

Teen Parenting: Bridging Multigenerational Support

Webinar

Carol Mills: Thank you, thank you very much, for that; hello to you all. Thank you for joining us today for this most interesting webinar on Teen Parenting: Bridging Multi-Generational Support. We appreciate you taking the time out of your busy work schedules, your day, to explore together how we can continue to provide quality and responsive services to this very vulnerable, unique population. Some of our goals today will be to learn a little bit more about the complexity of multi-generational families. We will also hear about community partnerships and agencies.

We will also hear a little bit more about how...and the experiences of parenting teen parents that may be homeless. And then of course we will also be talking...and again we're talking a little bit about some strategies but also some of the resources that have been and will be available to all of you out in the Head Start community. So let's get started on our journey together by having Angie Godfrey, who is the Infant and Toddler program specialist at the Office of Head Start in Washington, D.C. Angie welcome.

Angie Godfrey: Thank you Carol. It's wonderful to be here today and I just want to start by thanking all of you for joining us on this webinar and on this wonderful topic. I think there's probably nothing more exciting, challenging, puzzling, invigorating than working with teen parents and their babies and it's a wonderful opportunity that many Early Head Start programs across the country engage in on a daily basis. And knowing that we decided as part of the series of webinars and audio conferences that we would be sending materials out and I know that many of you were on the audio conference a few weeks ago on working with teen parents. And I'm sure that you received some of these resources but I would just remind you to look...to make sure that you have them and look for them.

The first one is the DVD, "Learning Happens" and it's 30 vignettes that show parents and children, ages birth to three, interacting during everyday play and routine. And it's really a sweet DVD and I hope that you will enjoy it. The next two I really love. The first one is "Everyday Ways to Support Your Babies and Toddler's Early Learning" and it's divided into language and communication, thinking skills, self-control and self-confidence. And you received a packet of these so you can share them with families. One side is in English; one side is in Spanish. And the thing I love about these is they're very friendly. I think sometimes parents can be overwhelmed by materials and this is just a one pager that's really sweet and that covers a lot of areas for families interacting with their babies.

The next one is "Your Baby's Development" and again I like to describe it as three to six months. This time it's all about parents and babies falling in love. And we know that that certainly is what happens

but when you're working with young parents they may not always realize that's what happening and I think sometimes it's really hard because there's so many other things going on with them and their babies that they just need a little bit of time to think about things. Again, it's very friendly. What your baby can do and what you can do and its three to six months. It's...actually it's zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months and nine to 12 months. They're wonderful sheets. So again, share them with your families.

The last one is "Teenagers and Their Babies: A Perinatal Home Visitor's Guide". This is a wonderful book for working with teenagers and their babies and multi-generational families. And there's also a section on working with fathers which we know is a big goal in Early Head Start. And I know that I'm going to be introducing Nick soon who wrote the book. So I'm not going...I know that everything he's going to say is going to be wonderful so I'm going to just encourage you to use all of these resources and to know how important and valuable the work that you're doing is and to know that we also want to support you anyway we can.

Another thing I just want to talk briefly about are the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Some of you may think: Well, I can't find services to pregnant women and it can be a challenge sometimes because people are not always looking for them where they are which is under "Family Partnerships." And as you see the first one 1304.40(a)1 Family Partnerships; it talks about goal setting with families, and engaging in this collaborative process of building partnerships with families. And that certainly is true in general but when you think about services to pregnant women that's exactly what we're doing and in the next slide it talks a little bit more specifically about services to pregnant women. And that assisting pregnant women to accept comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care through referrals is one of the big goals of the program. And I just wanted you to see the standards. Whenever I'm on one of these I always talk about standards because I think in Head Start and Early Head Start we're so fortunate because we have standards to guide our work. So I'm going to leave you with those two.

Here's a third one and again it's...the thing I want you to... as you look at this slide is to know that it really talks about the whole family. That we're talking about pregnant women but also working with expectant families and helping the whole family understand fetal development and also understanding what happens after the baby is born. Some of the strongest programs serving pregnant women have great community partners. We know that maternal depression is not unusual among Early Head Start parents. That there are indications of it and our programs...it's an opportunity to develop partnerships to serve families around those issues. The last one is the benefits of breastfeeding for all pregnant and nursing mothers. That's a huge part of our program. I've been in programs that have purchased breast pumps to support working moms and that have just spent a lot of time working with families around breastfeeding and nutrition. So don't forget those standards.

As well as on the next slide, I just want you to know that as we go through the... through the webinar think about these key points: Building relationships, teen development, infant development. I love this

one. The reality of teen parenting. It's a big reality and when we work with teens we need to be... we need to embrace that reality as well as we embrace them. And then appropriate curriculum; the other thing we know is in the standards. We don't require a curriculum, but we do know from the research that the best results, the strongest results with expectant families and with the impact on parenting come from programs that use curriculum. So we're going to talk about all these things today and it's just key to understand that each of these really are important and know that we really understand how challenging and how wonderful the work you're doing is and for that very reason we've brought someone special to talk with you today. Nick Wechsler is the co-author of the book I mentioned earlier: *Teenagers and Their Babies: A Perinatal Home Visitors Guide* and he's going to talk today about the many roles that teen parents have as well as the special...and again, sometimes challenging relationship with grandparents. Nick thank you for being here today.

Nick Wechsler: Thank you for inviting me and to Early Head Start staff across the country; how wonderful to spend time with you today. This is really thrilling and a little bit strange and scary speaking to 75 people who I can't see. But I know that you're there and I'm certainly happy to be here with you. When Angie was speaking she put a slide up; she lingered on us focusing on the reality of teen parenting. For those of you like myself who've worked with teenagers, we've come to understand that one thing that is certain in our work is that nothing is certain. But every day when one of you encounters a young parent in one of your Early Head Start programs, you do know that the one thing that is certain is that they are a mom or a dad.

You also know that parent or not, they're first and foremost a teenager. And being a teenager permeates everything that they feel, everything that they do and every way that they interact with you, with their baby, with their own family and with their friends. They have all the qualities that come with adolescence. Often they'll stumble on some of the developmental hurdles that they will encounter but you know because you've worked with them over time that in time they'll master those hurdles after they stumble. There are other certainties aren't there?

