

# CHILDREN RAIS

An in-depth examination of young moms



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## TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

In the high school, sex education involving intercourse and contraception is first taught freshman year.

“After that, there is a little more information given out on this through the parenting classes and the child development classes,” school nurse Lisa Schwob said.

However, according to Schwob, students in the school district are exposed to some form of sex education in one way or another starting at an early age.

“The district has a comprehensive sex education program that really, believe it or not, starts in kindergarten,” Schwob said.

In kindergarten, children are taught about sex through chickens and their hatching eggs. As elementary school progresses, students are taught good touch and bad touch, and starting in fifth grade are introduced to ‘My Changing Body,’ which teaches the changes occurring through puberty.

But, according to Via Christi obstetrician and gynecologist Dr. Angela Shaw, the intercourse and contraception portion of sex education starting freshman year may be too little, too late.

“I see too often that sex education is being taught too late because we’re waiting for it to be done at home, and people are becoming sexually active younger and younger,” Shaw said. “I think ninth grade is way too late. The youngest patient I have treated who was pregnant was 12.”

In addition, Shaw argues that sex education is something that should not be restricted to a school environment.

“I think sex education in schools is very important,” Shaw said. “I’ve talked to patients in the office and asked them about basic reproductive biology and they don’t understand, so I don’t know how they can properly teach their kids to understand what’s going on with their bodies, not just with sex education, but with reproduction, prevention and everything else.”

Both Schwob and Shaw agree it is important for sex education to be taught in schools. According to Schwob, students should be learning about everything sex related, and being able to ask any questions necessary in order to make better decisions.

In 2007, Kansas was given \$1.7 million for teaching abstinence until marriage, according to National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education, and, in USD 250, students are taught an abstinence plus sex education regimen.

“Luckily, our district is an abstinence plus district, which means we can go into the classroom and talk to students about contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases and we can answer questions,” Schwob said. “I’m just thankful that knowledge is power when it comes to this, and you’re a lot more likely to make good decisions if you know the facts.”

Shaw also believes an educational environment that encourages students to ask questions is important in keeping students safe and informed.

“It is really eye-opening to us to see what even ‘educated’ kids still didn’t know,” Shaw said. “These are smart kids, they’ve done some reading, but they still don’t understand, and for them to have a forum where they could ask the questions that they couldn’t ask their parents is really important when you talk about sex education.”

For senior Demi Stacey, obtaining birth control and contraceptives was not a problem. The problem was ensuring she took her birth control.

“I did [use birth control and condoms] but, like they say, it’s not always 100% fool-proof,” Stacey said. “I wasn’t faithful everyday, I don’t like taking pills and I thought, ‘Oh it’s not going to happen to me.’ If you can try to refrain [from sex], try really hard. If you’re not ready to become a parent, that’s the quickest way to become one.”

Amidst all this, Shaw believes sex education in schools should be purposely taught. According to CCHD registered nurse Natalie Ritchell, the Crawford County district has a higher rate of teen pregnancies than the state, and, because of that, Shaw argues that the role of sex education in the school district would have a significant impact.

“We try to preach abstinence in schools, but they don’t know the reason they need to be abstinent is because they don’t understand that the first time you have sex you can get pregnant,” Shaw said.

For senior Danielle Clay, whose name has been changed due to confidentiality, being taught abstinence her freshman year did not stop her from having sex until she got married. Just this year, she had a pregnancy scare.

“I was really scared. It was the only thing I could think about. There were so many thoughts racing through my mind,” Clay said. “The idea of even having the slightest chance of being pregnant was beyond scary. If I would have been, I have no idea what I would have done.”

Even though Clay did not end up being pregnant, the incident changed the way she perceives sex.

“I now realize what can happen and the consequences it can have,” Clay said. “I’m not necessarily scared [of sex now], but I just know that if something were to happen [contraception] should be discussed beforehand and both parties should be aware.”

However, for Schwob, it all comes down to the maturity level of sexually active teenagers.

