INTRODUCTION

Many teens have never thought about how a pregnancy would affect their lives. “High School Moms” offers a helpful starting point for discussions about teen pregnancy and how to prevent it.

These guides are designed for parents, teachers, youth group leaders, coaches, and other grownups who want to talk about “High School Moms” with teens. The hope is that the show and the discussion guide can help them explore their own views and values, and to understand that teen pregnancy can happen to anyone.

Shows like HIGH SCHOOL MOMS can be a useful tool for parents, teachers, and other concerned adults to start important conversations with the teens in their lives about pregnancy and prevention. In order to facilitate this, TLC and Discovery Fit & Health have partnered with The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to produce discussion guides for the series. Each guide will provide facts, questions, and discussion ideas designed to encourage teens to talk about and consider the issues brought up in the show. These guides will be available online at DiscoveryFitandHealth.com and will be distributed to schools nationwide via Discovery Education’s efforts.

KEEP IN MIND

The purpose of these guides is NOT to generate a discussion with teens about their own sex lives or to have them share intimate details of past behavior. Rather, the goal is to help break through the common belief that teen pregnancy “won’t happen to me,” and to use the stories portrayed in the show as a way to make the challenges of teen pregnancy and parenthood more real to teen viewers.

Although the stories on the show are real, your teens’ own experiences may be quite different. Or they might be quite similar. Either way, don’t make assumptions about how they will react. If they don’t relate directly to the girls in the show, encourage them to think and talk (anonymously) about what their friends or relatives may have experienced. Encourage them to talk about what they see in the world around them – in their community, at their own school, among their peers, in the media, etc.
Not everyone has the same opinions about the topics brought up in the show but conversations should always be respectful. Remind your teen or your group that listening to others’ viewpoints is an important part of the discussion.

TIPS

If there is a particular topic that resonates with your teens, start there. Each episode provides a lot to talk about. Don’t feel like you have to get to everything in the show or cover everything in the discussion guide.

Ask your teens open-ended questions that require more than a yes/no answer whenever possible. The goal of this discussion guide is to get young people thinking and talking about their own views and values, not just answering questions.

Even if teens offer up details of their own sexual experiences, steer the conversation away from that and bring it back to a discussion about the larger themes. You can refer students to confidential resources after the discussion.

FACTS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT TEEN PREGNANCY AND HOW TO PREVENT IT

There are only two ways to prevent teen pregnancy: not having sex, or using protection carefully and correctly, EVERY single time. These facts and tips can help teens commit to doing one or the other:

Teen pregnancy is 100% preventable – either don’t have sex or use contraception carefully and correctly every single time.

Do you have a plan to prevent pregnancy? Will you say no to sex, and if so how will you say it? If you do have sex, what kind of protection will you use? Where will you get it? How will you know how to use it properly? Where can you go to learn about prevention? Who can you talk to about it?

It takes two people to cause a pregnancy, but only one to prevent it.

How can you talk about protection with your partner? Who is responsible for protection? What do you do if the other person doesn’t bring it up? If it’s too embarrassing to talk about birth control with someone, what would it be like to deal with a pregnancy?

Less than half of U.S. teens in high school have had sex. Some have, some haven’t, and some are lying.
Does this surprise you? Did you think it would be higher? Lower? Would more teens wait to have sex if they knew that not everyone was doing it? Do you think most teens could be happy in a relationship that doesn’t include sex? Why or why not? Why do some teens have sex before they’re really ready?

Nearly 3 out of every ten girls in the United States get pregnant before their 20th birthdays.

Does that seem high to you? What do you think it’s like to be one of those girls? Why aren’t more people careful about preventing pregnancy?

More than 700,000 teen girls got pregnant last year. Most of them didn’t think it would happen to them.

Thinking it won’t happen to you doesn’t count as protection. Unless you are actively preventing pregnancy, chances are it will happen. If you have unprotected sex regularly, there is an 85% chance of pregnancy within one year. Do you know everything you need to know to prevent pregnancy? Where can you go to find more information about contraception? Who can you talk to about it?

In the past two decades, teen pregnancy and teen births in the U.S. have declined by about 40%.