Let's start with the most basic. Parenting is hard. It's scary and it's pretty much trial and error for all parents no matter your age. And all parents including teenagers have common dreams for their children. Dreams for good health, safety, success and the desire to provide a better life than they feel they may have had. Let's just pause there for a moment because this is what motivates teenagers and what keeps us going when we're feeling frustrated or uncertain.

Teenage parents like all parents dream for the best for their children. Now it's true a teenager's sense of perspective, the preparedness, the resources that they may have make some of these dreams a little

less realistic on face value. But the dreams come from a very, very deep place and they hold motivating truths for the young parent to strive for. They can inspire both the parent and those of us who work with the parent. We want to hold those dreams with them so then we can help them turn those dreams into realities. As we're working with them we know that adolescence is all about change. Typically the developmental process allows for time, space and protective factors for safe passage. And we know that parenting teenagers experience this development take on much greater ramifications as they are now responsible for their very young children.

So depending on the age, the maturity, the social and familial relationships and accessibility to support systems like you and your Early Head Start programs, the job description of parenthood may exceed their neural or their emotional, cognitive or social readiness for the job. Infants and toddlers depend on some relational experiences that in fact may be the antithesis of what we generally think teenagers exude. Things like consistency, dependability, predictability. These are qualities that often aren't used to describe healthy and typical adolescents. They certainly hold these qualities but they're not always present and they're not what we think of first when we think of teenagers.

But ready or not now they're a parent. Young parents, they are thrust into a dual development. Now they join all parents of all ages who must define how they and their baby fit together as they develop their own way of parenting. And you know how hard they can work at both growing and parenting [noises]. And you know how often they amaze you at what they can accomplish on behalf of their child and for themselves. How young parents feel about themselves in this new life role, the nature of understanding and support and guidance that they experience with others; this is what directly impacts their child's well-being. Their own parents, their partners, their extended family and friends and you provide much of this. Let's go to the next slide.

In my talk today we'll touch on adolescent development and parenting. But most of what I want to share with you in this segment concerns our work with multi-generational families and in particular working with grandparents. As I speak I want you to listen for three themes that thread themselves throughout my talk. The first one is what we know and that is that children's emotional, cognitive growth is impacted by the relationships that they share with all of the people in their lives. Especially their mothers, their fathers and grandparents. In our work in Early Head Start programs we benefit parents by entering into those relationships with the deepest understanding and perspective that they all want the best for their children.

Second, we know that parents of teenagers can feel how challenging the developmental drive of adolescence is. Primarily as their teenagers try to break away from them. And we know that the striving

for independence is confounded by becoming more dependent as they grow and become parents. In our work we often play the role of a bridge for a family, helping them go through the journey and starting at different places but ending up where it best serves the Early Head Start child. And finally the third theme to listen for is how programs and staff who work with teenagers must earn the trust of grandparents, especially grandmothers in order to work with their children. Those of you who do this work, you know how critical a grandmother's approval is as she often is the gatekeeper allowing you to do your work. Let's go to the next slide.

Early Head Start programs bring repeated opportunities for teenagers to experience themselves as being able and confident parents. Now this is a message that can be undernourished in the life experiences but it's essential for the development of the parental self-esteem. Belief they can do what their child wants and needs is best for their child. Belief in investment in them is an investment in their child. Would you go to the next slide please.

When you think of the work that you do, I know that you often find yourself divided between all of the worlds that you work in. I've only listed four here. It doesn't even include your own personal world. The world that you share at home with your family. Your work is very complex. It's very exhausting. And it's very critical. Next slide please.

This slide depicts the four different worlds that we're in. And you can see that the child is involved; we have an adolescent, the relationship with each other and then the relationship with all the other people in their life.

Let's go to slide six. This is a developmental trajectory that I first heard from Ron Whaley several years ago and I'm pretty sure it sounds familiar to you. But I want you to focus on here because this is not about child development. The reality that we all understand is that development is a product that builds on itself. It expands outward as it progresses and it encounters expected bumps in the road stretched backward along the journey as we move ahead on the journey. This is typical. The beginning is always developing a sense of security and trust and then we go out and try to explore the world. We try to develop our identity and then you become masterful. This is a very common trajectory.

So let's go to the next slide and we'll take a look at the developmental trajectory of parents. And you can see that I've used the same words. When I do my work I look for parallels between the focus of the work...and you know this as working within the parallel process. Becoming a parent you also need to have feelings and interactions that make you feel secure that you can trust yourself, that you can trust

others in your life that are helping you as a parent. You too as a parent, just like a child needs to go and explore how you want to be as a parent, the defining of parenthood. And it moves all the way down to mastery.

So now let's go to the next slide and you'll see that we framed grandparents as having a similar trajectory. Because teenage pregnancy is an experience that often is passed from generation to generation, I want to spend a little time before we go through the development of parenthood focusing on what it might be like to be a grandmother of a teenage parent. The grandmothers that you're most likely to encounter are probably in their 30's or 40's. It's most likely or possible at least that they too were a teenage parent in their own life and the child's parent that you're working with was a child of a teenage parent. Poverty is the single most common denominator amongst all teenage parents. It too is generational. All of the negative consequences that poverty can bring exist in the lives that you'll work with. Their young daughter's pregnancy might interrupt the forward motion, the anticipated independence, the growth that the grandparent was having in her early life. She may begin to feel that becoming a grandparent has stopped her progress and it might be burdensome. It could be experienced in many, many different ways by the older generation. Many of you have heard a grandparent say something like: "This is your bed. Now you sleep in it."

