectives, energy, and ideas. For example, business leaders might be compelled by economic arguments, or the police and judicial community may see a link to crime. In one community, a retired judge helped mobilize a community by making compelling arguments about all the cases he had seen that were connected to adolescent pregnancy.

*Talk less about teen pregnancy and more about youth development.* Youth development activities are a promising approach to preventing teen pregnancy. Most

youth development activities are not controversial. These programs address the activities and ambitions that motivate teens to avoid pregnancy. Youth develop-

ment approaches include mentoring, tutoring, community service, employment, and recreational activities.

*Choose a popular project.*

Certain issues or projects can bring adversaries together. For example, in one county, many community members found they were all offended by the same sexually explicit billboard. This was a great opportunity to unite the group around a petition drive to have it removed. Careful listening can bring these issues to your attention.

*Focus on working with parents.*

Most people agree that parents should be the primary sexuality educators of their children. Recent research affirms that children want their parents to

talk with them about values and relationships, and where sexuality fits in that context. Parents need to be assured that, even though they may feel in competition with their children's friends, music, and television, they are very much needed by their teens.

*Increase public awareness of teen pregnancy.* Most people can agree that teen pregnancy is a problem. Develop activities to raise awareness across your state or community. Use May, which is National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, as a rallying point.

## Conclusion

Many people have worked tirelessly to reduce teen pregnancy in this country, and although rates of both teen pregnancy and births are steadily decreasing, more needs to be done.

There are many speculations as to why this is the case. One theory is that the potential divisiveness of the issue limits bold action. Because programs to reduce teen pregnancy can cause controversy, leaders and

people at the grassroots level frequently avoid the topic. The arguments that do arise distract communities from carrying out effective prevention activities. Too often adults do what is most comfortable for them, not what teens need or what research suggests could work.

Dealing with controversy is not simple. This chapter has offered strategies that have worked in

other states and communities. Figuring out how best to address disagreements has to happen on a case-by-case basis, depending on the issues at hand and the people involved. Ultimately, it is important to move forward and get programs and activities in place that can help prevent teen pregnancy and enhance the well-being of our nation's children and youth.

## Programs mentioned in this chapter

### **Buffalo Coalition for Common Ground**

1272 Delaware Ave.  
Buffalo, NY 14209  
(716) 882-4793  
Fax: (716) 882-7671

### **San Bernardino Structured Community Dialogue Children's Network**

imPACCT Program  
385 N. Arrowhead, 2nd Floor  
San Bernardino, CA 92415  
(909) 387-5361  
Fax: (909) 387-4656

### **Louisiana Adolescent Health Initiative**

Office of Public Health  
325 Loyola Ave., Room 610  
New Orleans, LA 70112  
(504) 568-6636  
Fax: (504) 568-3786

### **Michigan Abstinence Partnership**

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Tillamook, OR 97141  
(503) 842-3403  
Fax: (503) 842-1384  
scameron@co.tillamook.or.us

## Other useful

### resources Conflict resolution organizations with a teen pregnancy prevention focus

#### **Common Ground Network for Life and Choice**

1601 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20009  
(202) 265-4300

#### **Public Conversations**

Project 46  
Kondazian St.  
Watertown, MA 02172  
(617) 923-1216

#### **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy**

2100 M St., NW  
Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20037  
(202) 261-5655  
[www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)

## General conflict resolution organizations

#### **Program for Community Problem Solving**

1319 F St., NW  
Suite 204  
Washington, DC 20004  
(202) 783-2961

#### **Study Circles Resource Center**

P.O. Box 203  
Rt. 169  
Pomfret, CT 06258  
(860) 928-2616

## Mediator/facilitator resources

#### **National Association for Community Mediation**

1726 M St., NW  
Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 467-6226