Does that surprise you? What about in your school or community? Why do you think there has been such a dramatic decline? Better sex ed? HIV awareness? Access to birth control? Abstinence? Which of these topics do most teens learn about in sex ed class? What do they learn outside of class?

One in six girls in the U.S. will be a teen mother. One in ten children born in the U.S, is born to a teen mother.

What kinds of challenges do teen mothers face, not just as teenagers, but as they get older? How does being the child of a teenager affect a child? What might that mean to the children of teens parents over the course of their lives? Children born to teen moms are more likely to become teen parents themselves someday – why do you think that is?

More than 8 out of 10 fathers don’t marry the teen mothers of their babies. More than half of teen mothers don’t live with their babies’ fathers.

What does it mean for a teen mom if the baby’s father isn’t in the picture? What does it mean for the baby? New moms usually depend on their partners for a lot of support – who can a single teen mom depend on?

Most girls who have a baby by age 18 don’t graduate from high school. Fewer than 2% graduate from college by age 30.

Pregnancy and parenthood are leading reasons that teen girls in America drop out of high school. Why do you think that is? What kind of impact does it have on a girl, and her family, if she doesn’t finish school?
Children born to teen mothers are more likely to live apart from their fathers and grow up in poverty.

Teen pregnancy is hard on teens, but it’s harder on their children. What are some of the ways that being the child of teen parents might be difficult?

Teens say parents are the #1 influence on their decisions about sex and pregnancy.

Why do you think that is? Do you agree with that? What are some ways that parents can be helpful on this topic? What do some parents do that makes you NOT want to talk with them about sex and pregnancy? If teens just can’t talk to their parents about sex, who else do they turn to?

The only 100% foolproof way to not get pregnant is to not have sex. But if you do have sex, there are many kinds of contraception or birth control available. If you are going to have sex you need to find the one that works for you and use it properly.

Most people have heard of the pill and condoms, but there are also IUDs, implants, the ring, the patch, the shot, and others. A health care provider can help you find the right one for you, and tell you how to use it properly. Using it exactly as directed is important because if you don’t it won’t be as effective. Think about it like a seatbelt in a car – just having the seatbelt there, or using it sometimes, doesn’t mean you’ll be safe when a crash happens. You have to buckle up every time in order to be protected.

Get more helpful tips and resources for teens, and hear what real teens are saying at www.stayteen.org

For free fact sheets, tips, and material for parents and educators, go to www.thenationalcampaign.org

**REGARDING PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS**

Pregnancy and parenthood should not be the end of the education road for teen mothers. Title IX of the Education Amendments passed in 1972 bans sex discrimination in all federally funded education programs and activities. And discrimination based on pregnancy is sex discrimination. This means that all students who might be pregnant, are pregnant, or have been pregnant (whether parenting or not) must have the same access to school programs and activities that other students have. Schools are required to treat pregnant and parenting students the same way they treat other students who are similarly able or unable to participate in school activities and pregnancy-related absences must be excused for as long as the student’s doctor determines is necessary.

The National Women’s Law Center is a nonprofit organization working to expand opportunities and eliminate barriers for women and their families. They have decades of experience helping communities address the needs and rights of pregnant and parenting students. Learn more at www.nwlc.org.

For facts sheets, resources, and more information about pregnant and parenting students – for schools, for parents, and for students – please visit www.nwlc.org/pregnantandparentingstudents.
EPISODE 5
ABOUT THE GIRLS

This episode focuses primarily on the stories of two students, Larissa and Maria.

LARISSA

Do you have anything in common with Larissa? Is there anything about her story that is similar to your life? Does she remind you of anyone you know?

Examples: She lives with her dad. She's really close with her sister. She's looking forward to getting her high school diploma. She doesn’t want to be alone when big things happen. Sometimes she's late to school. She is confused about her feelings for her ex-boyfriend. Even though she has a lot of responsibilities in her life she says she’s “still a kid.”