It might also be seen as a positive experience for a grandparent. They may find joy in it. They may find opportunity. They may look forward to working with their own daughter and helping her become a woman and join the circle of women who raised children. How grandmothers accept you matters in the way that you enter into the family system and work on behalf of the Early Head Start child. If you look at the developmental trajectory, their feelings with you must engender trust; they must feel secure with you as you enter into their life as an outsider, a visitor, helping them to do their work which is raising their child. It pays off in the beginning of your work to pay special attention to connect with the grandmother. To build a sense that you're not going to try to undo things that she has spent a lifetime doing. And you're not there to undermine her... winning her trust the first step. This brings a challenge to you because you have to build two alliances. First and foremost with the teenager but then with the grandmother as well. The only thing that makes this easy is remembering that our client is the enrolled child. Mother, grandmother, and you are equally invested in that child. That's your common denominator and when there's tension or conflict between mother and her mother, teen mother and the grandmother, you and mother, you and grandmother; when you can go back to what's best for the child you all can find common ground. Let's go to the next slide please quickly.

Raising children is how culture, family beliefs, and practices gets passed from generation to generation. This is the work of families. It's the work of mothers initiating their daughters into how we raise children. All of the issues of parenting... crying, sleeping, feeding, spoiling, disciplining, toilet training, playing, learning... these are the issues of how parents parent. They're influenced by culture; they're

influenced by family history, beliefs and practice. And you're entering into a discussion that's a family's discussion. We have some experience and expertise about all of these different parenting practices but we are outsiders visiting and we need to find a way to visit in a way that others can join with us to gain from us what we have to offer.

The next slide please. We find ourselves working in the midst of other people's lives. An infant toddler [inaudible] program; we all want to work together on behalf of that child's healthy and robust development. Their emotional development and their cognitive development. So in the end, your comfort with uncertainty, with differences in beliefs and practices that may not be your own, your sensitivity and interest and openness, your ability to focus on the young child through the young mother within the context of the mother makes your work possible.

Let's go to the last slide. You, the teen mother, the grandmother all share a common goal and that's for their Early Head Start child to succeed in the world. For that child to know love and eventually to be able to give love. For that child to be excited by ideas, relationships and to see experiences as opportunities not barriers. The relationships that you and young parents, you and grandparents share on behalf of the Early Head Start child makes it possible for the shared dreams to reach closer to realities. I wish that we were in a situation where you could speak with me and I could learn from you but we'll find another time and another place to do that. Right now, as I end my segment I want to acknowledge that oftentimes families and programs need to access other support outside of the family circle. We have joining with us now Carol Nolan who is a head start fellow with the Office of Head Start and Carol's going to share some of her experiences working with teen parents and community partnerships. Carol welcome to the discussion.

Carol Nolan: Thank you Nick. Hi, I'm here today and a lot of...one of the things I'm going to share is about community partnerships and some of you as Early Head Start home visitors and staff may be working with teens who are not enrolled in school. I am going to talk about teens that were enrolled in a high school and how we connected with Early Head Start staff but also how we connected to the community. I was a childcare manager for 13 years for an onsite teen parent childcare center located in a high school and though I'm not the expert today I do have a lot of experiences. In 13 years I served over 200 pregnant and parenting teens and their fathers, their grandparents, their extended family but also school personnel which is another whole world as Nick has showed in his solar system that sometimes collides with teens or can be supportive to teens. And I want to say that our program was...we tried to be very supportive to teens. We were a national model. We were written up in Newsweek magazine as one of the first in the country to have an onsite infant and toddler childcare center for teen parents.

This is a picture of myself many years ago with a teen...one of the teen's babies and I have permission from Ashana her mom to share this picture with you. And this particular child was very, very colicky,

very attached to her mom and she would come down from her classes during the day and say, "I'll leave the rest of my classes. Please I don't want to leave my daughter here. She's so difficult." And I would hold this child in between my administrative jobs and say, "Go back to class. We're here to help your daughter and help you finish school." So when we think about finishing school and plans to continue some teens we know...many teens drop out of high school. They don't have...they're not fortunate enough to have an onsite childcare center in their high school that supports them. We were fortunate in our community that we had the support of school committee members, representatives and community agencies to make this happen for teens. All they had to do was live in the city, apply for a childcare subsidy and go to school and they were able to have their child in that childcare center.

We served teens from 8th grade through 12th grade and with those teens came a variety of ages and stages in their education and as Nick mentioned in their development. And we had to figure out where teens were at. Somebody would be coming to us from 8th grade had four years of high school to complete with their child. It was much more of a struggle than someone who came as a senior who was pregnant and had a child. So we looked at both their social and their emotional needs to try to set goals for the future and we were fortunate also to have a licensed clinician who taught adolescent parenting classes.

So we had parenting programs as well as another form of support within the high school for these teens to learn about how to take care of their child. They also came to the childcare center during their study periods and we modeled practices for them as well. So when I mentioned about community partnerships and Nick also did too. One of the things that I would like you all to think about when you're serving teen parents is there're so many bridges to be made for them. Many of us as older adults know where those bridges are and know how to find them, know how to access them. Many teens aren't even getting healthcare for themselves let alone their baby. Many of our teens came to us at seven or eight months pregnant with no prenatal care. No care for themselves, no care for their baby. So this is an important bridge to make as Early Head Start staff.

Also mental health; as we know teenagers are so volatile and they go up and down from... and we think of them as manic but they're just teenagers [laughter]. And their emotions can fluctuate. As we know in the morning they can smile at us, in the afternoon they hate us. And so it's really important that we look at some of the mental health needs and services in the community to help them. We also need to be culturally sensitive. We cannot say to a teen, "You need help. You need counseling." Even though we may think that we need to figure out approaches on how to do that.

In terms of education many teens could not complete high school and we have to look at GED programs and alternative programs to help them because we all know that through schooling, and finishing schooling is very important for their financial independence. And the last is looking at employment. Some teens want job training programs, looking at job opportunities and again it's our role to help them find that and also one of the things that I wanted to stress in community partnerships is really finding out...we need to do that as staff...find out who the key players are and bring those key players to the teens. And I did this with both Early Head Start and Head Start staff so they came to my program; they met the teens. They saw them where they were at. They saw the children before they enrolled in the program and the staff also got a chance to build a relationship and the teens got to build a relationship with those Early Head Start staff. Nick spoke about grandparents so I'm not going to spend a lot of time; what I am going to share with you though is the...when Nick talked about the interruption in the moving forward for the grandparents. So grandparents could range in age as Nick said from their early 30's if they were also young mothers and then we also have great-grandparents that Nick did not mention who are also involved in the teen's life, or aunts, or extended family.

