



There are lots of good things about being a young parent but there can also be extra problems. There are times when you might still feel you would like to have someone to take care of you. There will be other times when you want to be free to do what you like without the responsibility of a child. It will make a difference if you are on your own with your child, or if you have a partner. It will make a difference if you have the blessing and practical support of your family or feel unsupported by family and friends. These things can make it much easier or much harder to be a teenage parent. Being a parent is one of the most difficult things you can do, but it is one of the most important - and it can be fun.

*This PEG uses 'he' and 'she' in turn.
Change to suit your child's sex.*

Looking after your child

- Children need love and affection. Give your children lots of cuddles and tell them you love them many times a day.
- Children are eager to learn and need lots of things to do. When they are very young their parents are their best playmates. They like:
 - to be danced with
 - to be talked to
 - to be read to
 - to be sung to
 - to be taken for walks
 - for you to lie on the floor and let them crawl over you
 - for you to play with them and their toys.
- Children need your time - they want you to be around them and to take notice of them. This might mean giving up things you want to do and it might mean making out you are interested in what they are doing, even when you don't feel like it. Your time and attention helps your child to feel loved.
- Young children need to be closely watched, especially near water (even nappy buckets).
- Children can get into all sorts of things when you are busy. It is important to make your house and outdoor area as safe as possible. Washing up detergents, laundry powders and medicines need to be kept in a high cupboard and locked.

- The best toys for young children are often ones you don't have to buy. Children love:
 - saucepans and saucepan lids
 - pegs or lids to put into containers
 - walks in the park and picnics
 - home-made playdough
 - jugs and water to pour
 - cushions on the floor to crawl over
 - cardboard boxes of different sizes to crawl through and into, and to make into cubby houses.
- Change the toys occasionally to give variety. Keep a special toy for a treat.
- Join a library (and toy library) to borrow books and toys at no cost.
- Take them to a playground or join a playgroup.

Looking after yourself

Children need you to look after them but you can't do this well if you don't look after yourself.

- One of the things you may find as a young parent is the loss of your friends who don't have children. Sometimes you feel that you don't have anything to talk about any more. By joining a young parents' group you will make new friends who have similar lives to yours. Here you can have fun, your children can play with other children and you can talk over the same problems you share with other young parents.

- It's okay to need your own space. Arrange someone reliable to care for your child so you can have a night out, go shopping or do something special. All parents need a break.
- All parents have times when they get really busy and times when they get upset. Take a break, go outside, ring a friend or someone you trust and talk about it. Always make sure your child is safe first. Often being outside can make you feel less stressed so taking your baby for a walk around the block in the pram, or your toddler to the local playground can help.
- Even though you are a young parent it is important to still plan for the future. Some areas have school programs designed for young parents and may have a creche on site. TAFE also has courses that may help you. (Young parents who have returned to, or continued their education have made exciting and fulfilling new directions in their lives.)

Getting help

Most parents want to be seen as being able to cope well. They want others to think that they know how to be a good parent. Sometimes there is a fear that asking for advice means you are not a good parent and this is quite wrong. Young parents often believe they can do everything themselves and don't want older adults interfering.

No matter how old we are, if we are parents we need information. We all need support and advice from others and we all need to say we don't know sometimes, without feeling ashamed.

- Ask other young parents where they have found support.
- Sometimes young parents feel that they are being judged when they go to an agency, a doctor or a clinic for help. It is important to look around until you find someone you feel comfortable with.
- If you have problems with professionals not understanding what you want:
 - think about what you want from them
 - write it down
 - practise saying what you need and why, without getting angry
 - ask if there is a worker at the agency who works with young parents
 - take a friend with you if you feel worried.

- Be willing to listen to family members when they give advice. The more ideas you get, the more ideas you have to choose from. It doesn't mean you have to do it. Choose what feels right for you.
- Ask workers you trust for referrals to people they know who will be able to help you.

Reminders

- **Be wise enough to learn from others.**
- **Be smart enough to say "I don't know".**
- **Get lots of information so you have plenty of ideas to make good choices.**
- **Everyone is allowed to make mistakes - mistakes are to learn from.**
- **Use the 'survival instinct' strengths that you develop as a young parent.**
- **Find support for yourself and use it.**
- **Don't be ashamed to ask for help.**

Want more information?

Parenting SA - www.parenting.sa.gov.au (see 'parenting groups')

Information on parenting, children and youth - www.cyh.com

Youth Healthline - 1300 13 17 19

Young Parent Programs

- Talking Realities - 8243 5459
- Second Story - City 8232 0233
 - Elizabeth 8255 3477
 - Christies Beach 8326 6053

See other Parent Easy Guides (PEGs):

Being a parent, Being a Mum, Self-esteem, Discipline (0-12 years), Milestones, Right from the start, Living with babies, Living with toddlers, Sleep (0-6)

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Parent Helpline
1300 364 100



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