

# Preventing Teen Pregnancy Using Evidence-Based Approaches

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Preventing teen pregnancy is an important goal that will improve the well-being of Alabama's children, families and communities. Opportunities for implementing medically-accurate and age-appropriate sexual health education programs for Alabama's youth can be provided in communities across the state. The development of these opportunities requires a deliberate and thoughtful assessment of the needs of the youth in a particular community, followed by a thorough review of effective prevention programs, and, finally, the implementation of these programs with fidelity. The information provided below can help communities identify evidence-based programs that have been proven effective at reducing sexual risk-taking behavior.

Using evidence-based approaches for teen pregnancy prevention helps ensure greater success of programs. An evidence-based approach includes the following:

- The use of demographic, epidemiological and social science research to identify populations at risk of early pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections, and to identify the risk and protective factors for those populations
- The use of health behavior or health education theory for selecting risk and protective factors that will be addressed by the program, and guide the selection of intervention activities
- Use of a logic model to link risk and protective factors with program strategies and outcomes
- Selection, adaptation (if necessary), and implementation of programs that are either evidence-based or promising
- Process and outcome evaluation of the implemented program

An evidence-based program is one that research has shown to be effective in changing at least one of the following behaviors that contribute to early pregnancy, STD and HIV infection: delaying sexual initiation, reducing the frequency of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, or increasing the use of condoms and other contraceptives. An evidence-based program has been evaluated using a rigorous research design, which includes the following:

- Use of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design
- Measures knowledge, attitude and behavior
- Has an adequate sample size
- Collects data from both groups at three months or later after intervention

- Uses sound research methods and processes
- Replicates in different locations and finds similar evaluation results
- Publishes results in a peer-reviewed journal

If an evidence-based program cannot be implemented with fidelity, or cannot be adapted to fit a community's population, then implementing a promising program would be the next best option. A promising program is one that has not been formally evaluated, but has most of the characteristics of programs shown to be effective. A list of 17 characteristics of effective curriculum-based programs has been developed by Dr. Douglas Kirby and colleagues. The list was developed by conducting a systematic review of 83 domestic and international sexuality education and HIV prevention program evaluations. The characteristics are divided into three categories: program development, program design/content and program implementation. A list of these characteristics can be accessed at <http://www.etr.org/recapp/documents/programs/tac.pdf>.

Detailed information about sex education and other programs that work to prevent teen pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infections may be found at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/programs-that-work-publications>.

Portions of this fact sheet obtained from information published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Healthy Teen Network [www.healthyteenetwork.org](http://www.healthyteenetwork.org).

## DEFINITIONS

*Intervention:* deliberate entry into a situation or dispute in order to influence events or prevent undesirable consequences.

*Logic model:* the relationship between specific events, situations, or objects, and the inevitable consequences of their interaction.

*Protective factors:* individual or environmental safeguards that enhance a person's ability to resist stressful life events, risks or hazards and promote adaptation and competence.

*Risk factors:* individual or environmental markers that are related to the increased likelihood that a negative outcome will occur.

*Teen pregnancy rate:* calculated as the number of pregnancies per 1,000 in a specific population.