

## **TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION TEEN PARENTS AND CHILD ABUSE**

Statistics indicate that teen parents contribute to the ever increasing problem of child abuse. The number one cause of death of children 0-2 years is child abuse. Many teen parents are not ready to meet the demands of parenting. They are children themselves, with parental needs and growing up to do.

**Child Abuse** is any mistreatment or neglect of a child that results in emotional or physical harm or injury. There are four types of child abuse:

**Physical abuse** is deliberately injuring a child by hitting, biting, shaking, kicking, burning, or throwing objects at the child; anything that physically hurts the child.

**Emotional abuse** is deliberately injuring a child's self-concept and emotional well being. This involves verbal attacks, threats or humiliation. Emotional abuse can sometimes be more damaging than physical abuse.

**Sexual abuse** is any sexual contact with a child, such as incest, inappropriate touching, fondling, exposure, or obscene language. Using a child for sexual pictures or showing such pictures to him/her is considered sexual abuse.

**Neglect** is failing to adequately provide for the child's safety, physical and emotional needs. Children who are unsupervised also fall under the neglect category.

Stress is a major factor in child abuse. Teen parents are often under the stress of being a new parent and not knowing what to do. Financial burdens also add to their stress and sometimes school or lack of schooling will contribute. Social isolation can cause lack of a support network from family and friends. Abuse of alcohol and drugs can cause teen parents to lose emotional control and it becomes easy to abuse a child. Illness, along with the burdens of doctor bills from the birth of the child and any complications that may have resulted, can place excessive financial strain on parents. All of these factors lead to high incidences of child abuse among teenage parents.

Child abuse is serious because children can suffer physically and emotionally. Sometimes physical abuse can lead to serious medical problems that can damage, permanently disable, or kill a child. Emotional abuse can leave scars that last a lifetime. Low self-esteem, emotional problems, and impaired relationships can be the result of emotional damage.

Some **physical signs of child abuse** are bruises, welts or broken bones, cuts or scrapes, burns, missing hair, injuries or redness around the genitals, or an injury that hasn't been treated correctly.

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Some **behaviors** that may indicate child abuse are aggressive or withdrawn behavior, unusual fears of certain people or home, craving for attention, fatigue, lack of concentration, hunger, begging for food, or stealing.

**Adult abusive behavior** can include harshly punishing the child in public, often referring to the child as difficult or bad, lack of concern for the child, conflicting stories about injuries, or becoming defensive when asked about the child's health or well-being.

### **How To Find Help:**

**Hotlines:** The National Child Abuse Hotline Number is: 1-800-422-4453

**Family Service Agencies** offer child care and emergency shelter. They are listed in the yellow pages under Family Services or Social Services.

**Child Protective Services:** This is a state agency listed in the white pages of government listings under Utah State Government Agencies.

**Support Groups:** Parents Without Partners and Parents Anonymous are available to help prevent or curtail child abuse. These groups are listed in the phone book.

There is much more to raising a child than just giving birth to a child. Parents have the responsibility to provide shelter, food, warmth, clothing, love, education, and emotional support for the child. Many teens have babies because they need love or need something to love. What must be remembered is that a baby does not give love--it demands that its needs are met. Sometimes those demands can be more than a teenager can handle.

There is the case of a teenage girl who was sexually active and became pregnant, but did not know for sure who the father was. When the baby was born, she still wanted to have her own life of freedom, but she was afraid to put the baby up for adoption. If she did, she feared the boy who thought he was the father would adopt it. The mother of the child did not want this to happen because the boy was on drugs. So, the mother gave the baby to her best friend to raise.

Is this responsible behavior? Could this be considered child abuse? What type of nurturing and quality of life would this young child have? Two million children suffer from some form of child abuse each year. We must stop the cycle. One way to do this is to realize that there is a time to be young and a time to have children. The time to have children is with the right person under the right conditions.



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