So we need to think about where the grandparents are at and many grandparents may accept the fact that their teens...their young teen is pregnant. Living conditions are very difficult if they're already in a crowded situation; thinking about where the teen and their baby are going to sleep. And understanding that that teen may be in a relationship with that mom that is not always the most positive. And now we're asking her to support this teenager who may or may not finish school, who may or may not have the parenting skills and now we're asking the grandparent to be very active and involved. And one of the things that I wanted to share with you that really hit me when I was working with grandparents was one of the grandparents came into to pick up the baby and I asked her what she would like to be called by the baby and she said her name. She did not want to be called Nana or Grandma because she wasn't ready to accept her new role as a grandparent. Nobody...she told me, "Nobody asked me to be in this role so I don't want to be called that." And so I had to respect that. So we called her by her name.

There's lost dreams for the grandparents and also for them for their daughters. This is not what they had hoped that may be the path for their child to be on. Nick is also going to be talking about teen fathers and I really love this quote. This is also in Nick's book and I refer a lot to Nick's book I recommend all of you to go back to that resource; "There is no such thing as a fatherless child." And when I think about that I think about the "railroad of parenthood" that Nick refers to and our goal is to encourage responsible fatherhood. We have a lot of misconnections with parents, with teen parents and with especially with fathers. And Nick in his book in chapter four talks about that we know that infants benefit by a relationship with both parents but it's not our role as Early Head Start staff to bridge that relationship with the parent. But to make sure that the child has a relationship with the father and has a relationship with the mother as well. And if we want the father to be involved we have to realize that the mother has been on this track for nine months. The father may only be on that track very recently, maybe halfway through or maybe at the end of the track. To be afraid, to not know where he stands,

what his role is and so we often think about father's falling off the track or reversing direction and getting off the track and it's a lot easier for them to do if they haven't been on the track as long as the mom has been.

So one of the important things that I want you to take from what I'm sharing with you, and my experiences and this also came from teenagers and their babies, is to think about who you are and when you work with teens everything from your life, from who you are profoundly affects how you approach your work. What your age is influences. The teens thought I was an old lady. I was in my 40's. "Oh you're so old." And I thought I wasn't old at all [laughter] but I was compared to what they saw me as. So they didn't want to listen to me because I represented their parents. Another thing that we have to think about is your own life story. If you have children of your own, and you look at these teens and think, "Oh, if this was my daughter" or "I hope this doesn't happen to my daughter". We have to stop those kinds of thoughts and not judge the teens and also the people in your life... think about the people in their life. Their friends and their peers are very important. You may be in a stage in your life that you only have a few friends in your life but a very rich support system. Teens do not have rich support systems in their lives and we have to remember that; the important part is knowing yourself and all of this requires time, persistence and understanding. We look at this as a balancing act and I want to leave you with this quote. Again, I'm not promoting the book but I am promoting what's in the book as something that you should have by your beside.

So this last quote was: "We change through our work with teens and they change as they work with us and we are both in the process of becoming." So as we think of teens going up and down, we go up and down. One day we're welcome and we can have our home visit happen and things seem to be going smoothly. And the next week the appointment gets cancelled, rescheduled; they don't want to talk to us; they're stressed out. So we have to remember that as we have our ups and downs, teens have more than we do. We have to be sensitive and be supportive to them and think about where they're at. Not where we're at, where they're at. In our growth they're growing rapidly and we have to grow with them and thinking about... I probably should have put a tug of war; so as we want to be confident and competent, and we want them to be confident and competent; sometimes we feel inadequate; we don't feel that we have the right tools to work with them. They feel very inadequate at times and we have to recognize both that in ourselves and in our work with teens. And lastly this is Ashana and her daughter Ashley. And Ashana gave me permission to share this photo with you. She was 16 when she came to me and she was pregnant and was very upset. Her mother was very upset and I want to share the good news with you that Ashana finished high school with the support of Head Start, with the community, with the school and she became a Head Start teacher from her involvement with the Head Start program, is now a lead Head Start teacher, is graduating this June, getting her Bachelor's degree as a single mom, with Ashley who in that picture is now 11 years old. Her son Jefferson is nine and she is going to be presenting with me at a national conference at [inaudible] sharing her life as a teen mom. So Ashana I want to thank you for allowing me to share your life, your wonderful child and I want to now

introduce Kasi. I had the pleasure of working with many teen parents and I'm pleased to introduce to you a teen parent who will share some of her personal experiences with all of you. She can tell you firsthand with the assistance of our moderator, Carol Mills how she balances attending high school and parenting with the support of Early Head Start. Thank you for joining with us Kasi and Carol.

Carol: Thank you Carol. This Carol [inaudible] and this is Carol Mills. Kasi?

Kasi Huppert: Yeah.

Carol Mills: Hi. Kasi, thank you. Also a special welcome to you for calling in and particularly, especially this week. So thank you. How about...would you like to begin by just telling us a little bit about who you are and what program you are with and whatever you would like.

Kasi Huppert: Ok...My name is Kasi Huppert. I'm 18, I attended Tahlequah High School... Alternative School. I'm a senior. I have three brothers and three sisters. I'm I guess the middle child. I'm the second to graduate out of my high school or out of my family out of high school and I have two kids named Jayden and Jeremiah. Jayden just turned two and Jeremiah is nine months. And I guess that's it [laughter].

Carol Mills: I hear...we had a conversation earlier. You decided to return to school and you became involved with Early Head Start. How did that come about Kasi?

Kasi: Well I was going to drop out when I first got pregnant because I missed too many school days and Bethany she had come talked to me. She had come talked to me about this Head Start that they were doing and I decided to go ahead and put my kids in it and finish school. I'm caught up on all my grades and now I'm actually graduating this year.

Carol Mills: Wow, good for you. Good for you. Congratulations. And I bet it wasn't easy. You make it almost sound like it was easy...I did this, I did that. But I bet you must be proud of yourself because I'm sure you had to make some sacrifices as well too.

Kasi: Yeah, it was pretty hard actually. It wasn't as easy as it sounds right now.

