



REALLY GREAT TEACHERS

make you feel that you, too, can become great

So what exactly is “gender”? And why are teachers expected to understand, and to respond to, issues linked to gender?

These are two questions that the national Department of Education (DoE) will be answering in this six-part *Generations* series. These resources have been developed by the DoE especially to support teachers with gender-related issues that may occur in their schools.

The six Generations editions will focus on two different matters linked to gender:

1. Preventing and managing learner pregnancy at schools

The first three editions set out the DoE's *Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy*.

These *Measures* set out the role that educators should play to help reduce teen pregnancies even further. They also set out what procedures educators should follow if a schoolgirl does fall pregnant.

The first three of the *Generations* series will be filled with useful information from the DoE's *Measures* document, as well as giving practical support to help teachers deal with this matter in the best way possible.

2. Preventing and managing sexual violence and harassment at schools

The last three in the DoE's *Generations* series will focus on another area of critical importance linked to gender: sexual violence and harassment.

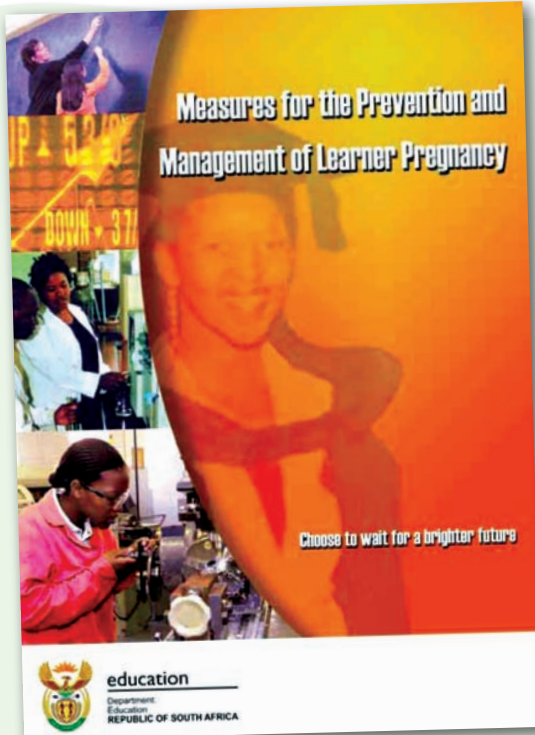
The content for these three editions set out the DoE's *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Public Schools*.

They will clearly define the range of acts that are seen as sexual violence and harassment, and the terrible effects that the victim can suffer.

They will also set out strategies for schools that can help prevent such abuse from happening, as well as the procedures educators should follow in the event that an incident of sexual violence or harassment does occur.

These three *Generations* editions will also be full of information about practical support and resources available to educators when handling these difficult matters.

Collect all six of the *Generations* series, and file them at school for future reference.



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Helping you to help young adults

The national Department of Education (DoE) believes in the ideal that women and men should only become parents when they're ready for the practical and emotional realities that go with having a child.

We also firmly believe that, as young adults, learners should be focused on their education, enjoying their youth, and planning for their futures – not unexpectedly becoming parents.

HOW DOES “GENDER” RELATE TO TEEN PREGNANCY?

Simply put, gender refers to how males and females are socialised to become “boys” and “girls”, “men” and “women”. The identity of each one of us is shaped by society's expectations of what it is to be a “man” or a “woman”.

This shaping is done through what we're taught by those who raise us as children, and in social institutions such as schools.

For example, young men may be taught that to be “masculine” means they should be dominating and assertive.

Young women, on the other hand, may be taught that being “feminine” means being sexually desirable, and available, to men.

This can create situations that make having sex at a young age more likely.

EDUCATORS HAVE THEIR PART TO PLAY

Unplanned schoolgirl pregnancy is not something that educators should have to handle alone.

Parents, health professionals, and the broader community must also play their part in making sure learners are informed about sexual matters; make healthy choices for themselves, and provide support for teenage pregnancies, should they occur.

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

To help educators in this complex area, the DoE has developed “Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy”.

These measures set out the role that educators should play to help reduce teen pregnancies even further. They also set out what procedures educators should follow if a schoolgirl does fall pregnant.

GET THE FACTS STRAIGHT!

To begin with, here are some key facts from the Measures that all educators should be clear about:

- The message that all educators should be getting out to teen learners is that they should **abstain** from having sex until they're finished with their high school education. This is the central pillar of the DoE's strategy to **prevent** unplanned schoolgirl pregnancies.

- There are a number of existing mechanisms through which the message of abstinence should be communicated. For example, the **Life Orientation curriculum**; **HIV and AIDS education programmes**; and **peer education programmes** are all designed to communicate the key message of abstaining from sexual intercourse, and making healthy lifestyle choices.

