Big, Beautiful Babies (or, Prenatal Care for Teen Moms)

This is independent study prenatal care packet for teen moms. Prenatal care focuses on the health of the pregnant mom and the developing fetus. It involves the medical care of the mother, her diet and nutrition, her daily exercise and her avoidance of alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs and over-the-counter medication during the course of her pregnancy.

This packet is geared toward the needs of teen moms who are members of Goals, Reality and Dual Role Skills (GRADS) class. This is a federally funded class that offers support to pregnant girls and parenting teens (mothers and fathers) enrolled in high school. This daily, elective class covers issues related to self, pregnancy and delivery, parenting, child development and preparing for the world of work. A strong emphasis is placed on problem solving to integrate the concerns of parenting while attending school, with a goal of graduating. Half of the graduates enter college.

The weekly schedule allows one day for assigned reading pertaining to individual needs, two days of GRADS curriculum, one day for a related speaker or fieldtrip, and one day for peer mentoring/sharing or packet completion. A typical class may have pregnant teens at various stages of fetal development and teen parents with children ages one month to four years. Individually assigned reading and packets are the tools I use to adapt the course to individual needs.

I have several prenatal concerns when I interact with teen moms. First, what is their age and do they have the capability to think abstractly? Can they comprehend the effect that their behavior has on the development of their babies? Do they have the self-discipline to alter teenage habits? Will their families and peers support their decisions to live a healthy lifestyle? Do they have medical insurance, live in a smoke-free environment and have access to nutritious foods? According to the
2000 U.S. Census, our community has an average family income of $27,000.\(^1\) Our students tackle poverty and accompanying family issues each day. In our initial interview I discuss these concerns with the teen and her parent(s). We brainstorm possible solutions.

The purpose of this packet is to provide an exposure to prenatal care. It covers the medical care of the mom, her diet and nutrition, her daily exercise and avoidance of alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs and over the counter medicines. I employ diverse experiences to challenge multiple intelligences. Students are asked to read, problem-solve, solve a puzzle, maintain a journal, keep a dietary log, view a video, complete an Internet assignment and share with a peer mentor. Students complete one section per week and finish the packet in a month, though some activities extend throughout the pregnancy.

The mentor pairing experience allows the pregnant teen the opportunity to discuss concerns regarding prenatal care, emotional issues, physical discomforts, family problems and parenting fears. The teen mentor is a parenting student who has already completed this packet and has a child. The mentor reviews work, clarifies issues, shares emotional concerns and personal pregnancy experiences, and offers suggestions. I have found that pregnant teens are more comfortable discussing personal issues with a mentor. I am always available to clarify problems or offer resource references.

This packet is constantly evolving according to suggestions in student evaluations. The prenatal care practiced by GRADS students has resulted in healthy deliveries and no birth weights below five pounds for the past three years. I think that the use of this packet has been a success.

\(^1\) U.S. Census *FactFinder* website, http://factfinder.census.gov/.