Carol: Sounds like you had a lot of support. You had mentioned someone. Is that an Early Head Start family advocate that [inaudible] you and helped you to fill out the paperwork or the documentation? What was that about?

Kasi: Yeah she was the one who helped me to apply to get into the daycare and to get my second son in.

Carol Mills: So is it true...and do I understand that with your...the Early Head Start program at the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma that they have the center right in the school. Is that correct?

Kasi: Yeah, that's what I like so much about it is I can come and check on my kids anytime that I wanted. Well in between classes.

Carol Mills: [Laughter] We're glad to hear that too.

Kasi: [Laughter] Yeah.

Carol Mills: Well that probably has made a big difference right? Does that make you feel what? What; safe, secure or able to concentrate on your courses or what? Why is that so important? That model.

Kasi: It does make me feel really safe and secure about my kids. Because I know where they're at and if I feel like...or when they get hurt I can just rush over here and come help them or get them or anything like that. It really does make me feel safe knowing that I'm just right here, right next to them.

Carol Mills: Great. Okay. Can you share with us what has been one of the biggest challenges for being a parent?

Kasi: Transportation,

getting around. Yeah, when my kids get sick I miss school days because of it. Sometimes I miss several school days because I have two kids and, you know, they're both sick at the same time. I have to stay home.

Carol Mills: Wow that's...Kasi, thank you for sharing that because a lot of Early Head Start staff, home visitors, maybe managers they are listening and that may be helpful for them to know as one of the challenges too. Because your voice also represents also some of the others that are experiencing some of the same challenges. So thank you on behalf of other teen parents out there. Also do you have dreams? Often times we have dreams and what would you say your dream in life...what are some of your dreams for yourself first?

Kasi: For myself it would be to finish high school, go to college and be able to financially support me and my kids. I guess that's my only dream.

Carol Mills: And your dream for your two children would be what?

Kasi: To grow up healthy and strong boys and I want them to succeed in life too. You know? Be able to finish high school and go to college. I just want them to grow...you know, to be really good boys. That's all.

Carol Mills: Oh, that's a great message. Great message. And just in closing too... can you think about maybe in the last few months something that just looking at your children or maybe one of your sons; what were you so amazed at? What made you either smile or laugh, or just felt blessed or surprised? What were you amazed at? Can you think of something? Does something come to mind [baby crying]? Especially how wonderful they are or maybe how funny they can be?

Kasi: When my son had started talking and he was repeating things. How he like mocks us and he [laughter]...that stuff, it really does make me happy and seeing him do all that. And I love how he reads ...he loves books. He loves to read books. He picks up any book and he's like... you know he'll want me to read it over and over. And I just love how, you know, they start crawling. Just everything that they're doing.

Carol Mills: I can almost picture it and I'm smiling inside in my heart because I'm mother of four. We went to Head Start but I'm also a grandmother of two little ones too. So with that I want to just say Kasi thank you so much for being willing to share your story, your perspective and help...helping those that are listening to continue on with the most important work that we do and that we really believe in. And best of luck to you and congratulations on your upcoming graduation which will be next month. Thank you.

Kasi: Thank you.

Carol Mills: Thank you so much. With that so far we have heard about how to bridge the relationships with grandparents and community partners and the voice of a teen and her personal experience. Let's continue our journey together with hearing about two other special populations we have identified as being important members of the Early Head Start community: Teen parents that are fathers and teen parents that are homeless. First we will hear again from Nick who is the co-author of the book *Teenagers and Their Babies* who spoke earlier on the webinar. Welcome back Nick.

Nick Wechsler: Thank you Carol. And before I begin my talk about fathers; Kasi, I want you to know that I listened into your conversation along with all the other people from this webinar and how much you've lifted our spirits. It's stories like yours and the work that you do that really keeps me going from day to day. And I really thank you on behalf of all of us but especially on behalf of your two kids who are really benefiting from spending their time with you. So congratulations and thank you for sharing today.

Kasi: Thank you.

Nick Wechsler: I want to talk...you're welcome. I want to talk a little bit about things that we all know that children need. One thing that they don't need is a perfect parent. But they do need parents that are just good enough to stay invested and involved in positive ways. Now children benefit from as much of this as they can get from dads as well as from mothers and others in their lives. It really wasn't until the late '80's or '90's that adolescent fathers were even studied. They weren't planned for as a focus of our programs until about then or we never looked at what their experience was as a father. But most importantly what the impact they had on their own child's development. So we have to admit that our work is late. It's still in its forming stages but it certainly is needed. Next slide please.

Here are some of the things that we both know from practice and from research. Children who are raised with dads compared to those who have not been raised with their dads have increased abilities to negotiate and navigate a broader range of behaviors that they experience in interaction with others. They're also more able to display greater empathy. In short they appear to have greater social competence. Having a dad in their life positively impacts their abilities for emotional, regulation and self-control. Now this is perhaps the single most critical influence on a young child's ability to learn and when you have time with your dad you seem to have a head start in mastering this internal control. Their self-esteem appears to be increased as is their curiosity and most wonderfully they demonstrate higher verbal skills and higher scores of cognitive competence.

Later when all of this is posted online, I'll include the citations for these studies that I've generalized here for any of you who want to learn more about it. But clearly we agree that dads do make a difference and play a vital role in the lives of their young children's lives. Now Early Head Start staff face very critical function in their work when they meet a teenage mother in considering how to engage the father in services. In most of our programs around the country fathers are a secondary target, not a parallel or primary target. As program staff learn about the family they have to begin to balance the needs and desires of child, mother and father. A dad once told me that he didn't get involved in the home visits that his partner were having their child because he was never asked. He said that he assumed that it was women's work. Another dad shared that when the visitor looked him in the eye and asked him how he was dealing with being a parent, he knew then that she cared about him and the rest was easy. He said he needed to see that she wasn't afraid of him and did not disdain him for being a young father.