- **No pregnant learner may be discriminated against**, such as by being expelled or prevented from attending school. The learner has a right to education, and to dignity, that educators have a duty to protect.

- The Measures **do not** state that teenage mothers are not to return to school for two years after giving birth.

What the Measures **do say** is that a teenage mother must take responsibility for her newborn child, whose rights and needs also need to be looked after.

The young mother may therefore request, or be required to take, a leave of absence from school. This must give her enough time to address her own pre- and postnatal health concerns, as well as initial caring for her infant.

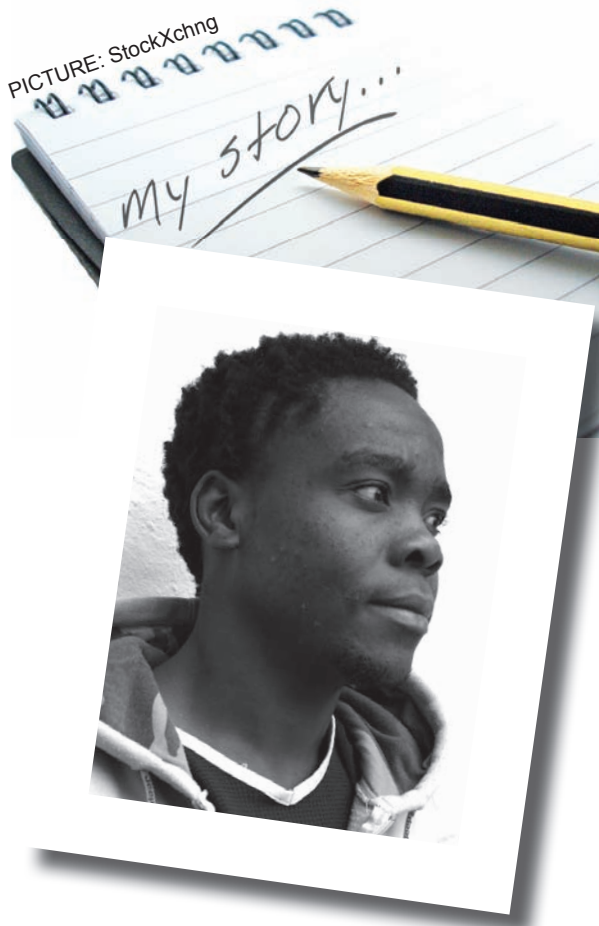
There is no pre-determined period for this, since every set of circumstances is different.

Make sure you collect edition II and III of Genderations, which provide a lot more detail on both the “prevention” and “management” aspects to unplanned teen pregnancies.

To get your own copy of the *Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy*:
Online: www.education.gov.za or
use the contact details above

Learning the hard way...

My name is Clayton Malindi and I want to share my own experience regarding teen pregnancy, because I believe it is something that is killing the futures of today's youth.



My mistake happened four years ago, when I was 18. At that time, I had just dropped out of school and was living with my granny in a small village in Limpopo. I had no work, no qualifications, and no idea how I was going to make a good life for myself. I was very down at that time.

Rosie was a lovely young lady of 17 I fell in love with. She was in Grade 11. She was my everything. I was sexually active, and so was she. At first,

we used protection, but seven months into the relationship, we decided not to use protection any more.

Her family knew that she was sexually involved with me and didn't like it at all. They told me to stay away from her. I refused, and she refused to stay away from me as well. We continued with our relationship.

One afternoon, she came by my place and told me that she had missed her period. At first I was not worried, but then a week went by and then another, and still nothing was happening. So we decided

to pay the clinic a visit. The nurses checked her out and it was discovered that she was pregnant!!!

REALITY HITS BACK HARD

When I heard the news, I was emotionless. I couldn't figure out whether I should be happy or scared, or what I should do about it. For a moment, it all felt unreal. But when the news finally sank in, reality hit back hard.

The first thing that came to mind was: how was I going to maintain this child and his/her mother? Would Rosie drop out of school? What would my family think? How would her family take this? Everything I thought of had a question mark at the end of it.

Rosie and I decided not to alert our families and friends to her pregnancy. It was our big secret. We sat down together and discussed the matter. We both did not want the baby as we knew we were not financially, emotionally or mentally ready to raise a child.

It was a very hard discussion, but we eventually came to the conclusion that she should have an abortion. Even though I had all kinds of doubts and worries about taking this path, I agreed that it was the best course of action for us to take.

We went back to the clinic together to gather information about abortion. We were told to go to the hospital in town and that it would cost R350. We agreed. For three days, I did piece jobs around the neighbourhood and managed to get the money.

