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 Genderations 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.

POINTER 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 informed of the 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.

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.

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.

SCHOOLS CAN’T DO IT ALONE

Preventic/guardians/hy members of the pregnant learner must take the lead in working with the school to support and monitor their child’s health and progress. These caregivers must also take steps to support the school in continuing their child’s education.

For example, they could fetch tasks and assignments from the school so that the learner can complete them, and then return the completed tasks and assignments back to the school for assessment.

Create a network of support

Besides the work done by schools, managing a learner pregnancy successfully needs the combined effort of a network of people and organisations.

Schools are advised to set up care committees/support teams. These committees/support teams should include a number of professionals and members of the school community.

For example, the committee/team could include educators; members of the school management team; responsible senior learners; parents; members of the school governing body; and officials from other departments, such as Health and Social Development.

The committee/team should have clear lines of communication and responsibility and be ready to act to support the learner concerned.

CenTral prinCiplEs

• The (unborn) child.

Managing a learner pregnancy.

This is primarily the responsibility of the young parents, as well as of their own parents/guardians and families.

However, the school will need to support the young mother in a number of ways so that she is able to meet these responsibilities.

For example, after giving birth, educators should refer the young mother to organisations that offer advice and counselling on motherhood and responsibility.

• The school community.

The rights and needs of other learners, educators, and other members of the school community also need to be taken into account when managing a learner pregnancy.

For example, learners sometimes give birth in classrooms. This not only exposes the young mother and the newborn child to unacceptable risks, the whole school community also suffers negatively when a birth occurs at school.

Managing the learner’s pregnancy therefore requires steps to protect the school community from such risks.

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.

Caring School Communities

Further reading

To get more information on the Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, please visit education.gov.za or use the contact details below.

www.education.gov.za

For a copy of this SANGONeT directory in book form, contact Thutong Education Portal: www.thutong.org.za

You’re Not Alone

The Department of Education Helpline

0800 202 933

Contact details

Website: www.education.gov.za

Thutong Education Portal: www.thuthing.org.za
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.

**OTHER DATES TO NOTE DURING THE 16 DAYS**

• 29 NOVEMBER: International Day of Women Human Rights Defenders day
• 1 DECEMBER: World AIDS Day
• 10 DECEMBER: This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SAYS:**

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 contravene 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 violence 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.

**Step-by-step guide to reporting**

Get the Guidelines for your school from the Department of Education

Tel: (012) 312 5420/8
Fax: (012) 312 5218
email: mononela.m@doe.gov.za

**YOUR GUIDELINES TO PREVENTING AND MANAGING SEXUAL VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT... COMING IN JANUARY 2009**