

# Guidebook for Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Washington State Care

*This guidebook is designed to provide you with resources and basic information to help you navigate being a pregnant or parenting dependent youth in Washington State.*



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**



## Introduction

This guidebook is a resource for pregnant and parenting teens in the custody of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). The information in this guide is specifically geared towards youth ages 12 and over. It is intended as a best practices guide for pregnant and parenting youth and as a practice guideline for DCYF caseworkers. Although it refers to laws and policies that may affect foster youth, it does not provide legal advice. The information in the guide should not be used or relied upon as legal advice.

A youth who wants to know how laws or policies apply to a specific situation should contact his or her attorney, caseworker, court-appointed special advocate (CASA), guardian ad litem (GAL) or the state Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman.

# I am a pregnant or parenting teen in state foster care. Now what?

## Who do I tell?

Finding out you are pregnant can be scary. If you took a home pregnancy test and think you are pregnant, go to a doctor or clinic to find out for sure. Your ProviderOne medical identification card will pay for the visit and the pregnancy test.

Tell your caseworker if you are pregnant. Your caseworker must keep your pregnancy confidential and will **NOT** tell your parents or foster parents without your permission. If it is safe, tell your parents, guardians or foster parents right away so they can help you through this time. If you don't think it is safe to talk to the adults caring for you, let your caseworker know.

## What are my rights and responsibilities?

You have rights and responsibilities as a pregnant parent. Your doctor and caseworker can help you make good decisions for you and your baby.

- **Does my foster parent/caregiver need to know about my reproductive health choices?**

- State law gives you the right to choose or refuse birth control (RCW 9.02.100); and
- Under state law, you have the right to privacy when it comes to your choices about your body (RCW 9.02.100).

- **Who authorizes medical care for my baby?**

You are the parent. You may sign and consent for health care services for your baby.

## How do I take care of the baby and myself during pregnancy?

Taking care of yourself and your baby while you are pregnant is called prenatal care. Prenatal care is very important during pregnancy to promote the health and safety of you and your baby. Choose a person who is specially trained to support pregnant mothers and new mothers, such as a midwife or a doctor who specializes in pregnancy, often referred to as an OBGYN. Your OBGYN or midwife will follow you throughout your pregnancy. During your first prenatal visit, you can expect your doctor or midwife to:

- Ask about your health history including diseases, operations or prior pregnancies.
- Ask about your family's health history.
- Do a complete physical exam, including a pelvic exam and Pap test.
- Take your blood and urine for lab work.
- Check your blood pressure, height and weight.
- Calculate your due date.
- Answer your questions and discuss any worries or concerns you have about being pregnant.

### Prenatal care

At all your appointments, ask questions and discuss any worries or concerns you have about being pregnant. Find out all you can about how to stay healthy. Later prenatal visits will probably be shorter. Your doctor or midwife will check on your health and make sure the baby is growing as expected. Most prenatal visits will include:

- Checking your blood pressure.
- Measuring your weight gain.
- Measuring your abdomen to check your baby's growth (once you begin to show).
- Checking the baby's heart rate.
- Discussing birthing options (preparation for birth including where to deliver – home or hospital, birth coaches (also known as doulas).



- It is very important for you to brush your teeth and floss your gums every day and keep your regular dental appointments. A healthy mouth and teeth will reduce your risk of infections.
- Mental health/substance abuse/ medications: talk with your caseworker, doctor and other health care providers if you have questions about your mental health, changes in your moods or emotions or concerns about medications, drugs or alcohol use.
- Finding a pediatrician: your doctor and caseworker can help you select a pediatrician for your baby before the baby is born. Most hospital websites have a directory of pediatricians in your area.

If your doctor suggests medical tests for you or your baby during your pregnancy, ask about the tests. Learning about the tests, why your doctor thinks you should have them and what the test results could mean can help you cope with any worries or fears you might have. Screening tests are not perfect. They may tell you your baby may have health problems. They are not proof of health problems and they cannot identify every health problem a baby might have.

