

# Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy

2007

## Choose to wait for a brighter future

### Introduction: Context and Purpose

1. These Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools have become necessary because of our concern about learner pregnancies in public schools. The Department of Education recognises the responsibility and influence of the education system in this regard, within that of the community at large, and this document aims to clarify the position regarding learner pregnancies.
2. It is our intention to provide an environment in which learners are fully informed about reproductive matters and have the information that assists them in making responsible decisions. In addition, we intend to inform affected learners about their rights to education, and support teachers in managing the effects of learner pregnancy in schools. It is evident that many learners in public schools misunderstand what the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa says about their legal rights and responsibilities.
3. In the first instance, and above any other measure, a clear and consistent message should be communicated that children should abstain from engaging in sexual intercourse. There are many reasons for this, especially the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS, as well as the negative impact of a pregnancy on the future life chances for girls. In this respect, it must be noted that childhood pregnancies have a far greater impact on girls than on the boy fathers. Educators, parents, guardians and the public should therefore strongly advise learners to avoid early sexual encounters.
4. **These Measures provide a framework for:**
  - Educating and assisting learners to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities in regard to healthy lifestyles;
  - Guiding and supporting vulnerable learners; and
  - Involving all relevant role-players, and integrating these measures with available systems and structures. Role-players include parents, learners, educators, communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the South African Police Services (SAPS), and the Department of Education, Health and Social Development.

5. The Measures are firmly anchored within a prevention context – the prevention and reduction of pregnancy, as well as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections – in order to promote learning, development and healthy lifestyles for all learners. Therefore the Measures highlight the importance of sexuality education. Therefore the Measures highlight the importance of sexuality education, HIV and AIDS education programmes, and peer education among learners. However it is recognized that unplanned pregnancies may occur, and this the measurers also provide for procedures and guidelines to be followed in cases where learners do get pregnant.
6. The Measurers are underpinned by three important principles of the Constitution: the right to equality, the right to education, and the rights of the child (including the newborn child). The measures take into consideration the legal and other requirements pertaining to children and pregnancy. They are supported by and supplement the National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners and Educators (*Government Gazette No 20372 of 10 August 1999*), which states that "...there are high levels of sexually active persons within the learner population group in schools. This increases the risk of HIV transmission in schools and institutions for further education and training considerably. Besides sexuality education, morality and life skills education being provided their children with healthy morals, sexuality education , and guidance regarding sexual abstinence until marriage, and faithfulness to their partners.

### **Policy Statement and Principle**

7. The Department of Education strongly advocates abstinence from sexual activity among learners. Programmes emphasizing abstinence, targeting both boys and girls, should be in place in all public schools.
8. In accordance with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act, and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No 4 of 2000), school children who are pregnant shall not be unfairly discriminated against.
9. Accordingly, in July 2000, the Council of Education of Ministers issued a statement indicating that pregnant learners may not be expelled from schools.

### **The Prevention of Learners Pregnancy**

10. The Department of Education strives to ensure that learners, both boys and girls are educated about the likely outcomes of engaging in sexual activity, and to assist young people to make choices that protect their health and support their access to education opportunities. Schools should provide programmes to ensure that all children, whatever their situation receive information and guidance to:
  - encourage them to attend school every day
  - stay on in school
  - practice healthy lifestyle

- to make appropriate and informed decisions about activities that will impact on their future health and educational prospects.
11. Prevention programmes should be offered in collaboration with NGOs and other agencies and should provide information and education that builds upon the learner's own knowledge, skills values and attitudes. As a targeted prevention measures, schools should provide special guidance and support to vulnerable or trouble learners, who most are at risk.
12. The National Curriculum Statement provides for comprehensive Life Skills programmes in the Learning Area life Orientation, which is compulsory from grade R-12. Life skills Education is a programme that deals with topics that affect each and every learner and educator. Life Skills programmes include the following topics
- Human sexuality
  - Develop and maintaining self esteem;
  - Interpersonal and decision-making skills, including communication skills negotiating abstinence, assertiveness, and dealing with peer pressure
  - Teenage pregnancy, including contributory factors consequences and prevention
  - Sexually transmitted diseases a
  - Sexual abuse, including the "touch continuum" gender based violence, incest, and rape.
13. While some of these topics may be difficult to teach, because of the sensitive nature of issues addressed, it is important that suitable educators are prepared to do so and are equipped to deal with any issues which affect learners. Peer education as an approach must be emphasized and incorporated in any intervention programme, due to its proven ability as a method to tackle such issues in an open manner, and to change both attitudes and behaviour. Importantly also, successes must be identified and celebrated in order to reinforce positive behaviour changes among learners.
14. Prevention programmes should also involve parents and guardians through:
- their involvement in the governance of the school, and in the development of the school's Code of Conduct, with specific strategies to eliminate learner pregnancy.
  - providing information and support through school newsletters, circulars and meetings.
  - workshops on pertinent issues (effective parenting, values in education, Identifying substance abuse, preventing gender-based violence as well as information on HIV and AIDS)
  - creating links between the school and the community it serves, and supporting community activities
  - developing and sharing a common vision regarding the well-being of the community 's children and

- supporting healthy lifestyles through positive role modeling, encouraging learners to participate in sporting and cultural activities, and advocacy and awareness on the positive consequences of a healthy lifestyle.

