Background
Adolescence is a transitional period from being a child to being an adult. The pregnant adolescent has special psychosocial needs. **The pregnancy pushes her into womanhood when she is still in many ways a child, with many conflicting needs and wants.** She will need to care for a dependent infant while still having needs and interests of other girls her age. She may have had little experience in independent problem solving and making important decisions. She probably lives and thinks in the present and often lacks the ability to plan for the future. She probably is greatly influenced by what her friends do and say and resistant to the advice of adults.

Adolescents vary greatly depending on their cultural background, individual lifestyles, educational background, family structure, and emotional maturity. These and many other factors can be either positive or negative influences in the outcome of her pregnancy and her parenting ability.

**Special Legal Rights of Minors**
Current California law gives some special legal rights to children under 18 years of age.

**Consent to Care**
A minor of any age can receive some health care without her parents’ permission, as long as she seems capable of giving an informed consent. This includes family planning and sexual assault services, abortion and prenatal care. Minors 12 years or older may provide their own consent to services related to sexual assault, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents are not responsible for payment if the minor receives services on her own under Medi-Cal’s Sensitive Services described below. For more information, see "California Minor Consent Laws" on The National Center for Youth Law's Web site [www.youthlaw.org](http://www.youthlaw.org) under "Articles and Analysis - Adolescent and Child Health."

**Sensitive Services**
A young person may be eligible for a special kind of Medi-Cal called "sensitive services" or "minor consent services" if he or she is:

- At least 12 years and not over 20.
- Living at home or temporarily away such as in school.
- Seeking care for sexually transmitted diseases, family planning, prenatal care, abortion, sexual assault, substance abuse treatment or outpatient mental health treatment.

Medi-Cal may not contact the parents and the parents’ income is not considered in determining eligibility; only the teen’s own income is counted. It is available to young people in all immigration categories, including undocumented; a social security number is not required. For more information, see Medi-Cal’s Web site [www.medi-cal.ca.gov](http://www.medi-cal.ca.gov). Go to “Provider Manuals,” then “Medical Services,” then “Part 2: Obstetrics.” then “Minor Consent Program - minor.”
Steps to Take

Interviewing Teens

Interview the teen privately, even if she is accompanied by a parent or boyfriend. Tell the support person you're glad they came to the visit, but policy says you must interview the client alone for part of each visit. Then you can ask the teen how she wishes to involve family members, her partner or the father of the baby in her prenatal care.

You may need some extra time to establish a relationship with the teen before the psychosocial interview. She may have had little or no experience with interviews and may be anxious or nervous. She may respond in a hostile or angry manner, not understanding why you are asking her so many questions. See Interviewing Techniques in the First Steps chapter.

It is very important to have a nonjudgmental attitude when working with pregnant teens. They are often very sensitive to adults' negative attitudes and body language.

Unwanted Pregnancy

Give her a chance to talk about her feelings about being pregnant. Spend some time exploring whether the pregnancy was planned or unplanned and wanted or unwanted. If unwanted, be sure to explore all of her options as outlined in Unwanted Pregnancy Guidelines in this chapter.

Pregnant teens may experience greater pressures than adult women to choose a certain “solution” to an unwanted pregnancy. Because of their emotional and financial dependence on their parents, they are often pressured to do as their parents wish. This may involve making a choice that is not truly their own. When you observe this happening, advocate for the teen’s wishes to be heard. You may want to make a referral for family counseling to help the teen and her parents resolve the crisis before a final decision is made.

The Teen’s Parents

One of the first things to find out is if the parents of the teen are aware of her pregnancy. If yes, how did they react? Are they supportive? If they do not know, how does she plan to tell them? When? How does she think they will react? Would she like to practice with you on how she would tell her parents?

The pregnancy will often cause or make worse a family crisis between the girl and her parents. The parents’ reactions may include anger, guilt, sadness, or acceptance. Usually their reactions will be mixed.

Living Arrangements

If the family is unable to accept the girl’s pregnancy, she may have to live elsewhere. Help her explore her options.

Can she live with a relative or friend who can provide her with physical and emotional support? Would this be a short-term or long term arrangement?

Living with Boyfriend

Sometimes she will choose to live with the father of the baby and/or his family. Help the girl explore her relationship with her boyfriend.
How will living together affect their relationship? What if she wants to break up with him? How will she do this if she is dependent on him for housing?

Legal Emancipation

If the client is emotionally and socially mature, she may need to become legally “emancipated” and obtain her own housing. A minor may obtain a court declaration of emancipation if all of the following are true:

- She is 14 years or older.
- She is living apart from her parents with parental consent or they are not formally protesting the arrangement.
- She is managing her own financial affairs and her income is legally obtained (not through criminal activity).

