

FACT SHEET



**FSU Center for
Prevention & Early
Intervention Policy**

Teen Parents and Their Children: Language and Emerging Literacy

REFERENCES

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RESEARCH

Adolescent mothers engage in less smiling and positive eye and physical contact with their infants than adult mothers, even when matched on socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics. They talk less, give more commands and authoritarian statements, and make fewer elaborated, descriptive, and articulate responses.

Teenage mothers are more passive in their face-to-face interactions, and they score lower than adult mothers in maternal-affectional match, rate of stimulation, flexibility, positivity, motivation, and overall quality of mothering.

Teen mothers are more likely to be depressed than older mothers, and depressed mothers are less emotionally available for their children.

The children of teen mothers speak less and are more likely to have poorer cognitive and linguistic outcomes.

Adolescent mothers are less knowledgeable about child development than are adult mothers. They generally underestimate social, cognitive, and language functioning and overestimate the attainment of developmental milestones. Compared to adult mothers, teenage mothers also have been reported to perceive their infants' temperaments as more difficult.

The National Campaign to Prevent Pregnancy found in their analyses of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 that upon kindergarten entry, children of the youngest teen mothers lagged behind children born to older mothers on language and communication skills.

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RESEARCH

The negative effects on the cognitive development of children born to adolescent mothers are evident. A study of children ages four to 14 showed that those born to the youngest teen mothers performed more poorly on tests of cognitive ability, were more likely to be retained a grade, and were less likely to be perceived by their teachers as performing favorably by the time they reached high school.

Children of adolescent mothers are more likely to drop out of high school when compared to the children of mothers age 20-21. Only 77% of children born to adolescent mothers complete high school by early adulthood compared to 89% of the comparison group.

The path to literacy begins with the interactions between caregivers and young children. Caregivers expand on the sounds made by infants and toddlers and add words and ideas to what very young children express, feel, or say. Caregivers promote the development of language through the use of simple words and maintain a balance between listening and talking with the child. Staff create a learning environment that includes books and other print materials throughout the center. Opportunities for shared reading time are a part of each day and children are encouraged to enjoy books independently. The use of songs, nursery rhymes, and finger plays provide a context to promote the development of language and literacy.