“If you and your partner are not comfortable discussing birth control, you should not be having sex.”

## YOU’RE NOT ALONE

Having only her best friend to comfort her, senior Demi Stacey was pregnant and did not know what to do other than cry.

“I was scared,” Stacey said. “I tried to hide it, and I didn’t seek help. I thought, ‘there was no way I could be a mom,’ and I asked myself how was I going to do this.”

In the 22 years that Schwob has worked at the high school, not a year has gone by without a pregnant teen.

In 1996, a pregnancy support group was established.

Currently, there are four girls who are already mothers and three girls currently pregnant. Most of whom participate in the support group and utilize resources available.

Stacey sought these resources.

At first, Schwob guided her to the “Mommy” classes available directly through the high school, but then she became introduced to the Becoming a Mom class through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, which is offered through the Crawford County Health Department (CCHD).

According to Ritchell, these programs are offered to help teen mothers overcome their situations and help set them up for success.

“Teen mothers are less likely to graduate high school or get their GED by the time they are 30,” Ritchell said. “So that is one of our goals: to keep the girls in school.”

These classes offer information and advice normally not accessible for young mothers in Stacey’s situation. And even though her baby, Vanessa, is six months old now, Stacey still finds the classes helpful.

According to Schwob, this is because the informational classes are more than just an opportunity to gather information.

“[The programs] have gone from an educational program to really a support group,” Schwob said. “[The parents] are all at different stages in pregnancy or trying to raise a baby, so we talk about what they are needing to talk about at the time.”

However, the classes offered through WIC still provide more than just information or support. These classes offer certain incentives to mothers who regularly attend, such as packages of diapers, baby wipes, formula, gift cards and necessities to choose from

