The national Department of Education (DoE) believes that women and men should only become parents when they’re ready for the practical and emotional realities of having a child.

What’s more, the DoE believes that, as young adults, all learners should be focused on achieving education success, planning for bright futures, and simply enjoying their youth. For these reasons, prevention is the primary strategy outlined in the DoE’s Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy. See Generations editions 1 and 2 for more on prevention strategies.

**A MATTER FOR CONCERN**

However, the DoE accepts that schoolgirl pregnancy is a reality, and is concerned about the high levels of unplanned teen pregnancies occurring at many of our schools. Of equal concern is that young people are engaging in sexual behaviour at a relatively young age. While some choose to do so, in many instances teens are forced to engage in sexual activity.

**A COMPLEX ISSUE, NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS**

Research shows that the reasons for unplanned teen pregnancy are complex. It is not a matter of a learner just behaving “badly” or being irresponsible. Some factors linked to learner pregnancy are:

- **Unequal power relations between the sexes.** This arises from how each person’s identity is shaped by what society expects from us as “men” and “women”. Often, men are expected to be dominating, while women are expected to be obedient and passive. Likewise, “to be a man” is seen as being sexually assertive, while “to be a woman” means being sexually attractive, and available, to men;

- **Low self-confidence and self-esteem among young women.** This causes women to seek affirmation through being sexually desirable, rather than appreciating their own value as individuals;

- **No clear vision of a worthwhile future.** The choice to partake in irresponsible sexual intercourse can be motivated by a sense that there is no bright future to build towards; and

- **Pressures linked to poverty.** Exchanging “sexual favours” for food or goods – known as “transactional sex” – is sometimes a survival strategy used by women trapped in poverty.

**AN EMOTIVE SUBJECT**

Another factor which can make managing teen pregnancies that much more of a challenge for educators is that people often have very strong, personal views on the matter. Teachers therefore also need to address any negative or judgmental responses from members of the school community so that the pregnant learner can be given the support that she needs.

**POINTING SCHOOLS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION**

In the Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, the DoE sets out some useful guidelines to help schools manage learner pregnancy fairly and effectively.

However, educators must not regard unplanned schoolgirl pregnancy as their sole responsibility. Any school management plan for learner pregnancy must be designed to draw on a support network involving parents/guardians, as well as the expertise of professionals such as social workers and those in the health sector.

Turn to page 2 and 3 to find out more!
MANAGING LEARNER PREGNANCY: It’s a balancing act

To support schools in managing the sensitive area of learner pregnancy, the Department of Education (DoE) recommends that certain procedures are followed by schools.

1. Schools must be informed when a learner is pregnant so that support can be provided. The pregnant learner should immediately inform a trusted educator at the school.

2. The teacher who has been told this information should seek assistance from the principal and/or other senior members of the school community. If the school has a care committee/support team (see right), then those on the committee/team must be informed and begin their work to support the pregnant learner.

3. Every case must be dealt with confidentially. For example, the name and other personal details of the learner should not be shared with others in the school community, until such time as it is appropriate to do so. Parents/guardians should only be informed after consultation with the learner is included, although confidentiality is not an option when the learner or others are at risk.

4. Schools should ensure that pregnant learners have access to health facilities during their pregnancy and at the time of birth. Schools are also encouraged to provide advice and counselling on parenting. There also needs to be a strong emphasis on the responsibilities of the father, especially when the father is a learner.

5. The young mother and the father are expected to exercise full responsibility for parenting their child. The young mother may therefore request or be required to take a leave of absence from school.

6. On returning to school, learners must submit medical reports declaring that they are fit to resume classes. They must also show that proper arrangements have been made for the care and safety of the child.

7. Schools must maintain a record of all learner pregnancies that occur. These records must be submitted to the relevant provincial education authorities when possible.

8. Where possible, provincial education departments have the responsibility to provide each school with a copy of the Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy. These are available through the DoE's Provincial departments or local education offices of national organisations. For a copy of this SANGONET directory in book form, phone (011) 562 6222.

In cases where prevention measures fail and learners do fall pregnant, the education system must manage the situation by balancing the best interests of the individual against those of other learners, educators, the school and the community.

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The 16 Days of Activism is a global campaign led locally by the government. The campaign aims to:

- Raise awareness about the violence suffered by women and children
- Challenge those who commit these violent acts to change their unacceptable behaviour
- Highlight the stories of survivors.