Fathers benefit from being actively involved in their children's lives in many of the same ways that mothers do. It can help make them feel wanted, needed, engaged and competent, loved by their child and essential to the child, growing into the person they dream about for their child. It can motivate them in how they live their lives. Having a baby gives all parents, mothers and fathers an emotional edge to want to start over, to do better, to fix wrongs, all because they want the best for their child. I once spoke with a father who shared that when he looks at his daughter and she smiles right at him and he knows it's just for her it makes him feel better and better. It motivates him. It motivates him to get up and to do what he knows he's got to do. He told me that he cut back on a lot of stuff that he used to do.

He said "I started focusing a little more on getting out there, working and doing the best I can." He shared that having a baby really changed his attitude because before "I didn't really have anything to look forward to and having a baby inspired me to be a better man and to want to provide for my baby." In the course of working together, Early Head Start staff can help mothers who may have had negative, hurt or angry experiences with the baby's father; they can help the mother separate her own relationship with the child from the father's relationship with the child. Earlier Carol told us that the idea

of separate relationships for the child is what we strive for. Our work is based on what the child needs so we work to find ways for the child to have a mother in their life as well as to have a father in their life. Programs that address inclusion of the fathers as a parallel target of their work have been able to benefit from some of the things that have been learned about in fatherhood work over the last few years. I want to go to the next slide please.

Fathers want to be involved with their children and with learning that the sooner they're involved the longer they stay involved. The period of pregnancy has appeared to be a time of great openness that fathers really are more able to get engaged and involved and committed during the period of pregnancy before too much time has gone by. We talked earlier about staying on the track and that they don't have as much time to connect with the child in utero. But the pregnancy calls them in and conjures up their greatest dreams. So we want to maximize those opportunities when we can. And certainly the first year of a child's life is critical for child and father to attach, to stay engaged. One of the things that we've learned is that the nature of the relationship that the father shares with the child's mother and with her mother seem to have the most profound impact on the relationship that they can develop with their child. Mother of the baby and grandmother of the baby either open or close doors for fathers involvement. And fathers no matter their age, especially those who find their way into our programs are there because they want to be involved. I want to go to the next slide please.

I had blanks...there we go. Most young fathers see this new role as a great opportunity, brings them a sense of purpose, hope, future. It's an opportunity for their own growth and development. A father once told me that, "Everyone kept telling me that I had made a mistake and I didn't know what I was getting into and I couldn't do it. My worker said, 'Yes, you can do it.' Now holding my baby that daddy feeling just hits me. She told me that what I put into being into being a dad is what I'll get out of it." And we know that change takes time. Some studies indicate that change is realized the sooner the interventions begin and especially if they can continue for at least the first 18 months of a baby's life and spending part of that life with the baby's father. No matter the setting, the program design and/ or the curriculum the single most critical element in promoting change in another including a father is you. The way you are, what you know, the way they experience you; this is what makes change possible. We're going to change gears a little bit here and recognize that sometimes teen mothers do not have the support of fathers or even of other family members. In some cases once the family hears about the news of a daughter being pregnant, the daughter may find herself in a situation where she may have to seek out alternative living environment. And here with us this afternoon from Somerville, Massachusetts is Angela Conway, who's a home visitor supervisor. Angela, thanks for joining the conversation with us.

Angela Conway: Thank you Nick. Hello and thank you for asking me to participate in this most important webinar on bridging support for teen families. I want to first start by taking about our program. Somerville Early Head Start is a comprehensive home visiting early childhood program that partners with

parents to promote children's healthy development. There are many cultures that make up our Early Head Start community. 40% are Spanish speakers; 17% are Portuguese speakers; 14% are English speakers; 6% are Napali speakers and 1% speak Arabic, Somali, Punjabi and Albanian. Our collaboration with one of the shelters serving teen mothers was established in 2010 after the RFP had come out for the ARRA Grant. It stated in the guidelines that one of the priorities was homeless children.

Our director Marie Galvin thought it would be a good idea and approached the director of the shelter who was very excited. Enrollment is based on Head Start Guidelines and we give priority to up to 10 children and pregnant women living at the shelter. The shelter director and associate director provide information to Early Head Start and facilitate the referrals of interested parents. The shelter is a group home that provides a safe, supportive and nurturing environment for the teens and their children. Now let's go to the next slide.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the teens. Like other teenagers these teens are in a phase of development marked by dramatic changes physically and emotionally and are dealing with life stressors. Add to these experiences a pregnancy then homelessness and then you have a teen with significantly more stress than the typical teen. Many of them have experienced trauma in their lives. We know that teen mothers are more likely to be depressed than older mothers and may be less likely to initiate verbal interaction as frequently or respond as positively to their young children. Some statistics show that as many as 50% are clinically depressed. Their relationship with their infant or toddler varies. They don't all raise their children the same. One teen may raise her baby one way, another teen may think differently. Cultural factors can also influence how a young mother raises her child.

For instance in some cultures breastfeeding is the norm. But then there are those teens who choose not to breastfeed their babies. A teen's level of parenting skill may be low because they haven't all had positive examples and good role models in their own lives. But most of them are trying. Some of the teens see pregnancy as an opportunity to try to do things differently and they have a desire to learn. So there's some basic modeling to the teens. This is the job of the staff at the shelter and our job as outside providers. Modeling what is developmentally appropriate. The teens' relationship with their like peers can be very supportive and sometimes close friendships may develop. When that happens they will usually text each other a lot and invite each other to important celebrations like their child's birthday party. But sometimes they do have conflicts with each other and they will get into arguments or fights with each other. Next slide please.

Some of the challenges these teen mothers face including having very limited financial resources to meet their family's needs, completing their education, potential health problems during pregnancy and

at birth and parenting problems can be enormous. The shelter is a unique place and it is sometimes challenging for Early Head Start to provide good services to these young women because they move a lot. Sometimes as a result of their own actions they are asked to leave. This sometimes happens even after the teen mother has lived in the shelter for a very long period of time. There have been times when Early Head Start has gone for a scheduled visit with a teen mother and learned that she had left the shelter. Usually over the weekend. In those situations there was no closure in the relationship between the family support worker and the teen. And I'm referring to teens who have not just left the shelter over the weekend to visit with extended family because there are those teens that have those support systems in place. But I'm talking now about teens who have actually left for good. A lot of the teens have grown up in the system and have gone from group home to group home. Living at the shelter may be just another placement.