## BY THE NUMBERS

(un)SAFE SEX

212 STUDENTS SURVEYED  
 50% BOYS  
 50% GIRLS

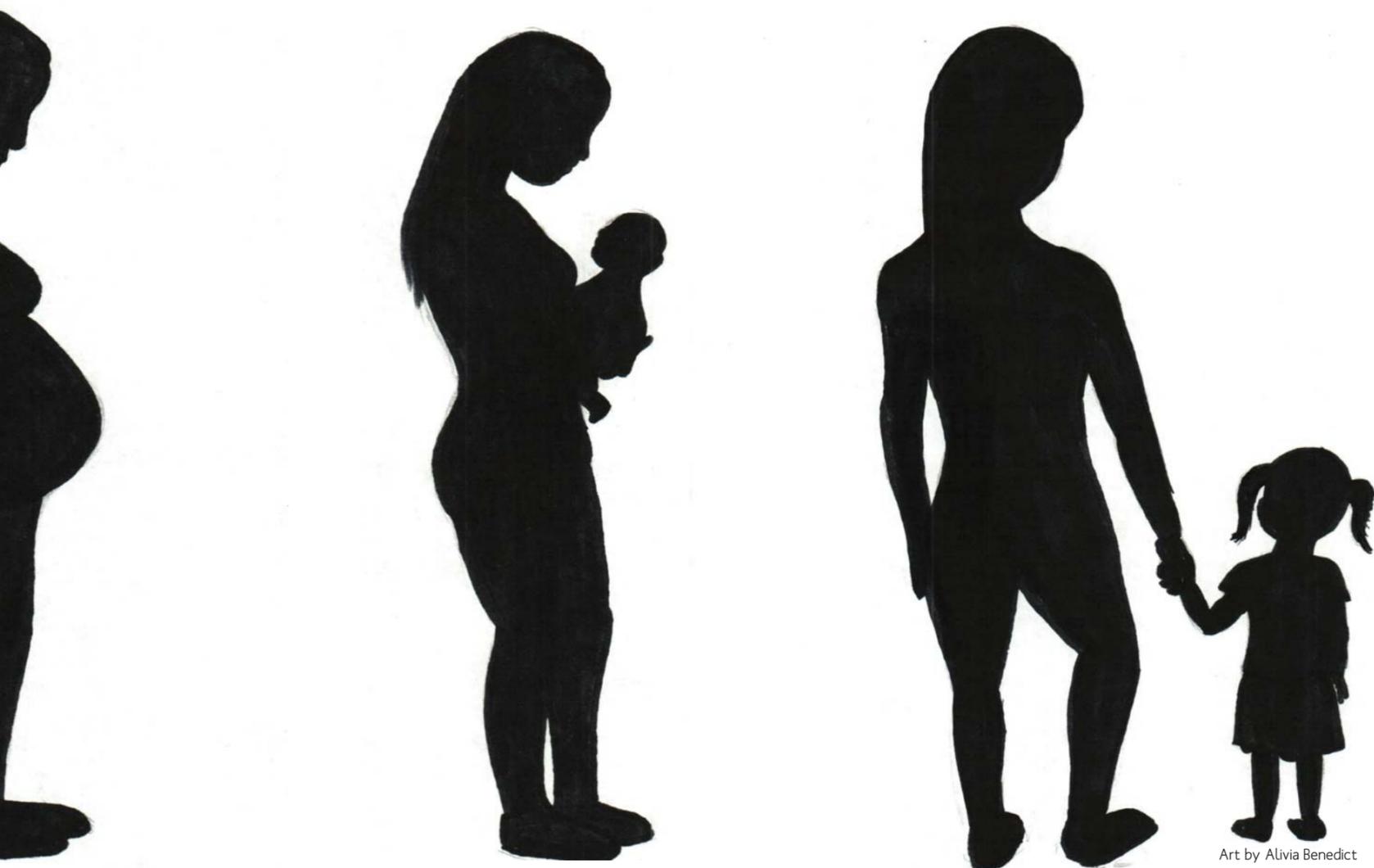
120 students are sexually active

48 students believe “pulling out” or the Plan B pill is a method of birth control

average age of lost virginity: 14-15

# MISSING CHILDREN

, sex education and available resources



Art by Alivia Benedict

including pack'n plays, baby monitors and car seats.

"Originally, I was in it for the information. I had no idea so many benefits came along with it," Stacey said. "With these classes you get 'baby bucks' and you can spend it on diapers and clothes. For every time I go to one of these classes, or I work 30 hours, or we go to the baby's doctor appointment, I get diapers from the WIC office. I have a rewards card from her insurance. Every time she goes into a checkup I get \$10-20 for formula."

And WIC does not provide support for just infants; through the incentive system, parents benefit as well.

"WIC is an awesome resource for them because they get vouchers for very healthy food, and that helps the grocery budget. The main thing is that they are getting prenatal care, and they get started on all their multivitamins so that they can bring a healthy baby into the world," Schwob said. "We have to keep mom healthy, too."

While the programs offer the same base information and incentives to each parent, not every situation is the same and accommodations are made when necessary.

"[The programs] are there to encourage and support the things you need to do in order to have a healthy pregnancy," CCHD registered nurse Lisa Goins said. "It's not just a one size fits all. It is a personalized plan."

After a positive pregnancy test, making prenatal care arrangements is essential.

"Prenatal care and delivery are only the first expenses, and maybe the least expensive, associated with pregnancy. A new mom should expect the first year to cost upwards of \$10,000 to care for a newborn," Shaw said. "There's not a reason teens should go without prenatal care. No one needs to have insurance coverage before beginning care, either. We will treat regardless of insurance or financial status."

If someone is not able to financially obtain prenatal care by themselves, Via Christi and the Community Health Center offer financial assistance.

Although a majority of the programs are offered through CCHD, The Family Resource Center offers a childcare service at a reduced rate for young parents.

"[The parents] need to finish school, and while they're at school, they need a safe place to take their child," Executive Director Ann Elliott said.

The parents are then introduced to an Early Steps to Success coordinator. The coordinator conducts home visits and assists parents with word literacy to ensure the child learns to read by third grade.

"It's a rough schedule and a rough job, but we've had girls who have gone on to do wonderful things," Schwob said. "They've gone off to college and risen above their situation, but it takes a tough kid. They've got to be strong and really motivated."