### **The Management of Unplanned Pregnancies at Schools**

15. In cases where prevention measures fail and learners do fall pregnant, the education system is obliged to manage the situation by balancing the best interests of the individual against those of the learners, educators, the school and community. The aim of this management plan is therefore to help and support the learner who is pregnant, to guide the father of the child, if he is also a learner, regarding his responsibilities as well as to assist other learners, staff members and parents who are affected by the pregnancy.
16. In the first instance, every case must be dealt with confidentially. Parents or guidance should only be informed and involved after consultation with the learner involved, although confidentiality is not an option when the learner or others are at risk.
17. An inclusive approach to education outlines our commitment to the provision of educational opportunities for learners who experience or have experienced barriers to learning, or who are at risk because of the inability of the education and training system to accommodate their special learning needs.
18. The guiding principle of these management interventions must therefore be an appropriate response in order to safeguard the educational interests of the learner. Each situation should be assessed and evaluated on a regular basis.
19. In the event of a learner becoming pregnant, the following procedures are recommended, with consequent roles and responsibilities for learners, educators, schools and provincial Departments of Education.

### **Learners**

20. A learner who is pregnant, or has reason to believe she may be pregnant, should immediately inform some-one in the school, preferable a senior educator designated by the principal. The designated educator or educators should take responsibility for the implementation and management of these measures on behalf of the school. A learner who is aware that another learner is pregnant must also immediately inform the school.
21. Wherever possible, and as soon as possible, the learner should be referred by the school to a health clinic or centre, and provide to school on a regular basis a recode of attendance. Health professionals should provide advice to the learner regarding termination of pregnancy options, and any other necessary information.
22. Learner must be sensitised to the fact that they are no medical staff to handle the delivery of babies at school, and the potential health risks and trauma to the mother, new born child and the rest of school community arising from a hidden

pregnancy, or if the child is delivered at school. The learner (and the father, if a learner) may therefore request, or be required to take a leave of absence from school including sufficient time to address both pre- and post –natal health concerns as well as initial caring for the child. No pre-determined period is specified for this purpose, since it will depend entirely on the circumstances of each case. However it is the view of the Department of Education that learners as parents should exercise full responsibility for parenting and that a period of absence of up to two years may be necessary for this purpose. No learner should be re-admitted in the same year that they left school due to a pregnancy.

23. Before returning to school, the learner must produce a medical report declaring that she is fit to resume classes. The learner must also be made aware that after childbirth the rights of the newly born baby must be protected and she should be able to demonstrate to school that proper arrangements have been made for the care and safety of the child.
24. A school should avoid any action that may constitute unfair discrimination against a pregnant learner. However the pregnant learner should also understand that some members of the school community might not readily accept and be supportive of their situation because of the value systems to which they subscribe.

### **Parents and Guardians**

25. Parents and guardians may not be absolved from their responsibilities regarding their pregnant child, and have to take the lead in working with the school to support and monitor their child's health and progress. Parents and guardians should therefore ensure that the school is timeously informed about the condition of their child, ensure that she attends a health clinic and that reports are communicated to the school.
26. Parents or Guardians should take steps to ensure that as far as it possible their child receives her class tasks and assignments during any period of absence from school, and that all completed tasks and assignments are returned to the school for assessment.

### **Schools**

27. Schools should strongly encourage learners to continue with their education prior to and after the delivery of the baby. Educators should therefore continue offering educational support to the learner, within reasonable limits and in whatever ways possible given particular context.
28. In addition schools should strive to ensure the existence of a climate of understanding and respect in regard to unplanned pregnancies, and should put in

place appropriate mechanism to deal with complaints of unfair discrimination, hate speech or harassment that may arise. These may include:

- name-calling of a sexual nature, or jokes demeaning the dignity of a person, self-image and concept
- written or graphic discrimination in the form of notes or suggestive material relating to the pregnant learner; and
- breaking confidentiality in a condemning or judgmental manner.

29. Where possible, learners, after giving birth, should be afforded with advice and counseling on motherhood and child rearing. The life Orientation educator, counsellor, or psychological services staff member if available or any other suitable person, should offer the mother, and father if also a learner, counselling on the roles and responsibilities as parents. Schools should inform the Department of Social Development about pregnant learners and where applicable, assist in registering these learners for child grants. They may also refer to learner to relevant support services, such as social workers or NGOs operating in the community.
30. Schools should ensure that a record of learner pregnancies is maintained and that reports are submitted to the relevant authorities in provincial Department of Education. Schools should also ensure that if informed of alleged cases of rape (including statutory rape) as defined in the Sexual Offences (Act No 23 of 1957) they report the case to police.