When Larissa went to her doctor’s appointment she didn't want to go by herself but her sister couldn't come so she ended up going alone. When she went into labor she didn't have anyone to take her to the hospital so a volunteer from the school drove her. And up until the end, right before the baby was born, she was by herself in the delivery room, even though that wasn’t what she wanted. How did all of that make you feel? How do you think it made Larissa feel? How do you think she felt when her ex-boyfriend – who she's not on great terms with – arrived for the birth? When you think about what it might be like someday to have a baby, who do you imagine you'd want there to go through it with you? What do you want your life to be like when you become a parent? What steps can you take to help make sure that you become a parent when you want to and when you feel ready for it?

Larissa's older sister is about to leave home and join the Navy. On the one hand, Larissa is happy for her sister and pleased to see someone in her family push to achieve such a big goal. On the other hand she feels like they are “breaking up” and that she'll be abandoned. What will it be like for Larissa once her sister is out of town? Larissa's mom left their family, Larissa's boyfriend left her with a baby, and now her sister is leaving too. What would it feel like to go through that? Who can Larissa depend on? How do you think this will affect Larissa's parenting? Who do you think most teen parents rely on to help them raise their children?

Larissa's on-again/off-again boyfriend is the father of both of her sons, but their relationship is completely unsettled. How do you feel about that? How do you think Larissa feels about it? How do you think he feels about being a father? What kind of impact might their unstable relationship have on their two sons? Larissa's own father is very active in their lives – is that enough? She says that it's important for her sons to have a male role model in their lives. Do you agree? Why is it important? What are the lasting effects on a family when a father is not present? How do you think things will work out with Larissa and Paul in the long run? Do you think having a baby is more likely to make a teen relationship more solid or more unstable? Why?
MARIA

Do you have anything in common with Maria? Is there anything about her story that is similar to your life? Does she remind you of anyone you know?

Examples: She really wants to go to college. Finances are a big concern as she looks to the future. She hates being stereotyped. She doesn’t always get enough sleep. She’s late to school sometimes. She’s working hard to bring her grades up.

Maria says her life is different than the other teen moms’ lives at school because her daughter is blind. What are some of the challenges any parents faces with caring for a special needs child? How might that affect a teen mother in particular? How do you think it has affected Maria as a parent? She says that at first she thought it was “the worst thing that could happen” but now they seem to be making it work and her daughter is making good progress. How did this part of Maria’s story make you feel? Have you ever thought about what it would be like to have a child with special needs?

The costs associated with college – even a local community college – make it very difficult for Maria to continue her education. She’s pursuing various scholarship opportunities but even if she gets them, she still might not have enough money. Do you worry now about how you will pay for college? What if you had to worry about paying for college and raising a child at the same time? Do you know how expensive it is to be a parent? Daycare, doctor visits, diapers, food, clothing, toys, car seat, crib – it can cost more than $10,000 to take care of a child in the first year alone, not including the equipment and care needed for a special needs child. If you had a child while still in high school, do you think you would go to college anyway, or would you have to put that off? Most girls who have babies before age 18 don’t graduate from high school, and fewer than 2% graduate from college by age 30. What do you think the future holds for Maria?
SCHOOL STUFF TO TALK ABOUT

Even though Maria’s daughter goes to a special learning center for blind children (rather than the daycare at Maria’s school) how do you think the support available at the high school helps Maria? How do you think it makes her feel to check in with the school nurse about her daughter’s challenges and progress? Would Maria be able to find scholarship opportunities without the school’s guidance?

Larissa returned to school with her baby only 5 days after giving birth. What did that tell you about her relationship with her classmates and teachers? Given the turmoil in her family (sister leaving town, mom out of the picture, dad having trouble with the law, baby’s father being unreliable, etc.) what role does the school play in Larissa’s life? What do you think her life would be like if she didn’t have a school like this one to go to?

One of the teachers says it is never a waste of money to invest in someone’s human potential and especially in the potential of the young mothers at the school. Do you agree? Do you think most teen moms have the support and opportunity provided by this school? What do you think happens to teen moms who don’t have these resources? What can schools and communities and society do to better support teen parents? What should they do? What happens if they don’t? What are some ways that you can talk about preventing teen pregnancy in the first place while at the same time supporting teen mothers?