Then there are those teens who are not used to living in an institution or a group home. For some of the teens the shelter is a hard place to live because there are lots of rules, lots of requirements of them and their babies. Let's go to the next slide.

All teens are unique and there's so much variety in the teen mothers at the shelter in terms of who they are. Our program is strength-based and we see that they have strengths. Home visits by Early Head Start take place weekly and last for 90 minutes. Also we've conducted workshops on healthy snacks for children, food safety, healthy holiday cooking and car seat safety at the shelter. With teen mothers we are not only focusing on how to support bonding with their infant and early development but also on helping them create goals for their families, on teaching them life skills such as how to shop at a supermarket instead of a convenience store, how to buy stamps at a post office, and how to fill out an application. Achieving their life's goals and learning new skills help them to develop confidence and a positive self-image. The teens at the shelter are all involved in something. Most are completing high school, college or a GED. They also attend meetings and life skills groups at the shelter.

There is a structure and place for these teens which will help them to learn to put structures in place for their own children. A lot of the teens do see the staff as trying to support them even though they sometimes complain and they grumble. And most of the teens develop strong relationships based on trust and respect with the home visitors who work with their families. Now let's go to the next slide.

Our Early Head Start program was able to obtain a grant for the past five years in order to provide dental services for our prenatal mothers and the children. A family support worker and a nurse take them on a field trip to the dentist and the family support worker interprets for the family. This service

for the family helps them establish a local dental home. Sometimes there are teen mothers who are monolingual Spanish speakers and there's no one at the shelter to speak their language. Some of our Early Head Start has had a bilingual Spanish-speaking home visitor assigned to the shelter. Teen mothers in our program have been successful in reaching their goals of finding quality childcare so that they can finish school. Some have learned about the importance of establishing routines for their child and how important it is to talk and read to their child. What may be seen as a small feat to one teen may be a huge feat to someone else. Back to you Angie Godfrey who will reflect on some key points we heard today. Angie?

Angie Godfrey: Thank you Angela. I guess what I want to do is just start by thanking everyone who talked today. Nick and Carol Nolan, and Kasi and Angela and Carol Mills for moderating. It really has been as wonderful as I knew it would be. I...you know Nick when you talked... first of all I loved when you said that one thing is certain, nothing is certain. I think if that doesn't describe teenagers not much does. They live with uncertainty. And then when Carol talked about having a baby and not even understanding their own health, their own health needs and then being responsible for another little person. And then the...I think threaded throughout today was the dreams. And I do...all the years I've worked with families; families have such wonderful dreams for their children and I like in the piece that talked about how dads' dreams can be renewed through their children and I just thought that that was wonderful too as everyone talked about that and Kasi did too.

The other thing I loved Kasi was when Carol asked you a question about, you know, things that you're faced with and what you need and the first thing you said was transportation and I loved that because it's what we talked about at the beginning. There's a reality to the life of being a teen parent and being a teen...you know, a family with babies when you're teens. And sometimes the entire reality for a day can be just trying to figure out how to get a two-year-old, a nine-month-old and yourself somewhere. And those are the things that we need to remember when we're working with families. I loved the piece about the dad, Nick. It's so true; we've learned that from Early Head Start research. The earlier that we begin to work with fathers, the earlier that fathers become engaged with the children, the longer the relationship and the greater the benefits for the baby.

And I just think that's so true for all of us. I do...I love the piece about grandparents. All of us...even as adults think about how we raise our children in the context of our own family and the kind of judgments...I was 30 years-old when my daughter was born, my first child and boy could my mother tell me how things should be done [laughter]. So I can't even imagine what it must be like to be 13 or 14 and trying to raise a baby and having a mother tell you how it should be done or could be done. And the difference really is what happens in Early Head Start, what happens with having wonderful resources like those that were...those folks that were on the call today...be available to talk to us about these things so that we can all work our way through them together. The thing that I believe more than

anything else in the world is that relationships matter and that's what sees up through and that's what helps us change our lives and it's what helps us dream a better life is having a relationship. So this has been great. I look forward to more opportunities for all of us to be together. So thank you.

Carol, Carol...no, Jennifer am I turning it over to you? Thank you Jennifer [inaudible]. Sorry I wasn't looking at my script [laughter].

Jennifer: Hi everybody. So at this point in time we're going to turn to question and answer portion of the webinar and we have a few wonderful questions that have come in from the listeners. So I'm going to direct a few of these questions to our panelists. The first question that I'm going to ask that came in... we had a number of questions when Nick was talking about working with dads and one of the questions is: How do we work with the fathers when the mother is ...doesn't want him to be involved in the child's life? So I'm going to turn that question over to Carol first and then Nick if you have something you want to add please feel free to jump in after Carol.

Carol Nolan: One of the things that I had mentioned before in my presentation was to know the teen and understand where the teen is coming from. So I think that it's really important to find out what the teen is not allowing the dad to be involved about and what are those reasons. Because she may not have been in a positive relationship and we do know that domestic violence is something that we did not mention here but that is also very prevalent. So we need to be careful about why the teen is not allowing. But if the teen...what I try... my approach was to offer suggestions to the mom even if they did not have a positive relationship with each other. How could this father be supportive to her? So something as simple as maybe he could pick up the child from school so that she could attend a tutoring session. Or maybe the father could learn how to diaper the child. So I would ask the teen what were the things that really bothered her that she really needed help with and then to see if I could bridge... again speaking about bridging that... so that the dad could be onsite in the childcare center. We could teach the dad how to diaper the baby. She could watch, see that the dad was confident and then the dad could change the baby. Just something simple like that, so.

