

## Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) Podcast Series

### Importance of Working with Pregnant and Parenting Teens

**TISH HALL, OAH:** Welcome to the Office of Adolescent Health. Today we will be talking to Dr. Pat Paluzzi, the President and CEO of Healthy Teen Network, a national membership organization dedicated to adolescent health issues including teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, and teen parenting. Today, Dr. Paluzzi talks to us about the importance of working with pregnant and parenting teens.

**DR. PAT PALUZZI:** In 2010, the birth rate for teenagers fell 9% to 34.3 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19, the lowest level that it has ever been reported for the United States. This 9% decrease from 2009 is the largest single year decrease since 1946-1947. The teen birth rate decline is excellent, supporting the recent emphasis and federal funding for evidenced-based programs to prevent teen pregnancy. Still, however, about 400,000 babies are born to teen mothers annually in the US and these teen mothers, fathers and babies continue to be at higher risk for poverty and all that goes with it. Teen mothers and fathers are less likely to graduate high school and gain meaningful employment. The children born to teen parents often have more health and wellness issues and are themselves more likely to become teen parents thus continuing the cycle. These young families, if not supported, represent lost opportunities for individual, family, community and societal growth as these young men, women and their children have every potential of living full and meaningful lives. They just need a little help.

**TISH HALL, OAH:** Dr. Paluzzi discusses what can be done to improve their health outcomes.

**DR. PAT PALUZZI:** Like most parents, teen mothers and fathers want to do right by their children. Thus, they are often more motivated to complete school and gain employment skills once they become parents and quickly realize that education is necessary to make a living. Both school-and community-based programs that emphasize and support education can positively impact school participation. Parenting supports, such as school-based child care and transportation, can also support high school completion. Parenting can be improved among teen mothers, and fathers, if instruction and support are provided. Improved parenting is often an outcome of home based programs, where case managers and other professionals can view and comment on parenting. Co-parenting classes, especially if provided prenatally, show early promise for engaging young fathers in their children's' lives longer. Delaying subsequent births among teen parents can be more challenging than some of the other outcomes but certain approaches have shown promise, including Nurse-Family Partnership (a home-based program); Polly T McCabe (a school-based program) and a comprehensive adolescent program at Queen's Hospital (a clinic-based program). Our review of the research has shown us that teen parents are a challenging population to work with but improvements across several life domains can be achieved with the right approaches, including: adequately trained staff who relate well to the

population and a comprehensive set of easily accessible services and supports that are simultaneously available.

**TISH HALL, OAH:** Dr. Paluzzi believes in the importance of working with pregnant and parenting teens and goes on to share some of the lessons that she has learned and provides some recommendations for those working in the field to promote adolescent health.

**DR. PAT PALUZZI:** Why some teens become parents is a complicated issue with social inequality and poverty often at the heart of the matter. As I stated previously, most teen parents regardless of why they became parents, want to do what is right by their children. They are often more motivated after birth to complete their education and being a good parent is a goal for both teen mothers and fathers. As alluded to previously, research seems to lean toward selecting an intervention setting based on your goal; for example, if preventing school drop-out is your primary goal, then a school-based program may be the best practice; delaying subsequent births may best be achieved through clinic based approaches and parenting can be improved through home-based services. At Healthy Teen Network, we believe that every young person deserves the same opportunities to dream, achieve their dreams, and live a fully engaged life. We also believe that all teens, including teen parents, can achieve success if supported. Treating young people with respect and believing in their potential is probably every bit as critical as any content we offer.

**TISH HALL, OAH:** Thanks for joining us for today's podcast about the importance of working with pregnant and parenting teens! To get more information about the Office of Adolescent Health and to access more resources related specifically to teenage pregnancy and parenting, please visit us at <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>.