

Some teenage parents do not show any realisation of the importance of talking to their babies, particularly if the baby is at the non-verbal stage of communication

development. Teenage parents appear to need confidence and strategies to help them engage in what many mothers would view as instinctive.

Flying Start is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative that aims to make a decisive difference to the lives of all children under four years of age in specific postcode localities (WAG, 2005).

We developed the 'Talk 2 Baby' DVD as a joint project between a Flying Start specialist SLT, specialist midwife and community nursery nurse working with pregnant teenagers in Swansea. The main impetus for the project came during one of our joint home visits when a young mum asked, "Do I need to talk to my baby? What is the point he can't understand?"

'Talk 2 Baby' aims to demonstrate the importance of early bonding in the antenatal and immediate post-natal periods; emphasise the importance of talking to babies from very early on in pregnancy; and highlight the importance of effective parent-child interactions as a basis for a positive lifelong relationship.

Project development

We set an initial 12-month time frame from start to completion and chose the DVD format because we were becoming increasingly aware of the poor literacy skills that seemed to be a common theme in this client group. A visual format appeared to be a far more acceptable, user-friendly health promotion tool for this client group, in comparison to the copious quantities of leaflets handed to expectant teenage mothers.

We recruited pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers and asked them for their expressions of interest from an established Flying Start teenage group. Despite our initial reservations, the teenagers demonstrated enthusiasm and dedication throughout the whole process. We used a range of locations – including the teenage mother's homes, family centres and the ante-natal and ultrasound departments of the local hospital – to demonstrate key messages around interaction and bonding, commencing at the ante-natal stage,

The Talk 2 Baby Project

Hannah Murtagh and Sally Roberts discuss a project to encourage teenage mothers to talk more to their babies

through to talking with babies at nine months of age.

We employed a local production company to film and produce the DVD, with our guidance and expertise driving the editing process throughout. Following this, we designed the sleeve with the help of colleagues and a graphic design company, who took our ideas forward to completion.

Different perspectives

As three different professionals coming from three different perspectives, we felt it was really important to come together and share our expertise while also noting the differences in our knowledge and skills.

We wanted to highlight the importance of 'talking to your baby' as the key message to the teenage mothers. The rationale for this, and its positive effects on parent-child interactions and development later on, are clear from the plethora of research in the field. For example, a study of the language skills of nursery children in four areas of social deprivation in the UK found over half to be language delayed (Locke et al, 2002). Children need well-developed language skills by the time they enter school, in order to benefit from their subsequent education, and develop good literacy and social skills (DfES, 2003). The positive effect of providing early intervention to children



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and their families is therefore really important in order to prevent language delay occurring later on in childhood.

It is also known that teenage mothers are three times as likely as their adult counterparts to develop postnatal depression (Ermisch, 2003), which in turn may compromise the processes of bonding and attachment (Martins and Gaffen, 2002). Placing a greater emphasis on communication strategies throughout pregnancy and the very early postnatal period may contribute to reducing a teenage mum's susceptibility to postnatal depression.

DVD content and evaluation

We used a variety of activities throughout the DVD to promote and encourage early language and communication development in children. The mothers carried out these activities with their babies to enhance their ability to carry over the activities to their home situation thereafter.

To formally evaluate the project we asked the nine teenage mothers involved in the DVD's production to complete a questionnaire before becoming involved and issued the same questionnaire after they had viewed the completed film. We based the answers on a 0 – 10 Likert scale. We obtained a response rate of 89% for the



pre-DVD questionnaire and 78% for the post questionnaire. There was a significant difference between the pre- and post-mean scores (4.6 versus 8.8 out of a total of 10) (figure one).

We also ran a small qualitative focus group with the teenage mothers who participated in the DVD following their initial viewing of the completed product. Some of their comments included: "She chats to me all the time"; "She copies all the sounds I makes" and "I now have more confidence when talking to my baby".

Additional benefits

As the project evolved it became evident we were able to address far more than our initial objectives. Apart from giving the teenage mothers involved with the DVD production a greater insight into how to communicate with babies, the group provided a network and forum for peer support and a sense of belonging.

The most notable positive outcome was the improved self esteem and confidence of the teenagers involved in the production. They engaged in the

process with enthusiasm and eagerness and demonstrated an ability to apply the interaction games and techniques with their babies outside of the specific filming scenarios. They also showed dedication and commitment to the project, engaging proactively from start to finish. This was an outstanding accomplishment given their vulnerabilities.

There has been no incidence of post-natal depression in any of the girls taking part in the project to date and there was clear evidence of enhanced bonding, attachment and communication with their babies after the DVD was shown to them. This was evident during attendance at their weekly midwife-led groups and through their questionnaire and focus group feedback.

Overall, we feel this was a positive project which has had beneficial effects on the teenage mothers and their babies. We hope it will act as a successful preventative measure and we look to roll it out to as many pregnant teenagers/teenage parents and/or groups that are running as possible as we feel this is a very valuable teaching tool for any new parents/parents to be. ■

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References & resources

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Note:

To order a copy of the DVD, email: yvonne.griffiths5@wales.nhs

Figure one: Comparison of behaviours pre and post DVD development

