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*"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"*

## **EMBRACING MOTHERHOOD DURING TEENAGE YEARS: A TEN WEEK SUPPORT GROUP FOR URBAN TEENS**

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For pregnant adolescents, support groups have been associated with better birth outcomes, educational/career attainment, parenting skills, and delayed subsequent pregnancies. This workshop presents a ten-week support group curriculum, utilizing creative, expressive, and activity-based interventions. The goal is to teach skills necessary to be a successful parent and member of society.

Although nationwide teen pregnancy rates continue to decline, each year in the United States approximately one million adolescents, or 8.5 percent of females 15-19 years of age, become pregnant. Racial disparities within this group are dramatic: in the year 2000, the birth rate for Blacks and Hispanics was more than 2.5 times that of White adolescents (Hendricks, 2006).

There are many risks associated with teen pregnancies. Among them are low birth weight, maternal substance abuse, pre-mature birth, increased neonatal mortality, decreased verbal interaction with the infant, and poverty (Ferguson, 1998; Flynn, 1999). Also in addition, adolescence combined with mothering is detrimental not only because of the social disadvantages that precede many teen births, but because of the adolescent's failure to achieve autonomy first and become a rational thinker (Smith Battle, 2000).

This presentation describes and details a support group curriculum entitled Embracing Motherhood During Teenage Years (EMDTY). The model is designed specifically for pregnant adolescent girls. The EMDTY group utilizes creative, expressive, and activity-based interventions within a group setting to address the challenges of teenage pregnancy. This method is based on the model for somatic therapy, which goes beyond reaching the group on a cognitive level. Creative, expressive, and activity-

based interventions integrate affect, cognition, inner body sensations, 5 sense perception, and the impulse to move or not move (Levy, 2006). Within a therapeutic setting, the power and influence of the adolescent peer group can be harnessed to create growth and positive change. Evidence indicates that groups can provide valuable support and fellowship to teenagers coping with major life stressors, including pregnancy and motherhood (Aronson, 2004; Billow, 2004).

This group provides support to the teenage girls to help them confront the challenges that they will face being an adolescent parent. In the group setting we provide the knowledge and skills they will need to counteract difficulties they encounter, and empower them to actively take on the role of a parent. Some of the topics addressed include child development, nutrition, labor and delivery, and stress management. Group facilitators give concrete suggestions and information about these areas, while participants are urged to explore their feelings and reactions to them.

We utilize faith as a core resource to help the group members surmount the difficulties they experience related to teen pregnancy. Each group begins with a bible verse that is appropriate to the group topic. The girls get a chance to explore their spirituality and religious beliefs and to discuss how the bible can still be applicable to their lives now.

Currently, a pre-test and post-test is administered to measure how much the adolescents have learned in the group. The test evaluates how much the participants have learned about subjects related to pregnancy, parenting, and self-care. On average the adolescent mothers increased their scores from pre-test to post-test by 17%.

### **Learning Objectives:**

#### **Following this workshop, participants will be able to:**

1. Identify and discuss the implications of teenage pregnancy, especially among urban youth.
2. Design and implement a ten-week support group.
3. Implement creative, expressive and activity based interventions.
4. Identify barriers to success.
5. Understand how to incorporate faith into the group process.