## **My baby is born – what do I do? Will I have to move? Does my baby become a dependent?**

If you are the primary custodial parent, you and your baby will be placed together. This could mean a move for you in order to make that happen. Your foster parent will receive an increase in payment for the cost of care of your baby but that does not mean that your baby is in foster care (reference PPY policy). You and your baby may be eligible for services, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food assistance and medical coupons (WAC 388-25-0065).

Your baby can only be placed into foster care if you are not able to keep your baby safe and healthy. If your baby is put in foster care, your baby could be declared dependent by a court (see state rule: WAC 388-25-0025 for more information).

## What custodial options do I have (adoption, parent)?

You can choose to parent your baby, place your baby for adoption, give or share custody with the other parent, establish third party custody or voluntarily place your baby in foster care (see state rule: WAC 388-25-0050 for more information). Discuss your options and thoughts with your caseworker and attorney; together you can decide if a shared planning meeting is appropriate.

## What postnatal care do I need and why is it important?

- This is an appointment after the birth of the baby for the mother but the father (or her partner) can be there for support.
- Your doctor or midwife wants to see you four to six weeks after your baby is born to check on how your body is doing after pregnancy and delivery, see how you're feeling, see how you are doing as a new mom, make plans for the future and answer any questions. If you had a c-section you will need to see your doctor or midwife a week or two after delivery to make sure you are healing properly. If at any point you do not feel well, contact your medical provider.
- You get a full exam of your body and if you had problems during your pregnancy like gestational diabetes or anemia, you will be tested to see how you are doing. You may get immunizations for whooping cough, chicken pox or the flu.
- Talk to your baby's doctor about immunizations and how important they are.



- You will be checked for postpartum depression. You will need to answer some questions about your thoughts and feelings, including how you are feeling about and dealing with being a new mom. It is important that you answer the questions honestly so you can get help if you need it because postpartum depression is common and treatable.
- Talk to your doctor about taking medications if you are breastfeeding or getting back on medication you were taking prior to getting pregnant.
- Use this appointment to ask any questions you might have. For example, you may want to ask:
  - When can I have sex?
  - What birth control is right for me?
  - Can I use birth control and breastfeed?

This is also the time to get any paperwork filled out for time off from school or work (hint: Make notes ahead of your appointment so you don't forget your questions).

- Make a dental appointment because being pregnant can sometimes lead to dental problems because of the changes in your hormones.

## What are my responsibilities to my baby?

- Take care of your body, mind and spirit and manage your emotions so you can take care of your baby.
- Nurture your baby. Remember you are your baby's best toy! Coo, play, hold, comfort, feed, change, and bathe. What you do makes a difference in your baby's on-going development.
- Plan for your future (high school graduation, High School Equivalency certificate, college, job, etc.).
- Make sure your baby has food, shelter and clothing. See the resource section for places you can go for help.
- Make choices for yourself and your baby that keep both of you safe.
- Find a doctor for your baby who you like and trust and try and stay with the same doctor.
- Talk to your baby's doctor about immunizations and how important they are because your baby will need 28 immunizations by the time the baby is 6 years old. Women Infants and Children is a program that can help you keep track of your baby's medical needs.
- The first five years of your baby's life are really important because they do more learning and growing during this time than at any other age.
- It is important to read and talk to your baby as much as possible. Early Head Start is a program that can help you learn how to play with your baby.

- It is important that you play with your baby because this is how the learn.
- The people you choose to help you with your baby need to be people who can make safe choices for your baby.

## Why should I establish paternity?

It is important to create a legal relationship between the parent and child. Determining the biological and legal parents benefits the baby. Some of those benefits include:

- Knowing the child's full medical history to help doctors better treat the baby.
- Government benefits such as Social Security and Veteran's Dependent benefits may be available to the child.
- Medical insurance for the child may be available through the father's health plan.
- Life insurance policies and other inheritance benefits could be available.
- Both parents give financial support.

