



**Khanyisa Ngemfundo**

BE THE LIGHT THROUGH EDUCATION

# Learner pregnancy in South African secondary schools:

A TOOLKIT FOR  
SCHOOL-BASED  
SUPPORT TEAMS  
AND EDUCATORS



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FUNDERS AND PARTNERS



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For more information, please visit the  
 Centre for Social Science Research  
 website: <https://bit.ly/3zAogU3>

## WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is designed for educators who engage with pregnant and mother learners in South African secondary schools. This may include members of the School-Based Support Team. It is a guide for educators on how best to support these learners through their school journey, including supporting them to complete their schooling. Here we focus on pregnant and mother learners specifically, whilst recognising the important role of fathers.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Many learners - including pregnant and mother learners - face struggles, both inside and outside school. This can make it hard for them to complete their schooling. Creating a supportive environment in and out of school will lead to more learners completing their schooling and becoming active members of society. This supportive environment should be inclusive, enabling and free of stigma and discrimination. There are things that educators can do to create an environment that supports learners through their journey in school. At the same time, educators are not alone. It is crucial that they draw on other mechanisms of support.

## HOW WAS THIS TOOLKIT CREATED?

This toolkit emerged from a research project Khanyisa Ngemfundo (Be the Light Through Education) based in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa that aims to explore and understand support mechanisms for pregnant and mother learners in the school system. In this study, we talked to educators, learners, programme implementers and government stakeholders. Their thoughts, ideas and suggestions guided the creation of this toolkit. The stories that we tell have all been anonymised.

**This toolkit brings together years of research on the experiences of pregnant and mother learners and how they can best be supported in their school journey.**



This toolkit takes you on the journey of pregnant and mother learners, starting with when they found out they are pregnant, to being a mother. Every school and educator are different and face different challenges in wanting to support pregnant and mother learners.

**This toolkit recognises these challenges and seeks to give ideas rather than outright recommendations to make it as relevant as possible to everyone.**

## INTRODUCTION TO LEARNER PREGNANCY

Before moving into the toolkit itself, we start with what learner pregnancy looks like in South Africa.

**Adolescent pregnancy** is when a young person becomes pregnant before 20 years old. The focus of this toolkit is on those young people who become pregnant while at school. Adolescence is an exciting period filled with hope and potential. Adolescents can make healthy choices if they are empowered, have access to information and psychosocial support. Empowerment gives adolescents the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their lives including decisions about sexual and reproductive health. When adolescents are empowered, they can better control various aspects of their daily lives. They gain the ability to understand and manage their sexual health, including issues related to pregnancy. This knowledge allows them to make decisions that align with their personal goals and circumstances.

In South Africa, research shows that 1 in 4 pregnant adolescents withdraw from school during pregnancy. 35-50% do not return to school after giving birth.

What are the factors that might prevent learners from returning to school?

- dropping out of school early during pregnancy
- not having access to childcare
- exposure to stigma and discrimination from teachers and peers
- inconsistently applied policies

What are the factors that might increase the chances that a learner will return to school?

- being able to stay in school while pregnant
- having support from family members and educators
- access to peer-based support
- high levels of confidence, and
- access to childcare.

We will be referring to the School-Based Support Team (SBST) at times. This is an organised team focused on identifying support needs and co-ordinating support for learners. While School-Based Support Teams might look different across schools, the team is usually set up by the principal of a school and can include:

- Educators who are directly involved in the management of the school or who have specialised skills and knowledge or express an interest.
- Non-educators from the school (e.g. administrators or care-taking staff)
- A representative from the School Management Team
- The SBST co-ordinator
- Representatives from each Phase or Grade
- A learning support teacher (and Learner Support Agent, in some schools)