Rosie had the abortion and everything seemed like it had worked out okay. Nobody in the village knew that this had occurred. But our relationship suffered. We broke up a month later. That was the end of me and Rosie.

This was a terrible experience, but it taught me some important things about life and love. It made me realise that sex is not just a game. When I look around me, I see so many young girls – from age 14 upwards – paying a high price for their actions, suddenly becoming mothers themselves and dropping out of school to look after their babies.

I now realise that, regardless of how it is conceived – planned or unplanned – life is precious and should be valued. I'm sorry that Rosie had the abortion, but if she had kept the child, I don't think I would have been able to be a good dad.

I also don't think I would have been able to achieve what I have since then –

finishing matric and continuing my studies in Joburg.

It was hard, but I've learnt my lesson: sex is like fire. If you play with it, you get burnt.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE
THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HELPLINE
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Contact details:
Website: www.education.gov.za
Thutung Education Portal: www.thutong.org.za

PICTURE: Cartoonstock.com



...to make the right choices

What could educators do to help teenagers like Clayton and Rosie (see story on the left)? LO teacher Ruth Shabangu has some suggestions

If I was Rosie's LO teacher, I would frankly be disappointed that my constant message of “Abstinence, abstinence, abstinence” (or “the triple A” approach, as I call it) had fallen on deaf ears.

It can be very frustrating, as I try by all means possible to convince my learners that not having sex at their young age is the wisest course of action.

However, Rosie wouldn't be the first to have ignored my good advice.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST

As Clayton is not attending school, the only intervention I could have made in this matter would have been through Rosie.

It takes time and care to build up trusting relationships with one's learners. For me, the key to this is getting the balance right between being a figure of authority, and making learners feel I'm approachable and can be trusted to help them with their most intimate problems.

I also make a point of encouraging open communication and a respect for others' opinions in my class. I do my best not to impose my personal value judgments on any area we're discussing (although this is not always easy!).

BODY LANGUAGE TALKS

Over the years, I've realised that so much is communicated through learners' behaviour and body language.

Even if Rosie hadn't said anything to me about her pregnancy, there would have been tell-tale signs of her distress (such as being withdrawn, lacking concentration or appearing to be listless). I would have quietly monitored her over the next few days, respecting her space and privacy, and hope that she would approach me with her problem.

However, if she had not approached me within a week or so, I would have set up an opportunity for us to chat in private, and asked her if everything's OK.

But whichever way the communication is started between us, there are a number of very important steps I would then have to take to support Rosie through this personal crisis.

THEIR FUTURES DEPEND ON MY ACTIONS

Frankly, I find these situations quite stressful to manage.

There is so much to be concerned about. Firstly, there is the well-being of Rosie to consider (and the boy, too, if he's a learner). Whatever happens, I must try by all means to ensure that her education – or her future prospects – does not suffer.

At the same time, I must also be very aware that the child she is carrying also has needs and rights that must be protected, once he/she is born.

It's a very delicate balancing act that takes time and care to get right.

First step: My first responsibility in this situation is to ensure that I keep this information confidential. I would recommend that both sets of parents are informed about Rosie's pregnancy too – but it's not up to me to tell them.

Likewise, the only other person I may inform in the school community (but also with Rosie's consent) is the principal.



Second step: Next, I would arrange an after-school meeting with both Clayton and Rosie. Both teenagers need to be counseled on the implications of their situation, and to be made fully aware of all the options open to them.

This may take more than one meeting, but I would stress that the decision must be made urgently.

If the couple decides to have the baby, there is a lot of groundwork that needs to be done before the baby is born.

For example, arrangements need to be made so that Rosie can continue with her education. At the same time, she will need time off from school to go for prenatal care, as well as to receive counselling from health professionals on parenting.

She will also have to prepare her family and home for the coming birth.

Third step: Once the couple had made their decision, my next responsibility would be to point them in the right direction for whatever medical assistance and further counselling they may need.

Fourth step: I would also have a follow-up private session with Rosie (and Clayton as well, if possible), to make sure she's coping. If she appears to be struggling, I would refer her to organisations that provide appropriate expertise.

MISTAKES SHOULD NOT BE REPEATED!

I'm very sympathetic towards adolescents. As most of us will remember, the transition from childhood to mature adult is full of major life-changes and confusion.

I therefore don't judge them too harshly for making such mistakes, as serious as some of them may be.

However, I also firmly believe that there is only value in making mistakes if we then learn from them.

So whatever the young couple decided in this instance, I would definitely have a strong message for both of them about the dangers of having sex before they're really ready to face the consequences – and particularly unprotected sex.