## How do I establish paternity?

Unmarried parents may establish paternity (fatherhood). There are three ways to become the legal father of a child:

- Marry the mother before the child's birth.
- Sign and file a legal form called an Acknowledgment of Paternity. The birth certificate will name the father if both parents agree to sign the form.

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### TIP

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Your baby needs to see a doctor whenever they are sick and also at the following times:

#### **Newborn to 11 months old:**

- First doctor visit: Birth to 6 weeks old
- Second doctor visit: 2 to 3 months old
- Third doctor visit: 4 to 5 months old
- Fourth doctor visit: 6 to 7 months old
- Fifth doctor visit: 9 to 11 months old

#### **12 months to 6 years old:**

- Three doctor visits between 1 and 2 years of age. (12 months, 15 months and 18 months)
- One doctor visit every year for children 3 through 6 years of age.
- One doctor visit every two years for children 7 through 20 years of age.

\*\* Children in foster care need to have at least one doctor visit every year from age 7 to 20.

NOTE: You do not have to pay any money for these appointments. They are covered by your child's Medicaid eligibility.

- Go to court to make a request for paternity establishment. The court may determine if a person is the legal parent of a child. The court may require a genetic test of the mother, child and a man asserted to be the biological father. Usually, it is best to establish paternity through the courts if there is any question about the identity of the father. Often the state can help establish parentage for your child if you apply for services with the Division of Child Support (DCS).

For more information about paternity, call the Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS) at 1-800-442-5437.

## **What is the process of establishing a parenting plan if I am no longer involved with the father or mother of my child? How do we co-parent?**

- You can file a parenting plan with your county's family court. A parenting plan helps you with making a visitation and custody plan. You can find out more about parenting plans at [www.courts.wa.gov](http://www.courts.wa.gov) under court forms.
- If your area has one, a court facilitator can help you with filing a parenting plan. You can check with your Independent Living Skills provider or with your caseworker to see if that is available in your area. You can also check out [www.washingteenhelp.com/home/about-us.com](http://www.washingteenhelp.com/home/about-us.com).
- You may also want to access mediation services for help to develop a parenting plan with the other parent.

## **What is child support? Who pays child support? How much child support do I pay or do I get?**

- When a parent does not live with the child, child support is the money paid to provide for the child's basic needs.
- In Washington State, Superior and Tribal Courts establish child support orders and decide who should pay child support. The Division of Child Support and the courts set the monthly child support payment using the Washington State Child Support Schedule and according to the parent's ability to pay. Any unpaid child support payments become a debt called an arrears debt. If you do not pay the child support each month, your debt gets bigger.

- If the parents live in different states, the Division of Child Support can ask the other state to help establish, modify and collect child support. Because all state laws are not the same, it may be hard to collect regular payments when two or more states work on a child support case.
- Some tribes have their own child support laws and processes for establishing and enforcing child support when a parent is a tribal member, lives on the reservation or works for the tribe. The Division of Child Support works with tribes to establish and enforce child support cases.
- For more information about child support, call the Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS) at 1-800-442-5437. Visit the Washington State Division of Child Support website at [www.childsupportonline.wa.gov](http://www.childsupportonline.wa.gov).

## How can I balance being parented while being a parent?

Being a parent is a difficult job. But becoming a teen parent is harder still. In addition to education, career and relationship decisions, parenting a child can add stress to a young person's life. These are some of things you can do to make things at your placement a little easier:

- Be clear with your foster parent about what you want for you and your baby, including when you need help.
- Talk with your foster parents about what holidays you want your baby to celebrate and what you would like to do on those holidays.
- Create house and baby rules with your foster parents, write them down and post them somewhere. (Your caseworker can help if needed).
- Remember the house rules you will need to follow.
- Remember to be patient with your foster parents as they are learning how to make this work just like you are.



