

What will motherhood be like?

New mothers often doubt that they are able to take care of a baby. As a teenager, it can be even more difficult to be fully aware yet of what it means to be a mother.

Motherhood starts during pregnancy. While in the womb, your baby grows, moves, listens and responds to the world around him or her. Your baby's development in the womb helps him or her to develop after birth.

Raising a child is demanding, and as a teenager, this may be difficult to accept. However, by taking care of yourself and your baby during and after your pregnancy, you will help your baby grow in a healthy way.

Should I breastfeed?

Breastfeeding has many advantages for you and your baby.

If you decide to breastfeed, try to do so for as long as possible. Breastfeeding for longer has greater benefits for the baby. At least 6 months is recommended.



If you decide to bottle feed, ask the nurse for practical information on how to formula feed so that it is most effective and safe.

Why is bonding with my baby important?

Bonding is the relationship you create with your baby. It is important because it helps your baby grow stronger and healthier. During pregnancy, you have contact with the baby inside of you: this is when you can start bonding, by talking to your baby, singing, and touching/rubbing your belly.

Bonding can also happen after childbirth through physical touch, talking, smiling, singing and making eye contact and through playing with your baby.

Bonding is also important for you: it helps you feel better about yourself as a mother, and helps you keep going through the difficult times.

Finding a counsellor

In this leaflet, we suggest you to speak to a counsellor. A counsellor is someone who is trained to listen to people and guide them through problems, emotional difficulties and decision-making. This could help you.

Sometimes your nurse or midwife can help you find a professional counsellor.

Where else can I go for support?

Cape Town Drug Counselling Centre Individual and family counselling & outpatient treatment for drug problems
Observatory 021 447 8026 • Mitchells Plain 021 391 0216

Child Welfare Society Child abuse and maintenance issues
021 638 3127

Nicro +27 (0)21 462 0017 (*Thanya to check services in CT*)

Love Life Sexual Health Line
0800 121 900

Marie Stopes Information related to pregnancy, emergency contraception, family planning and abortion
0800 11 77 85

Saartjie Baartman Shelter for abused women and their children
021 633 5287 (*Manenberg*)

St Anne's Home Shelter for destitute and abused women and their children
021 448 6792 (*Woodstock*) • 021 447 1779 (*after hours*)

Call the Lifeline National Helpline

0861 322 322 (Toll Free)

SADAG suicide line

0800 567 567

SANCA

0861 472 622 (Toll Free)

Teenage Pregnancy (A guide for teens)

Having a baby is a major life event! This is true whether you have planned your pregnancy or not. This is particularly true if you are a teenager who may be unsure about what to do and what to expect.



A part of you could be struggling with the normal issues of being a teenager, yet another part is facing the responsibilities of an adult.

This leaflet provides information in answer to some questions you may have about pregnancy, labour, becoming a mother, and raising a child.

It is important to remember that the information provided in this leaflet is not the only resource you have. Please see the back page for a list of organisations you can seek help from.

Perinatal Mental Health Project

Email: info@pmhp.za.org

Website: www.pmhp.za.org

How will my body change?

As a teenager, your body is still changing and growing. As a pregnant teenager, the change that your body goes through could be uncomfortable. Some symptoms that you may experience include:



- Morning sickness (nausea or vomiting) is an early sign of pregnancy. This symptom usually does not last throughout your pregnancy. You may not only experience morning sickness in the morning.
- Your breasts may grow larger and may become sensitive.
- You may urinate (pee) more frequently.
- You may experience joint and back pain.
- You may have more saliva than usual.
- Your feet and hands could swell.
- You may experience constipation, stomach ache or heartburn.

It is important to book for antenatal care at a clinic or hospital as soon as you can. This is vital for your own health, and the health of your baby.

What about my mental health state?

Teenage pregnant women and mothers can become depressed or anxious. This is when your thoughts, feelings and behaviours change and affect how you are able to cope with school, work, relationships or at home. Many younger mothers may feel really down or worry a lot of the time. These feelings can also affect the body.

If these symptoms last for more than a couple of weeks, speaking with a counsellor can help a lot. Sometimes, antidepressant medications, prescribed by a doctor, are useful too.

Why is it so difficult to cope?

Experiencing more than one problem at the same time may result in a build up of stress. Some teenagers may use harmful substances to try to avoid the pain. Some may feel that ending their life is the only way to end the stress. This is not a sign of weakness or 'craziness'. It means that they are experiencing more pain and stress than they can cope with.

If you feel this bad, it is difficult to imagine another way of living. Yet, another person may be able to offer a different view of your situation and choices that you have not thought about, so it is important to get help.

What about school?

You will need to decide if or when you want to go back to school after your baby is born. With the right amount of support from friends and family, some teenage mothers manage to combine both school and taking care of their child.

If the decision about schooling is difficult to make, or causes conflict in your family, speak about it to a counsellor, teacher or someone you trust.

What about the baby's father?

Your pregnancy could have affected your relationship with the baby's father. This may be more difficult if the pregnancy was unplanned. It may even have caused your relationship to end. You may feel:

- **Angry** and think that life is unfair: the father's life goes on as usual, while you have to deal with the pregnancy.
- **Sad** and abandoned: you may think that no one will want to be with you again.

For these reasons, it may be difficult to decide about the father's involvement with his baby. Think about what is best for your baby. Even if a child's parents do not live together, he or she could still have a loving relationship with each parent.



All parents have a legal duty to support their children financially, even if they are not married or living together. You have a right to receive financial support from the father.

Violence in relationships (emotional, sexual or physical)

is common among teenage parents. Speak with someone you trust or a counsellor about how to plan for your safety and the safety of your baby.

What about sex?

If you wish, you can continue to have sex during pregnancy: this should not harm the baby. However, make sure your partner does not put all his weight on your belly. By using a condom, you can prevent sexually transmitted infections for both you and the baby.

Protect yourself. It is important to get tested for HIV/AIDS during at least one of your antenatal visits at the clinic. If you are HIV positive, you can get support for yourself and your baby to remain healthy and happy. Ask to speak to an HIV counsellor at your clinic for more information.

After the birth, wait until you feel ready before having sex. Make sure you take family planning precautions when you do. It may take a bit more time before you are ready to have a normal sex life again.

I am scared of labour.

As early as possible, try to think about someone who could be your birth companion. A birth companion is a person who you trust and who is willing to support you during labour. Discuss the birth companion policy with the nurses at the clinic.



"Just having my big cousin with me in labour made all the difference. It was still scary, but at least I wasn't alone."