

National Resource Centre for those working with Young Parents Newsletter March 2010

Young Parents Survival Guide

Thanks to funding from the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme the second edition of the Young Parents Survival Guide is in preparation. While some articles from the first edition are being retained new ones will also be added to this next edition. A committee of those working with young parents is developing the articles. We look forward to having it available in the early summer.

Children's Mental Health Coalition

The Children's Rights Alliance and Amnesty International Ireland have come together to establish the Children's Mental Health Coalition. The Coalition, which now comprises more than 35 groups, will advocate for the mental health rights of children and young people under 18 years of age in Ireland. Over the next two years they will lobby Government for action in four key areas prioritised by Coalition members, namely:

1. mental health services
2. the education system
3. the criminal justice system
4. the care system.

Their vision is that Ireland should be one of the best places in the world to be a child, where every child's right to mental health is realised. Not only does the Government have a legal and moral obligation to improve the lives of children in Ireland, it has the power to make this happen

Guidelines for obtaining consent for non emergency treatment/services from parents of children and young people under the age of 18 years.

These guidelines are intended to provide guidance to HSE staff working in community settings on the legal requirements for obtaining valid patient consent.

For any treatment, investigation or examination the consent of parents who are guardians is required.

A clinician may intervene in the case of medical emergency without parental consent under the “Doctrine of Necessity”. In emergency situations, where the parent is herself/himself a child, the consent process is dispensed with and the doctor must treat the child, as per the Doctrine of Necessity. If the child of the parent requires a therapeutic (but not emergency) procedure, obtaining such consent presents a difficulty since it is uncertain whether or not a minor parent can consent to treatment for their child since minors are deemed to be legally incompetent to give consent.

In general, some leeway is given in relation to the minor unmarried mother of a child, because in law, the unmarried mother of a child is the sole legal guardian. The mother’s wishes, providing she is competent to understand the proposed treatment are taken into account. It would be prudent practice to attempt to:

- Obtain the consent of an appropriate next of kin who is competent to consent and where consent is in the best interest of the child
- Include all parties in the consent process including the parent
- Ensure that if the next of kin does give consent that their signature and name is recorded on the consent form

- Ensure that such situations are recorded in detail in the patient's medical record/notes
- In case of doubt or uncertainty, it is recommended that healthcare providers seek further legal advice.

For a pdf of the *Procedure for obtaining consent for non emergency treatment* see

http://hse.ie/searchGoogle.aspx?ID=200007&q=guidelines%20for%20obtaining%20consent&btnG=Google+Search&output=xml_no_dtd&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF8&client=default_frontend&proxystylesheet=default_frontend&site=my_collection

Where to now? Empowering young people through information

This is a one day conference which is the joint initiative of **Eurodesk** and **Youth Information Centres**. It is on 22nd June 2010 in the National College of Ireland. The target group for this conference is organisations and people working with young people in Ireland.

The aims of the conference are

- to present trends among Irish young people on such issues as unemployment, migration etc.
- To offer a platform for discussion about young people's rights to information
- To encourage agencies working with young people to use European Information provided by Eurodesk to help combat social exclusion and poverty.

For more information, please contact: Malgorzata Fiedot-Davies, e-mail: eurodesk@leargas.ie , tel: 01-8722394, 01-8731411.

New Young Mums Drop-in starts in Westside of Galway

A new drop-in service for young mums has started in the Westside of Galway. Run by Youth Work Ireland-Galway, the drop-in will provide information on returning to work/education, social welfare payments, volunteering, CV writing, creche and childcare facilities, and more – or just a space to have a chat with other young mums. It is recommended that mums organise childcare so that the time can be just for them, but if that's not possible they should feel free to come along with their children. The drop-in runs from 10am-12pm every Thursday in the Westside Library.

Contact Kerry E'lyn on 087 914 1522 or droimchaoin@youthworkgalway.ie for more information.

Teenage pregnancy more opportunity than catastrophe, says study

This study, *Teenage Parenthood: what's the problem?* challenges preconceptions, arguing that many teenage mothers are motivated to turn their lives around to provide for their children.

Dr. Claire Alexander, one of the editors of the study, said: "Stereotypes of such young women as poor and ignorant, dysfunctional and immoral, engaging in casual sex and churning out babies who they cannot care for adequately and do not care about in order to gain access to welfare benefits and council housing, often underlie concerns about teenage pregnancy and parenting. However, these stereotypes are not borne out by the research evidence – in fact, quite the contrary."

The study questions the notion that all teenage pregnancies are unplanned and cites evidence suggesting that many teenage parents are "positively ambivalent" towards having children. It says: "They do not actually plan it, but would quite like a baby and do not use contraception

for that reason.” It concludes that “teenage childbirth does not often result from ignorance or low expectations, it is rarely a catastrophe for young women, and...teenage parenting does not particularly cause poor outcomes for mothers and their children”.

The study argues that governments should focus on tackling the original disadvantage often experienced by teenage parents, rather than on attacking their decision to become parents. Its research confirms that children born to teenage mothers are born into disadvantage, but suggests that this disadvantage predates the pregnancy and is not the result of it.

The research also found that many teenage mothers express positive attitudes to motherhood, describing how “motherhood has made them feel stronger, more competent, more connected to family and society and more responsible”.

GPs favour teen health rights

A recent article in *General Practice* (February 12th 2010) showed that over two thirds of GPs believe that some form of legislation should be introduced to allow teenagers to consent or refuse medical treatment, including the ‘morning-after’ pill.

One hundred GPs were polled IMT in January on a range of issues affecting healthcare in Ireland. Some GPs were concerned that legislation would create guidelines and protocols that would over-regulate treatment and result in a situation where GPs would be forced to treat against their better judgment. GPs in favour of new regulations were of the opinion that practices surrounding the treatment of teenagers needed to be formalised. It was suggested that doctors should follow guidelines already in place in the UK.

Some GPs were eager to have new legislation to protect them from potential legal action should they prescribe the 'morning-after' pill to a teenager against the wishes of her parents. Others simply wanted to legitimise their position.

Teenage pregnancies in the UK

In 2008, 40 in every 1,000 girls between 15 and 17 became pregnant, a drop of 13 per cent on the 1998 rate of 46. This is short of the initial target of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which was to reduce the rate by 15 per cent by 2004. A new plan – Teenage Pregnancy Strategy: Beyond 2010 was announced in February and states that the “promotion of condoms remains central to the overall effort.” Other plans include “one-to-one consultations” for girls and boys aged 15 and 16 in selected areas. In these, counsellors will “increase awareness and use of effective contraception among those who are, or are about to become, sexually active.” The document goes on to say that “helping parents play a more pro-active role is critical. We will be developing materials to support them in having conversations with their children about sex and relationships.” Critics of the Government’s policies said condom machines in schools would be a disaster. “They say they want to help girls resist pressure for early sex but this will encourage the opposite. It will legitimise sex – far from helping girls resist pressure, it will help boys bully girls into sex. Teenagers are not very efficient with contraception so it will mean more conceptions and more sexually transmitted infections” said researcher and author Patricia Morgan.

Daily Mail, 25th February 2010.