- Talk with your foster parents and your caseworker about the rules when you and the other parent are together but do not live together. If you are the visiting non-custodial parent, make sure you ask the foster parent what time you have to leave the foster home and go home.
- Address different parenting styles, values and beliefs, including the non-custodial parent's views.
- You are still a teen but having a child requires you to take on adult responsibilities. This includes getting a job and planning your future. Many programs are available to assist teen parents in finishing school, finding work, learning parenting skills and learning how to live on their own. Group homes are available for pregnant and parenting teens.

## What are the responsibilities of my caregiver (placement)?

Your caregiver is there to help and support you no matter what decisions you make about being pregnant. Tell your caseworker if you are not comfortable talking with your caregiver. Your caseworker can work with you to make sure you have the support and help you need, including talking with your caregiver if appropriate. Your caregiver should:

- Keep you and your baby safe.
- Help you and your baby get to appointments.
- Set house and baby rules with you (discuss if providing some childcare is an option).
- Let you take care of your baby.
- Help you make choices that keep you and your baby safe.
- Help you and your caseworker decide how some of the foster care money for your child could be spent. (If you are living with a licensed foster parent they will receive a supplement payment to help with rent, food, clothing, diapers, shampoo, etc..)
- Provide a room for just you and your child (if you are living with a licensed foster parent).

The responsibilities of foster parents are described in Washington State law RCW 74.13.330.

## What are the responsibilities of my caseworker?

- **If you are pregnant**

You need to work with your caseworker to make sure you and your baby's needs are met. Call your caseworker if you have any questions about your options regarding your pregnancy.

- **If your baby is not in foster care, your caseworker will:**

- Make sure you and your baby are safe, well-fed, loved, clothed and visit you at least once per month.
- Help you to make choices that keep your baby safe.
- Help you figure out what help you can get (money, parenting classes).
- Help you figure out childcare.
- Help you figure out visitation for your baby's other parent.
- Help you figure out visits for you with your parents and help you decide if your baby should be in the visits with your parents.
- Help you and your foster parent develop house rules and responsibilities for your baby.
- Continue to work with you on your own dependency case.

- **If your baby is in foster care, your caseworker will:**

- Make sure both parents, under the visitation/case plan, spend as much time with the baby as possible.
- Make sure you know who your attorney is, when your court dates are and what you need to do to be reunified with your baby.
- Visit you and your baby either separately or together at least one time a month.
- Continue to work with you on your own dependency case.

## What happens when I age out?

- **Your caseworker has a responsibility to:**
  - Work with you and develop a transition plan for moving out of foster care.
  - Obtain personal documents when needed and upon your exit from foster care, including birth certificate, Social Security card, Washington State identicard, immunization records and a copy of your health and education records. You can also request records after leaving foster care.
- You, as the parent, will be responsible for providing: food, medical care, clothing and shelter, emotional and educational support for your child. You may be eligible for TANF, food assistance and medical coverage after you leave foster care. Talk to your caseworker about how to access these services.
- If you are a pregnant/parenting teen over the age of 18, State rules may give you the right to receive TANF/medical benefits for you and your baby (WAC 388-472-0005).
- Other resources are available in your community. Your Independent Living Services provider and your caseworker can help you find resources and plan before you age out.

The responsibilities of caseworkers are described in DCYF's Pregnant and Parenting Youth policy.



# Resources and supports

## Who are my supports?

No parent can do it alone. You need to think about who is on the team that will support you and your child and help manage your stress. Potential support members include:

- Your caseworker.
- The mother or father of your child.
- Your foster parent.
- Your birth parents and other family members, if appropriate.
- The mother's or father's family members.
- A counselor.
- A mentor or best friend.
- A spiritual advisor.
- Other parents who have gone through what you are now experiencing.



## Where can I get help for myself and my child?

### Help with school, work and life:

- **Education options** – High School Equivalency Certificate, Graduation Reality And Dual role Skills (GRADS)

You have a right to a free education if you are under the age of 21. Your rights are protected by state and federal laws. The first step to earning a high school diploma is contacting your local high school or school district office. A school principal or district employee can outline the different options for you, such as:

- Attending your regular high school.
- Attending a program for pregnant and parenting teens, such as GRADS.
- Enrolling in an online school.
- Enrolling in a High School Equivalency Certificate class at your local community college (may have costs involved).

