Afraid, alone and ill-informed, teens who get pregnant out of wedlock often opt for the easiest way out like dumping the baby or subjecting themselves to unsafe abortion. Social rejection from families and the community also rob the girls from the support and assistance they desperately need.

An average of 18,000 teenagers in Malaysia get pregnant each year, 25% or about 4,500 cases involved out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The Fifth Malaysian Population and Family Survey conducted by LPPKN revealed that 4.8% of all teens have had sex at least once. The survey also found that Malaysian teens had inadequate understanding of matters related to sexuality/reproductive health and limited knowledge when it came to sexual relationships.

By Dr Anjil Doshi-Gandhi, Deputy Director General (Policy), National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN)

Preventing Teenage Pregnancies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Baby Dumping Cases</th>
<th>Found Alive</th>
<th>Found Dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The realities of having a baby before finishing school hits hard. The financial and psychological burden of raising a child can overwhelm teenage mothers, as compared to older women who are financially stable and more physically and mentally mature.

But regardless of whether a baby was conceived out of wedlock or not, teen pregnancies, in general, involve a heightened health risk for both mother and child:

**The Mother:** Anaemia, malaria, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, postpartum haemorrhage, obstetric fistula and mental disorders, such as depression.

**The Child:** Stillbirths, preterm birth, low birth weight and death in the first week of life are higher among babies born to adolescent mothers.

Helping our children involves equipping them and yourself, with the right know-how.

1. **Talk about reproductive health**

Parents should lay a basic understanding of reproductive health and teach their children the values and responsibilities concerning sexuality, sexual responsibility, and risky sexual conduct that could lead to pregnancy. Inform them about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases (HIV/AIDS), unprotected sex, baby dumping, rape, abortion, etc.

2. **Abstinence training**

Teach them how to say ‘NO’ and recognise risky behaviour and situations that could lead to premarital sex. For example, how to confidently and assertively confront pressure lines like if a person says "I love you", "if you love me you'll..." or "we were meant to be together, forever". Awareness and common knowledge and skills may prevent your children from making hasty decisions they will regret.

3. **Keep tabs**

Always keep an eye on your child and mould them with good values and model the morals you want them to espouse. Rules & boundaries are also important; all families have them. Be sure they understand your rules regarding reproductive health and relationships with the other sex.

4. **Keep lines of communication open**

Be approachable and reassure them that if they have any questions or doubts about reproduction, or anything else for that matter, you are there for them.

Tip: It can be hard to talk about this subject, so start early and ease into it as your children grow older. Do so in bouts, keep it simple and easy to understand.

Tip: Practice by role playing a few possible scenarios they might encounter in life.

5. **Spend quality time with the family**

Many parents today spend so little time with their teens, it’s no wonder these adolescents feel disconnected. These activities may seem small but are impactful in strengthening parent-child bonds, establishing trust, invite interaction and provides opportunity for parents to inculcate good moral values.

Things to do together as a family:
- Have dinner or other main meals.
- Watch movies, go for special outings or take a vacation.
- Attend family gatherings.
- Attend religious functions together whenever possible.

Finally, keep yourself informed, none of these will work if you have no knowledge of it to start with. With proper guidance, support and skills, your children will make realistic, positive and healthy choices throughout their lives. PP

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**I'M IN CONTROL**

The *Modul Cakna Diri* (I'm In Control Module) is used as the social and reproductive health curricular in government schools for post UPSR and post PT3 students. It is also taught at LPPKN's kafe@TEEN youth centres and also includes a module for parents.

The centre provides counselling services and advice on reproductive health, as well as health and social education, to adolescents and youths to enable them to make responsible choices on matters related to their sexuality.

Besides that, teens can enjoy numerous educational & skills-building programmes as well as fun activities and have the chance to make new friends. Enrol your teenager for free at any kafe@TEEN centre located near you and mould your teens into healthy, resilient and responsible people able to cope well with the challenges in life.

Website : http://www.lppkn.gov.my/
Call : 03-26937555

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