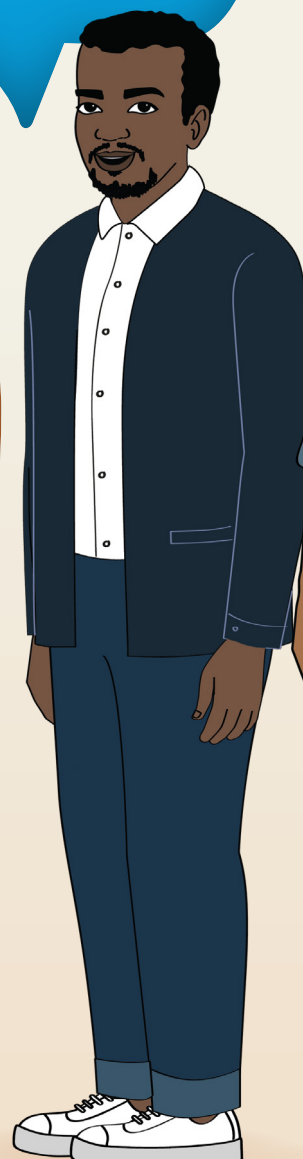
Sometimes people think that when a girl falls pregnant, it is her fault or she has behaved badly, but research shows us that many factors can contribute to adolescent pregnancy such as poverty, sexual abuse, peer pressure, poor parenting and role models, lack of sex education, and limited access to contraceptives and health services.

South Africa has set out many rights that learners have including the right to education, to not being discriminated against, to privacy, to bodily and psychological integrity and to dignity. In line with this, the South African Department of Basic Education has a specific Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, which has two goals:

- To reduce the incidence of learner pregnancy through the provision of quality Comprehensive Sexuality Education and access to adolescent and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.
- To ensure learners are not excluded from school as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, and to provide a supportive environment for them to continue and complete their basic education.

This toolkit should be read in conjunction with this policy and its associated Implementation Guidelines.

This toolkit is a resource to help put aspects of the Policy into practice as it relates to creating a supportive environment for pregnant and mother learners.





There are some beliefs surrounding adolescent pregnancy that are untrue. Here are some things we know to be true from research.

The large majority of adolescent pregnancies are unintended.

Young people can make healthy choices if they are empowered with education, support and access to services.

Pregnant and mother learners need a different kind of support compared to other learners.

Social and economic conditions such as gender inequality, lack of availability of health and social services, and financial hardship play a large role in adolescent pregnancy.

Other learners seeing pregnant and mother learners succeed, does not make early pregnancy more appealing to them.

A supportive environment helps prevent pregnant and mother learners from dropping out of school.



## WHAT'S IN THIS TOOLKIT



### CHAPTER 1

## Early pregnancy SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS.

This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities that learners and educators face when the learner has become aware of her pregnancy.

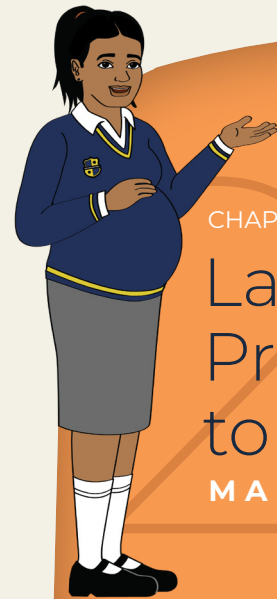
#### MODULE 1

Explores the struggles that pregnant learners face. **1**

#### MODULE 2

Explores the opportunities to support the pregnant learner to stay in school.

- SECTION 1  
Focuses on creating a supportive environment for pregnant learners. **6**
- SECTION 2  
Focuses on engaging support networks (including services) for pregnant learners. **17**



### CHAPTER 2

## Late Pregnancy to birth MAKING A PLAN.

This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities that learners and educators face when the learner is getting towards the end of their pregnancy and is preparing to give birth.

