

*The Role of the School Nurse: Using the IHP to Provide Nursing Assessments and Interventions for Pregnant Students (January 2011)*

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**Introduction:** According to the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), “School nurses, as trusted care providers, can assess *expectant parents’ physical and emotional well being, promote self-care during pregnancy, and monitor for pregnancy complications.* School nurses have a vital role in the development of evidenced-based *policies, procedures, and educational programs and materials for students and their parents relating to preventing pregnancy, and supporting parenting teens in the educational setting.*”

In-school nursing support can minimize and/or remove barriers pregnant teens face, while increasing the chances that these students will graduate with their cohorts and become contributing members of society. Because pregnancy is a medical condition that warrants specialized care and management in the school setting by a healthcare professional, the Individualized Healthcare Plan (IHP) can assist school nurses to meet the unique needs of pregnant adolescents through:

- identification of social, emotional and prenatal healthcare needs;
- provision of modifications/accommodations to the school day and/or environment;  
and
- assistance with access to expanded healthcare.

I. **Healthcare Needs:** The complex medical, emotional and social needs of the pregnant student in the school setting which involves multi-organ pathophysiology, includes the following systems:

- Cardiovascular;
- Circulatory including pregnancy-related edema;
- Endrocrinologic including lactation and breastfeeding;
- Gastrointestinal;
- Hematologic;
- Musculoskeletal;
- Ophthalmic;
- Respiratory;
- and Urinary Tract.

In addition, the IHP can assist in efforts to assess, intervene, treat and facilitate medical referrals for those conditions that warrant monitoring because of the implications for both the female student and the unborn baby. These include: severe headaches; blurred vision; abdominal, back and leg pain; acute and chronic illnesses; emergencies and injuries; hypertensive disorders; syncope; vaginal bleeding; signs and symptoms of miscarriage; toxemia; pre-eclampsia, monitoring of weight gain/loss and current medications; and interventions for non-pregnancy related illnesses and injuries.

**II. Accommodations:** The IHP will address additional challenges and demands facing pregnant students:

- confidentiality and privacy;
- mobility/safety in the school setting;
- provisions for emergencies in the schools (lockdown, evacuations, fire drills, etc.);
- modified physical education;
- nutrition and hydration;
- rest periods; and
- transportation to and from school.

**III. Social and Emotional Issues:**

Teenage pregnant students are facing stresses regarding their pregnancy, their unborn child, as well as housing, income, family issues, school completion, and future childcare in addition to those stressors facing teens who are not pregnant: isolation, fear, acceptance, rejection, etc.

As part of the school building teams, school nurses can refer these students to those professionals in the school setting who can facilitate comprehensive planning and interventions throughout the teen's pregnancy and parenthood while attending school.

#### **IV. Goals and Objectives:**

- 1. To support pregnant students in the school setting with provisions created in the Individual Healthcare Plans.**
- 2. To contribute to advancing the well-being and academic success of adolescent parents who attend school.**
- 3. To advocate for programs supporting pregnant teens through the provision of needed accommodations at school.**
- 4. To provide pregnant/parenting teens with opportunities, resources and support that will assist with high school completion.**

#### **V. Performance Outcomes:**

To enlist support for *school district policy* that will serve and support the unique mental, social and physical well-being of pregnant students in the school setting with provision of:

- **optimal in-school healthcare management;**
- **a safe and supportive school environment;**
- **access to community health resources; and**
- **removal of barriers that impact attendance and ultimately, school completion.**

#### **VI. Summary:**

School nurses manage the health care needs of students that range from acute to chronic conditions, illnesses and injuries. Interventions by school nurses on behalf of the students in their care have contributed to the elimination of health barriers that interfere with learning experiences. A pregnant adolescent presents with a plethora of prenatal healthcare needs that require a knowledgeable healthcare professional to provide assessment, planning and intervention; the expertise of the school nurse in the management of pregnancy in the school setting can contribute significantly to the provision of a safe environment, and positive educational experiences that will culminate in the completion of high school.

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