GET YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED

1. Wear white ribbons during the 16 days

The white ribbon is a symbol that expresses our rejection of violent behaviour towards women and children, and our solidarity with the victims and survivors of violence.

Create 16 Days buttons, stickers or T-shirts, which can be sold to raise funds to donate to an organisation that supports abused women and/or children.

This exercise has many educational benefits. Learners will gain experience in advertising-related skills by choosing the best words and images/logos to put on their 16 Days products. There are also opportunities for them to build economic-related skills, such as costing, pricing and selling these products.

2. Volunteer work at a relevant organisation

Use the 16 Days to nurture a sense of civic responsibility and social justice activism in learners. Identify worthy organisations in your school’s area that will benefit from voluntary work by learners.

Besides raising awareness of the terrible effects such violence can cause, this experience is an excellent way to instil a sense of agency in learners, as they witness first-hand how their personal efforts can make a real difference.

3. Make 16 Days the topic of a research project

Use the opportunity to focus on the issue of violence against women and children, as well as how campaigns such as 16 Days function to put an end to such violence.

Here are some suggestions of kinds of research such a project could include:

- Finding out statistics related to violence against women and children, such as prevalence, types of violence, and legal action taken against perpetrators of violence. Build an opportunity for learners to engage in statistical analysis and comparison by asking them to gather statistics from different countries, and/or from different years.
- Looking at the role played by major organisations in promoting universal human rights, such as the South African government and the United Nations. Ask learners to provide a brief history of significant declarations related to promoting human rights, and to compile a set of such documents that they regard as the most outstanding.
- Examining the causes for violence against women and children occurring. There are plenty of theories that attempt to explain this phenomenon, although there is no universal agreement on one particular theory. Use the opportunity to expose learners to the way academic fields approach the same problem from their own particular perspective (for example, psychological, economic, sociological, or historical analysis of the causes of such violence).
- Set up a class debate in which the roles and responsibilities of both women and men in causing and in ending gender-based violence are articulated.

The Department of Education says:

‘Enough! No more sexual violence and harassment in our schools!’

The Department of Education is concerned about sexual violence and harassment that takes place in schools. Acts of sexual violence and harassment are serious offences, not only because they have a negative impact on victims and survivors, but also because they are a violation of human rights, equality and dignity, and contravenes the Constitution. Sexual violence and harassment is also against the law.

Guidelines to help schools

To contribute to the prevention and management of sexual violence and harassment in schools, the Department of Education has published the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence & Harassment in Public Schools. These Guidelines are part of an attempt to reduce sexual violence and harassment in schools and the Department calls upon school management teams, governing bodies and educators to familiarise themselves with its contents.

These Guidelines are intended to support schools and school communities in responding to cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence perpetrated against learners and educators within schools, and those that come to the attention of school authorities.

Defining sexual violence and harassment

The Guidelines define sexual violence as any sexual act or attempted sexual act using intimidation, threats or physical force, whilst sexual harassment refers to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

Furthermore, sexual attention becomes sexual harassment if the behaviour is persistent, or if the perpetrator has made it clear that the behaviour is considered offensive, and/or if the perpetrator knew, or should have known, that the behaviour is regarded as unacceptable.

Responding to sexual violence and harassment

The Guidelines set out standard measures to be taken to respond to situations of sexual violence and harassment across school communities. They provide information for educators, learners and School Governing Bodies to understand their role in supporting learners and colleagues affected by sexual violence and harassment. For example, the Guidelines regard the institution’s manager (Principal) as the ultimate accounting officer in dealing with reported incidents. The procedures to be followed when the learner is the offender are set out.

The Guidelines advocate for each school to implement the Code of Conduct for learners, and for aspects of the Guidelines to be incorporated into the school Code of Conduct. When the offender is an educator or any adult, the Guidelines refer to the necessary action about how the individual should be charged or disciplined. For educators employed within the Employment of Educators Act, sexual harassment or violence incidents can be dismissable offences.

Step-by-step guide to reporting

The Guidelines also provide information so that they can understand reporting procedures.

Victims are sometimes further victimised by those who do not know what to do with such cases and are reported to them. Victims can also become despondent or even drop out of school, if their cases are not handled effectively. The Department of Education regards any form of sexual violence and harassment in schools as unacceptable.