There may be a GRADS program for pregnant and parenting teens in your area. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has information about GRADS on their website at [www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/GRADSProgram.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/GRADSProgram.aspx).

- **Independent Living Program**

If you are between the ages of 15 and 17 and are likely to remain in foster care, this program is for you. Washington State's Independent Living program can help you get the skills you need to succeed in life on your own. You can get Independent Living services through classes and workshops and through local agencies who can work with you one-on-one. For more information, visit [www.independence.wa.gov](http://www.independence.wa.gov).

## How do I postpone a second pregnancy?

- If you wish to postpone a second pregnancy, talk with your OBGYN or midwife about the best option for you.
- Another resource is Planned Parenthood: [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

### Help with money, medical and food:

- **First Steps** offers medical care to low-income mothers who are pregnant and to their newborns. The program also helps pregnant and parenting mothers access other resources in their communities to keep the family safe and stable and to help the baby thrive. [www.hca.wa.gov/billers-providers-partners/programs-and-services/first-steps-maternity-and-infant-care](http://www.hca.wa.gov/billers-providers-partners/programs-and-services/first-steps-maternity-and-infant-care).

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** provides temporary cash and medical help for you and your children for up to 60 months in your lifetime. To be eligible for TANF, an unmarried pregnant or parenting minor who has not yet completed high school or a High School Equivalency Certificate program must participate in educational activities leading to the attainment of a high school diploma or High School Equivalency Certificate **and** you must be living in an approved home. (WACs 388-486-0005 and 0010)
- **Fostering Well Being** can support you with health care resource information. You can take this information with you to medical appointments during and after your pregnancy. Contact the Fostering Well Being Program at 1-800-562-3022 ext. 59594.
- **Nutrition (Women Infant and Children) Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers**, along with children up to age 5, are eligible for a program known as WIC. A brief overview is provided below and you will also find more information at [www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC.aspx).

## What does WIC Provide?

- Health screenings including weighing and measuring to monitor growth, identifying health risks and checking blood iron levels.
- Breastfeeding support.
- Help getting other services (access to medical and dental care, access to food through food banks, community meals, etc).
- Checks to purchase nutritious foods (each eligible client receives checks to buy over \$50 worth of healthy foods each months, including milk, cheese, fresh fruits and vegetables, cereal, juice, whole grains, eggs and peanut butter or beans.
- All babies receive baby food, fruits and vegetables, and baby cereal. Babies who are not eating solid foods receive checks for additional baby food, fruits and vegetables, baby cereal and baby food meats. For babies who are not breastfed, WIC provides checks for iron-fortified formula.
- During summer months at participating WIC clinics, WIC clients can receive checks for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program. These checks allow the parent to purchase up to \$20 per person of Washington grown fresh fruits and vegetables at authorized Farmers Markets. To read more about the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, visit [www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC/FarmersMarket](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/WIC/FarmersMarket).

## How do I apply?

Call and make an appointment – there is no application form. To find the WIC clinic closest to your home, go to <https://resources.parenthelp123.org/services/wic-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-children?> or call the Family Health Hotline, a program of Within Reach, at 1-800-322-2588. Once an appointment is scheduled for you, the appointment lasts about 45 minutes. If you are eligible, WIC checks for healthy foods are provided at the appointment the same day.

## Help with parenting

You may wish to enroll in a free, local community parenting program. Ask your caseworker or Independent Living Program case manager if one is available in your community. Some common programs are:

### Home Visiting Programs:

- **Early Head Start (EHS)** is a comprehensive preschool program serving children birth to two and a half and their families and pregnant mothers. It is delivered through home visits or in center-based care. EHS includes: early childhood education, parent-child attachment support, nutrition services, health screenings and follow-up, family support and family involvement and leadership opportunities. Find a center near you, by visiting [eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices).