She is also considered emancipated if:

- She has entered into a valid marriage, even if she is currently divorced.
- She is on active duty in the armed forces.
- The court considers emancipation in her best interest.

For more information, refer her to a legal resource that specializes in services to minors; see Legal/Advocacy Guidelines in this chapter.

Maternity Homes

Explore the option of living in a residence for teenaged parents, often called a maternity home. These facilities provide safe, stable housing with many support services such as child care, education and job training, counseling and help in planning her future. She must be willing to live in a structured environment with a group of other girls and their babies. If she is interested, help her locate the nearest residence. Contact your local Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) for more information.

Homeless

Homeless pregnant teens have many complicated medical, social, economic, and legal concerns. Find out why she is homeless.

Was she a runaway before she became pregnant? Was her leaving home due to physical, emotional or sexual abuse? Was she living in a foster care placement? How long has she been living on her own? Was she kicked out of her home after her parents discovered she was pregnant?

Homeless youth are at greater risk for substance abuse, poor nutrition, sexually transmitted infections including AIDS, mental health problems, and the threat of violence and injury. They may be involved in prostitution. Refer to guidelines in this chapter for Perinatal Substance Abuse, Emotional or Mental Health Concerns, Depression, and Spousal/Partner Abuse if indicated.

In spite of their high risk status, many homeless youth are resistant to getting involved with services.

Others may want help but are excluded from services such as battered women’s shelters or residential perinatal drug treatment programs because they are under 18 years of age.
Listen to her carefully and try to establish a trusting relationship with the client. Encourage her to accept help in stabilizing her life. Your local AFLP can provide case management services. Inform her of the possibility that her child could be removed from her care if she cannot provide for its basic needs. See Child Abuse and Neglect Guidelines in this chapter.

Financial Assistance
A pregnant or parenting teen under 18 who has never been married and is applying for CalWORKs must live with a parent, guardian, other adult relative or in an adult-supervised arrangement. There are a few exceptions such as if she has been kicked out of the house or she would be in danger if she was forced to live with her family.

If she does not have her high school diploma or CED, she is required to participate in the state’s Cal-Learn Program. There are a few exceptions. The Cal-Learn Program uses financial rewards and penalties to encourage school attendance and graduation. It also includes supportive services to help the teen attend school regularly such as childcare, transportation, and case management. These support services may be available if your county has an Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP).

The months that she receives CalWORKs while participating in Cal-Learn will not count towards her lifetime limit of 60 months of cash assistance. See Financial Concerns Guidelines in this chapter for more details about time limits on CalWORKs.

Educational Plans
Encourage the teenager to remain in school and complete her education. She can be helped in doing this by accepting a referral to your local Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) if your county has one. An AFLP case manager will help her decide whether or not she wants to remain in her current school, attend a special school for pregnant teens or continue her education through a home-based program.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each choice. Help the girl evaluate her options from an academic and personal perspective. Where will she be able to progress in her studies best? Where will she be happiest? Where will her physical and emotional needs as a pregnant woman best be met?

Acknowledge that at times it will be difficult to deal successfully with both the demands of education and pregnancy. This continues to be true after the baby is born when she will have the challenges of school and parenting. With the client’s written permission, you might want to communicate with the client’s case manager at the AFLP Program so that you can support her plans to finish school.

Social Relationships
Peer groups are important influences for teens, giving feedback about her attitudes, appearance, values and behavior. Her pregnancy will probably affect her relationships with her friends. She may be isolated from her old friends and have to make new ones. This may happen at a time when she is undergoing numerous other stresses. Encourage her to talk about problems she may be having with her friends; they are likely to be very important to her.
Father of The Baby

The relationship with the father of the baby is often significant. Sometimes the relationship will end when the pregnancy is discovered. The boyfriend may deny paternity, which usually adds to the emotional pain of the breakup. In many cases, the relationship will continue. The father of the baby may provide financial and/or emotional support depending on his circumstances and desires. The foundation for his future role as a father is usually laid down during the pregnancy. If he is a positive figure in the patient’s life, encourage him to attend prenatal appointments and take part in childbirth preparation classes, and hospital tours.

Advise her that all unmarried parents will be asked at the time of delivery if they wish to participate in a statewide Paternity Opportunity Program operated by the California Department of Child Support Services. The program is voluntary. If the parents of a child are not legally married, the father’s name will NOT be added to the birth certificate unless they:

- Sign a Declaration of Paternity in the hospital, or sign the form later.
- Legally establish paternity through the courts and pay a fee to amend the birth certificate.