For senior Demi Stacey, the same goal of finishing school motivated her. She is currently working 30 hours a week and graduated in December. She plans on starting classes for a CNA license in March.

"Your baby should be your motivation to push forward," Stacey said. "So if not for you, do it for your baby."

Someone who has shared a similar experience and knows the challenges and triumphs of being a young mother is Courtney McCartney, Lakeside Elementary School Principal. She found out she was pregnant with two weeks left in her senior year of high school. She was able to overcome the struggles that came along with her teenage pregnancy and finish her schooling.

"The question I seemed to get a lot was, 'Are you still going to continue school?'" McCartney said. "I would step back and be offended because I'm like, 'I'm not stupid. Yes, I might not have thought through some of the process of it, but I'm still who I am. I still have my goals and I still know what I wanna do, and I still have the drive to be successful.'"

And although becoming pregnant was not something she planned on happening before she finished college, it did not stop her from achieving her goals.

"Even as a young kid your road may change, but you still know your goal and your journey," McCartney said. "There might be some roadblocks thrown at you, but you still kind of stay on that course."

## A SAVING GRACE

One teen's pregnancy experience

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Not only did sophomore Eliana Gonzales have to endure a pregnancy for nine months, she had to do it alone, at the age of 13.

"It was my last semester in eighth grade," Gonzales said. "I wasn't using condoms or contraceptives. I wasn't really thinking about it, and [I got pregnant] when I lost my virginity."

For Gonzales, it was a terrifying experience. She had to seek a pregnancy test from the KidCare van at the middle school.

It was especially difficult for Gonzales because she did not feel supported during her pregnancy.

"My mom was trying to talk me into giving her up for adoption for eight months," Gonzales said. "My mother wasn't there for the pregnancy, and [the baby's] father wasn't there, so I felt like I was alone in it."

A month into the pregnancy, Gonzales found someone to support her through the process.

When Pittsburg Community Middle School (PCMS) counselor Terri Sutton first heard about Gonzales' situation, she approached Gonzales after hearing rumors about her pregnancy to offer counseling. This

turned into taking into regular appointments zales' mother permission.

"Her mother there, and just how her felt," Sutton like [Eliana] somebody at

Although ton as a moth- for Gonzales thing she was for, it was dif- have immedi- support.

"I am so

Mrs. Sutton because I didn't think I would have anyone else there with me," Gonzales said. "But not having somebody in my family [was difficult] and it hurt me a lot. I was just heartbroken."

Because of Gonzales' mother's stance on the pregnancy, Sutton arranged for Gonzales to meet with different people representing different options available.

They met with a lawyer, who helped Gonzales understand the legal process of adoption. They met with a woman who had given her own child up for adoption and a woman who had gotten pregnant at the same age as Gonzales and who had kept her child.

When Gonzales reached her eighth month of pregnancy, her mother let go of the idea of adoption. Together, Gonzales and her mother decided they would raise the baby.

And although she now has her mother's support, Gonzales will always appreciate Sutton's support.

"I'm glad she considers me a motherly figure and for her to know she can come to me if she needs me. I always want her to have that backup in the right situation. I hope she will always have that with me," Sutton said. "She has a special place in my heart."

Currently, Gonzales is a sophomore in high school and a full-time student.

"Before I got pregnant, I was horrible," Gonzales said. "I got in trouble a lot through middle school and then God stopped it. He gave me my baby to help me realize what I was doing was not right. To this day, I look back and I realize my baby saved me."

**NOT HAVING SOMEBODY IN MY FAMILY [WAS DIFFICULT] AND IT HURT ME A LOT. I WAS JUST HEARTBROKEN.**

- ELIANA GONZALES

Gonzales prenatal after Gon- granted

was not that was mother said. "I felt needed that time." having Suterly figure was some- thankful ficult to not ate family

happy I had

38/113

students or partner have had a pregnancy scare

77

never or rarely practice safe sex

135