Nick Wechsler: Well I do have something I want to add and the first thing I want to say is thank you Jennifer for making this the first question because it clearly is the hardest question that any of us will ever face in this kind of work. Is how do we get someone to do something that they don't want to do for whatever good reasons or whatever reasons they may have? And if we knew the answer to that we would be doing something else [inaudible] [laughter]. But, let me say that in order to engage fathers in our program services we have the responsibilities to them and to the mothers of their children to make sure that we as a program put the legal rights on the father on our agenda of what we find ways to talk

about. Because every father of every child has the right to be determined to be involved with their child. And every state in the country has different laws. But if we are working with families; especially when they're apparent and obvious separations between mothers and fathers to find out what our legal responsibility and obligations are to the fathers of children. And to find ways to be comfortable to bring that into the discussion. Comfort, respect are all the key elements of getting to talk about hard things. Hard things is what parenting is about. So there's no easy answer. I really believe that when a mother introduces her life to us in the opening weeks of our involvement with her and tells us her life story the way she talks about the father of the baby or the way she doesn't talk about the father of the baby is meaningful. And we have to go very carefully, very gently and very respectfully but the respect is for the child that deserves to have a father involved.

In instances where there's been abuse, there's neglect and there's harm it doesn't become our role as a family support worker [inaudible] determine that the father can or can't be; that's the courts work. We need to find ways to join with parents so that they feel our acceptance for their position they feel our understanding of their feelings, and they feel open toward exploring this with us in a respectful and gentle manner. So that's a hard dose but I believe that's the reality from the father's perspective.

Jennifer: Great answer Nick. Thank you so much for that. Let's turn to another question. There are a couple of questions really wanting to get at some just kind of practical strategies about engaging parents, teen parents. So I'm going to sort of pull together a couple of questions into one question. So and I'll turn this both to Carol Nolan again and perhaps Angela and Nick as well. What are some creative, fun ways to really engage teen parents in home visits and encouraging them to be home? Or if they can't be home what are other ways to get them connected into the home-based program? We'll start with Carol again.

Carol Nolan: Hi, I just want to share...and again to all of the Early Head Start staff that are listening to make those connections to those community programs that the teens are involved with because they've already built a relationship of trust possibly with those agencies. So I would encourage home visitors to go to the schools, to meet the teens when they were picking up their child and walk home with them. One of the Head Start visitors actually took a teen to a coffee shop, treated her like an adult and she held the baby while the teen actually enjoyed a cup of coffee after school. So there's very creative ways that you can come up with but it's meeting them where they're at and what their needs are. So to ask them what would be helpful? What time would be helpful? What can I do? It's as simple as carrying the bags or pushing the carriage so that the teen can do something. A very simple way is when the weather was nice the home visitors would meet the teens at a nearby playground and interact with the baby and model behavior for the teen so the teen could actually sit and breathe and have a soda. So those are some quick ways but really thinking about what is it that the teen is really missing in her life. We forget that teenagers that leave high school hang out with their friends, play video games, do all this... these

teens don't have that opportunity for any down time. So providing some of that down time for them is a wonderful thing.

Jennifer: Great. And Angela I know that you talked about engaging families who are in shelters and in a unique situation. Are there other ways that you can talk about engaging those families and those teen parents?

Angela Conway: Well some of the shelters have wonderful play stations for the children and so that's a great opportunity to engage the mother and the child is to use the play space available at the shelter and to do some activities with the mother and the child. Some of Early Head Start has provided a lot of materials for our shelter that we collaborate with and so it's been great to be able to use those play spaces and those materials to do activities together.

Jennifer: Great. Nick did you have anything you wanted to add to that? Nick Wechsler: I think that it's helpful to remember that no one but especially teenagers don't like to be told what they should do or how they should be different, or what's wrong with what they're doing. So when we work with them we really have to work extra hard to focus on what they...and we care about what brings up together which is their baby and to find ways to help them discover and for us to support all of the positive things that they're doing with their children. The more they experience us as loving them, respecting them, being cheerleaders for them the more time they'll want to spend with us.

Jennifer: Wonderful. I think we have time for maybe one more question. And can Carol Nolan maybe can you speak a little bit about the importance of ensuring that the staff who are working with teen parents have the training and the skills necessary to do that?

Carol Nolan: Thank you Jennifer. One of the things that was key when I was working in the program that I was working at was realizing many of the staff...infant... we all know infant and toddler development courses aren't always readily available to understand the development of the child. To then be able to explain that to the teens. But more importantly we did a lot of training about adolescent development so staff would understand what a 13-year-old was thinking in terms of abstract thinking or when I mentioned before about teens not having goals. How many 14-year-olds know what they want to do next year or in three years? So these teens are also at that development stage and training is key but also training to support the staff because you also go through stressful times and how you as a staff member deal with the stress in your life. So having coping skills and we had breathing sessions [laughter], how to count to 10 and lots of just things to understand your development as well as the

teens development were very, very helpful. And then we also do training sessions about interacting with babies and being sensitive to the teens when we were doing...as Angela mentioned some of the activities to link the teen to her baby. In the book *Teenagers and Babies* there's also several activities listed about baby time and parent time and how to engage parents. So I would suggest that you look at those as well and develop your own resources but absolutely make sure that you have time for staff training to build your own skills. And as I would often refer to it as my professional resiliency so that I would know that I was doing the best that I could. Sometimes it felt like I was swimming upstream and I think that training really helped people understand that it wasn't always them, that it was also part of what the teen was going through as well.

Jennifer: Thank you Carol and before I turn it back over to Carol Mills I just do want to address one other question that came up a few times and that is about the materials and resources that were mentioned at the beginning of the webinar. Those materials were mailed out to each grantee in early March. And if you have not received them please check with your... perhaps your director, your executive director of the grantee and see if those materials came and they just haven't come to your program yet. And if you still have not received them you can contact us here at the Early Head Start National Resource Center and the contact person for those materials is Lena Cunningham and her email address is lcunningham@zerotothree.org. And I'm going to turn this back now to Carol so we can finish up.

Carol Mills: All right. Thank you very much Jennifer and to all of the presenters and to all of you for calling in today. For those of you that were not able to tune in today if you could let those folks know, the webinar will be available in the near future on the Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Center. Also too we will later on send out an evaluation and we would like to ask you to take a few minutes to complete it and send it back in. So thank you very much again and with my closing thought before I pass it on to I-link I'd like to say, "Let us put our hearts and minds together to show what good we can do for our children." And that is a quote by Sitting Bull. Thank you. See you next time.