Why should I teach my students about this topic?

Adolescence is an opportune time to teach basic principles of healthy living to students. The choices they make at this age can often affect them into adulthood. Practices that are adopted, either positive or negative, can influence their health and that of their future children, should they decide to become parents.

It is also really important that students develop supportive relationships during their teen years. In order to do so, they need to recognise the components of a healthy and an unhealthy relationship. Since their social circle is constantly shifting, and their peers play a significant role in shaping their attitudes, this task is particularly difficult. Friendships begin and are lost; dating relationships can range from wonderful to abusive; peers can influence positive behaviour or they can encourage bad decisions. The choices made in intimate and/or dating relationships can affect a person’s life in considerable ways.

In particular, the impact of a teen pregnancy is far-reaching and significant for young women and men. The Public Health Agency of Canada reports that research and literature on teen pregnancy demonstrate that when young women become pregnant, they must make difficult decisions that will affect their health and their future, and these decisions can play a role in determining their future health and well-being\(^1\). Regardless of the young woman's choice, the decision often brings with it detrimental physical, emotional and financial consequences\(^2\).

Similarly, the consequences that young men who become parents at a young age will experience are life-altering. Researchers have demonstrated that teenage fathers have a hard time adjusting to their new role\(^3\). In fact, a majority of teen dads do not involve themselves very deeply in their new role because it seems too onerous\(^4\). Even those fathers who attempt involvement with their children following conception generally leave the child’s mother during the pregnancy or the first two years after birth\(^5\).

Many young couples embark on parenthood without proper consideration for the ramifications that can ensue. Health risks for pregnant teens and for their babies are greater than for women who delay pregnancy. Poverty and underemployment is more common for teen parents because of interrupted schooling, lack of social and financial support and the need for childcare\(^6\).
Preparation for Parenthood – Teacher Guide

It is important to address the issue of teenage parenthood during high school. Ideally, we can educate students on how to avoid unplanned pregnancies while also letting them discover the benefits of delaying pregnancy into adulthood. In parenting classes, students can learn that bearing and raising children is amongst life’s most critical and challenging responsibilities, benefiting from emotional maturity, stable relationships and financial security.

It should also be noted that not all students want to become parents. Often, teens with a general interest in children or a specific interest in early childhood education or teaching will enrol in Parenting Classes as well. Teachers should remember to support the decision not to become a parent as well.

What information could help me teach about preparation for parenthood?

Young people often reach sexual maturity before psychosocial maturity; some therefore are sexually active before they are psychosocially mature. The average age for one’s first sexual relations is now 15 years old - three to four years earlier than the preceding generation. Since teenagers are now beginning their sexual lives earlier, they often are not properly equipped – cognitively, emotionally, or socially – to deal with the difficulties and manage the risks associated with sexuality.

Teachers can help teens recognise their right to decline sexual relationships. A lack of self-esteem and confidence can lead teenagers to consent to sex. Often, the young woman fears that she will be rejected by her partner if she refuses sex. It should noted that, in some cases, it may be the young man who is afraid to bring up the subject of abstinence with his partner.

Since some teens may not have good parenting and relationship role models in their lives, they will need to be taught what constitutes competent parenting and a healthy intimate relationship. Values such as honesty, respect, sensitivity and empathy may seem unimportant to teens if they have not personally witnessed the positive effects of these character traits in their own lives. In addition, we know that adolescent women often do not recognise the behaviour of jealous, critical or controlling partners as unhealthy.

Educators can be very instrumental in helping their students to identify strengths and weaknesses that they can bring into future relationships. When young adults choose positive partners and healthy lifestyle choices, the odds of becoming good parents in the future are improved.
What are the most important messages students should take away from this lesson?

- Parenthood is a challenging, lifelong commitment, that should not be entered into without due consideration.

- Being in a healthy, supportive relationship will assist people in their parental roles.

- It is important for everyone to consider his/her own readiness for parenthood on several levels – emotional readiness, physical health and financial stability.

- Not everyone will choose to become a parent and this choice should also be supported.

References


2 Ibid.


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Preparation for Parenthood –
Teacher Guide