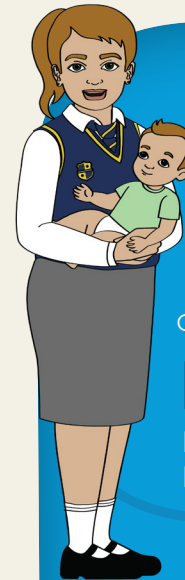
#### MODULE 1

Explores the struggles that pregnant learners face. **21**

#### MODULE 2

Explores the opportunities to support the pregnant learner to stay in school.

- SECTION 1  
Focuses on creating a supportive environment for pregnant learners. **26**
- SECTION 2  
Focuses on engaging support networks (including services) for pregnant learners. **29**



### CHAPTER 3

## Motherhood REINTEGRATION INTO SCHOOL.

This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities that learners and educators face when the learner is ready to reenter school.

#### MODULE 1

Explores the struggles that mother learners face. **35**

#### MODULE 2

Explores the opportunities to support the mother learner to stay in school.

- SECTION 1  
Focuses on creating a supportive environment for mother learners. **39**
- SECTION 2  
Focuses on engaging support networks (including services) for mother learners. **42**

At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.

#### Icons used in this toolkit:



Story



Reflection



Fact



Familial support



Peer support



Referral

# Module 1

## THE STRUGGLES THAT PREGNANT LEARNERS FACE

Here you will learn what it is like to be a pregnant learner as they become aware of their pregnancy. You will:

- Learn about and reflect on their physical, psychological and social struggles

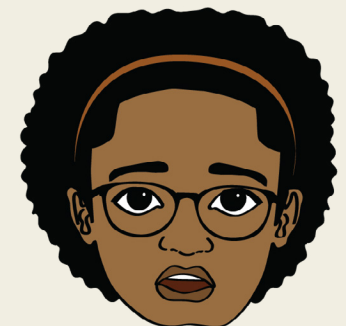
## Early pregnancy

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS.



### Andiswa's story: Experiencing early pregnancy

Andiswa is a 16-year-old, Grade 10 learner who is 3 and half months pregnant. She's very shy. She is also a dreamer, smart, and hardworking. She wants to become a doctor or nurse. She's an orphan who is staying with her maternal aunt. Andiswa and her boyfriend had unprotected sex. She is still seeing her boyfriend, and they are in the same grade. She thinks she might be pregnant as she has not had her period for 2 months and feels sick in the mornings. She is tired most of the time, and struggles to concentrate in school. She has heard some teachers making negative comments about another pregnant girl at school. She is worried that will happen to her and she doesn't want anyone to know that she is pregnant. Andiswa's maternal aunt is her only close relative, but she is scared to tell her what has happened. She is worried that her aunt will blame her. She finds it hard to trust people, and she doesn't know who to talk to about her pregnancy and what to do next.



- How do you feel hearing Andiswa's story?
- Have you come across similar stories to Andiswa?
- What challenges does Andiswa face?





Andiswa confides in Ms. Mallon, her Life Orientation teacher.

Ms. Mallon notices that Andiswa seems sad, not quite herself and is starting to sleep in class. She is struggling to keep up with her schoolwork. She sometimes reacts emotionally towards other learners and teachers and is occasionally skipping class. She is worried about Andiswa.



- If you were Ms. Mallon, what could you do to help Andiswa?
- What do you think would be a bad idea to do next?
- What would be a good idea to do next?
- How do you think these 'good' or 'bad' ways of responding would impact Andiswa?

## WHAT DO WE KNOW?



Now that we have had a chance to reflect on a learner's and a teacher's experiences, we'll look at what we know about the struggles that pregnant learners face during the early part of their pregnancy.

### Pregnant learners experience many difficult physical symptoms:

- Feeling nauseous often with morning vomiting
- Tender, swollen breasts.
- Struggling to concentrate

Learners need help managing these physical symptoms and staying healthy.

### Along with physical symptoms, pregnant learners can struggle with:

- Feeling anxious
- Feeling scared
- Feeling alone
- Feeling worthless

Coming to terms with pregnancy is an especially difficult thing for a young person. It is important to watch out for these symptoms and refer learners when they need support.