- **Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)** works with low-income mothers pregnant with their first child. The goal is to improve pregnancy outcomes, child health and development, and increase family economic self-sufficiency. Mothers have to be enrolled by the time they are 28 weeks pregnant. For more information, visit [www.nursefamilypartnership.org/Locations/Washington](http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/Locations/Washington)
- **Parents as Teachers (PAT)** serves families with young children by increasing parent knowledge of early childhood development, providing early detection of developmental delays and health issues, preventing child abuse and neglect; and increasing children's school readiness and school success. For more information, visit [www.parentsasteachers.org](http://www.parentsasteachers.org)
- **Parent-Child+** promotes positive parent-child verbal interaction, early language and literacy skills, and social and emotional development to strengthen the parent-child bond, increase positive parenting, and prepare children for school readiness. Home visitors match the culture and language of families served. Available in King County. For more information, visit [www.parentchildplus.org](http://www.parentchildplus.org)
- **Steps Toward Effective, Enjoyable Parenting (STEEP)** works on the premise that a secure attachment between parent and infant establishes ongoing patterns of healthy interactions. Through home visits and group sessions, STEEP facilitators work alongside parents to help them understand their child's development. Parents learn to respond sensitively and predictably to their child's needs and to make decisions that ensure a safe and supportive environment for the whole family. Available in Grays Harbor and King/Pierce counties. *\*\*Known as "Parenting Partnership" in King/Pierce counties and only accepts referrals from NICU hospital discharge.*
- **Partnering with Families for Early Learning (PFEL)** is an extension and enhancement of First Steps. The new model is a relationship-based home visiting program similar in intensity and duration to NFP. A two-year, visit-by-visit schedule for PFEL by incorporating two key curricula – Promoting First Relationships (PFR) and Partners In Parenting Education (PIPE). Available in King and Yakima counties.

## Center-based programs

Head Start is a federal center-based early childhood program that promotes school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development. Head Start programs provide comprehensive services to enrolled children and their families, which include health, nutrition, bilingual and culturally sensitive services and other identified social services.

- **Head Start** serves preschool-age children and their families. For more information, visit [eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices)
- **American-Indian/Alaskan Native Head Start** serves preschool-aged children and their families. For more information, visit [www.nihnsda.org](http://www.nihnsda.org)
- **Migrant and Seasonal Head Start**
- **Early Head Start** serves infants, toddlers, pregnant mothers and their families.
- **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Preschool (ECEAP, pronounced “E-Cap”)** is a program similar to Head Start, but funded by Washington State. For more information, visit [www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/eceap](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/eceap)



## Help with drug and alcohol abuse

- Safe Babies Safe Moms is a comprehensive home visiting program for Medicaid-eligible, substance-abusing pregnant and parenting mothers with children under the age of 3. Services available in cooperation with other publicly funded services include residential chemical dependency treatment with therapeutic childcare, housing support services and targeted intensive case management services. This program includes intensive case management, behavioral health related services, child development screening, assessment and referral and parenting education. Eligible mothers/children may receive TICM services until the child's third birthday.
  - Snohomish County 425-259-7142, Ext.141
  - Benton-Franklin Counties 509-582-0834
  - Whatcom County 360-734-4616
- Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP) is an evidence-based home visitation case-management model that provides advocacy services to high-risk, substance-abusing pregnant and parenting mothers and their young children. It offers assistance in accessing and using local resources such as family planning, safe housing, healthcare domestic violence services, parent-skills training, child welfare, childcare, transportation and legal services. The program is available in King, Pierce, Yakima, Spokane, Cowlitz, Skagit, Clallam, Kitsap, Clark, Grays Harbor/Pacific, Thurston, Whatcom, Snohomish, Benton/Franklin, Chelan as well as the Spokane Reservation. For more information, visit [www.depts.washington.edu/pcapuw](http://www.depts.washington.edu/pcapuw)









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