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## Teens, adults suggest teen pregnancy prevention tactics

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By **Laura Anderson Shaw**, [landerson@qconline.com](mailto:landerson@qconline.com)

Teen pregnancy is a problem, but abstinence programs aren't necessarily the answer.

That was one of many opinions shared at the teen and adult forums held Tuesday at Bethany for Children & Families in Moline, to help kick off Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month.

Mary Ann McLeod, Bethany director of community services, said the national teen birth rate is 6 percent, while state and county health department numbers indicate that Rock Island and Scott County teen birth rates are 13.3 and 11.5 percent, respectively, higher than the Illinois and Iowa rates of 10.1 and 8.7 percent.

The local Teen Pregnancy Prevention Advisory Committee, made up of area health educators, Bethany workers, counselors and others, organized the forum to open up dialog.

The event, hosted by Bethany, Edgerton Women's Health Center and the Scott County Health Department, included 45 adults and teens from area high schools in separate forums.

Afterward, both groups said main points included the need for parents to discuss sex and teen pregnancy with their kids, and for schools to implement sex education programs or practices that offer more information to teens.

Ben Cleaveland, Bethany program supervisor and a parent, said that since a group discussed teen pregnancy issues about 15 years ago, "our culture has changed," and abstinence programs and scare tactics aren't working.

There must be communication between parents and children, he said. "Not talking is not a way of handling this situation.

"The message must be age-appropriate" and consistent, he said, whether dealing with grade school, junior high or high school students.

Mr. Cleaveland said parents and schools should adopt a more "holistic" approach, asking the teen questions such as what kind of parent they want to be, and discussing what constitutes a healthy relationships rather than focusing solely on sex.



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**Photo: Todd Mizener**

Monique Redd, a senior at Thurgood Marshall in Rock Island, presents some of the talking points teens touched on during a forum on teen pregnancy prevention/awareness held at Bethany For Children & Families in Moline Tuesday, May 3, 2011. The forum, which involved both teens and adults, kicked off teen pregnancy prevention month.

Monique Redd, of Rock Island, a senior at Thurgood Marshall school, said although it can be awkward, parents need to talk to their kids about sex and sexuality, and monitor their online activity, especially on sites such as Facebook. "It's real hard to do," she added.

Ms. Redd said the teen group discussed how kids are becoming interested in sex at a much earlier age, and peer pressure exists, even in junior high.

These kids might not be aware that teen pregnancy "changes their life tremendously," Ms. Redd said.

Molly Rowell, of East Moline, a junior at United Township High School, said the teen group thought a peer leadership group might be helpful in spreading awareness.

She suggested that high school students meet with junior high students to discuss sex and teen pregnancy, and teen mothers and parents meet with students to discuss their personal experiences about how it's changed their lives, "and how it's a lot harder than people make it seem."

Ms. Rowell said junior high students might find it easier to relate to — and respect — upperclassmen, and that might help them listen.

Neither Ms. Rowell or Ms. Redd is a teen parent.

Organizers of Tuesday's event said they will follow up with the teens and adults involved, and the schools.

"We've been talking about this for 15 years," Mr. Cleaveland said. "It'd be nice to get some action going."