Signing the form is the first step in establishing legal rights and responsibilities of the father. Establishing legal paternity is necessary before custody, visitation, or child support can be ordered by the court. The form can be challenged in a court only by using blood and genetics test results which show the man is not the natural father. For more information on the Paternity Opportunity Program, see California Department of Child Support Services Web site. You can download the required forms and information for patients in several languages. 1-866-249-0773.

Follow-Up

Encourage the client to participate in any health education or support groups, especially if they are designed for teens.

Strongly encourage the teen to accept a referral to Public Health Nursing for in-home health monitoring, teaching and support.

Help her choose a support person for labor and delivery.

Prepare the client for her physical and emotional needs after delivery.

Help the client and her family make decisions in advance about who will care for the baby so that family conflicts are minimized and roles are clear.

Where is the baby going to sleep? Who is going to be responsible for feeding, bathing and changing diapers? Under what circumstances will the grandparents of the infant baby-sit? While the teen works or attends school? While she goes out with her friends? Who will make decisions about how the child is cared for?

Problems can best be avoided by mutual understanding.

At the postpartum visit, assess her situation as you would any new mother, paying particular attention to family relationships and emotional...
coping. See Parenting Stress Guidelines in this chapter for further suggestions. Be sure the teen has a referral to family planning.

**Referrals**

- Public Health Nursing.
- Adolescent Family Life Program.
- Family Planning.
- Parenting Classes.
- Parental Stress Line.

**Complicated Situations**

**Teens Who Abuse Substances**

Refer to Perinatal Substance Abuse Guidelines in this chapter. Many outpatient and residential drug programs exclude minors (those under 18 years of age). Contact your local drug and alcohol programs for referrals for minors.

**Mandated Reporting Responsibilities**

**Physical, Sexual Abuse and Neglect**

If you reasonably suspect that a teen under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected, you have the same reporting responsibilities as with a child. See the Child Abuse and Neglect Guidelines in this chapter for more information. Your county child protective services may or may not investigate the report, depending on their assessment of risk to the teen. In many cases, the agency will consider the teen mature enough to protect herself by leaving a dangerous situation and not in need of protection by the child welfare system.

A report for suspected abuse is required even if you think that nothing will come of the report. Be sure to document the report in the medical record. It is a good idea to tell the teen that you must report. Even better, have the teen be present when you make the phone call. This helps the teen feel that you are not talking about her behind her back.

If the teen tells you she has been abused in the past but not currently, see Child Abuse and Neglect Guidelines in this chapter under "When Past Abuse is Discovered" section.

**Dating Violence**

Dating violence is more than just arguing or fighting. Dating violence is a pattern of controlling behaviors that one partner uses to get power over the other, including:

- Any kind of physical violence or threat of physical violence to get control.
- Emotional or mental abuse, such as or constantly putting her down or criticizing her.
- Sexual abuse, including making her do anything she doesn’t want to or refusing to have safer sex.

If she is battered by someone outside the home, such as the boyfriend, you are usually required to report the assault to law enforcement; they may direct you to report to child welfare, depending on the policies of your county.

Review the Spousal/Partner Abuse Guidelines in this chapter. The National Domestic Violence

If you suspect that she has been forced, threatened or exploited into sexual activity you must report the sexual abuse to Children's Protective Services.

**Consensual Sexual Activity of Minors**

If the teen has consensual intercourse, the mandatory reporting laws are more complicated. It depends on the ages of both the sexual partners. You are not required to ask the age of the client’s partner or father of her baby.

When an adult (18 years or older) has sex with a minor (17 years or younger), it is called "statutory rape." However, you are not required to report all cases of statutory rape, just in some circumstances. The National Center for Youth Law publishes, "When Mandated Reporters Must Report Consensual Disparate Age Sexual Intercourse to Child Abuse Authorities" under Publications on their Web site www.youthlaw.org, which gives a good summary of the laws. See Child Abuse and Neglect Guidelines for information on how to make a report.

Studies have shown that girls who engage in early sexual activity may have been molested in a past or present relationship and may be in need of protection and mental health counseling. Ask questions about sexual abuse and refer to your clinical supervisor if needed.

**Resources**

**The National Center for Youth Law**
A private, non-profit law office serving the legal needs of children and their families. See "Minor Consent, Confidentiality and Child Abuse Reporting in California" under Publications. This document contains information on minor consent, consensual sexual activity and other topics.

510-835-8098
www.youthlaw.org

**California Health Council**
*Health Information and Education Division*
Produces patient education materials, available for a small fee; these include: "Is It Really Love?" in English and Spanish for teens

1-800-428-5438
www.epahealth.org