The physical and psychological effects of pregnancy can be exacerbated by stigma and judgement learners may face, from teachers, peers, family members and the wider community. Fear of being judged or treated differently affects the way they experience school and respond to their pregnancy. They may also experience feelings of regret and fear as they consider their new reality. They can worry about the short-term and long-term consequences of falling pregnant, both for themselves and their family. These experiences of perceived disapproval and judgement from educators as well as their feelings of regret and worry can lead to academic struggles such as losing concentration, missing classes, and failing exams, placing the learner at risk for dropping out. Along with the academic consequences, the psychological consequences can be severe. Learners can experience isolation, lowered self-esteem and in worse cases, suicidal ideation.

The father of the baby may also be a source of distress for the pregnant learner. They may deny that they are the father. They may refuse to support her. If the father and the pregnant learner are in a relationship, he may break up with her after she discloses to him. All of this can further isolate and distress her, making it even harder to disclose to others.



A referral network can include psychosocial support, healthcare services among others, refer to page 17.





Educators express concern about the consequences of a negative school environment for pregnant learners. Many are particularly concerned with the issue of disclosure of pregnancy from learners, and have had experiences where they found out about a learner's pregnancy very late and as a result could not provide proper support through the school.



### The learners' rights

Legally, adolescents have three options when they become pregnant:

- Carry the baby to term and keep the baby
- Legal termination of pregnancy (up to 12 weeks to 3 months)
- Carry the baby to term and give them up for adoption

Adolescents should be made aware of their options so they can be empowered to make an informed choice.

**Next we will be talking about creating a supportive environment in the school.**

# Module 2

## SECTION 1

### WHAT IS A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND HOW TO BUILD IT?

**This section focuses on the importance of creating a supportive environment for pregnant learners.**

You will:

- Learn what a supportive environment is
- Learn about active listening
- Engage with a case study about providing support to a learner in early pregnancy

For these modules we start with the facilitation of a supportive environment inside the school and then the engagement of support networks outside the school



A supportive school environment is inclusive, empathetic, and understanding, and free from misconceptions and discriminatory attitudes. Clear and emphatic communication between teacher and learner is critical.

Both learners and teachers see having a supportive environment as essential to overcoming struggles that pregnant learners face such as not being able to keep up with school, non-disclosure of pregnancy and mental health problems. This is important for the health and well-being of the learner, and her unborn baby.

Teachers are important sources of support, however in some instances support from a mental health professional might be needed.

How to use active listening

Active listening provides a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space for the learner to share her experience. It creates an open, trusting relationship between teacher and learner, helping her to feel heard and accepted. With active listening, you talk very little, but create opportunities to understand better what the learner is communicating. This means listening carefully to the learner, sometimes repeating parts of what they are saying back to ensure you have heard them correctly. Using open, friendly body-language, good eye contact, nodding and providing small verbal responses shows that you are listening attentively. Active listening also involves asking open questions that encourage the learner to speak - “How are you feeling?” “Do you want to say more?” “What do you think?” Active listening does not involve asking questions that start with “why” that might seem to cast judgement on the learner.

Here is one example of how Ms. Mallon could use active listening to approach Andiswa.

Ms. Mallon asks Andiswa to stay after class to talk to her privately for a few minutes.



You are not in any trouble. I am just concerned about your health and wellbeing. I have noticed that you have been sleeping in class. I am wondering if you might be feeling unwell. How are you feeling? Is there anything you want to talk about?



I feel sick, especially in the morning, and I'm tired a lot of the time. Sometimes I feel very sad, it's like my feelings are out of control.



I hear you, that must be difficult. Is there anything more you would like to share? How long have you been feeling like this?



I have been feeling weird for a while now. It is so frustrating.



I've listened to you carefully, Andiswa. What you are describing can be symptoms of pregnancy. What do you think?



No. I don't know what you are talking about. I cannot be pregnant.



It's okay, you are not in trouble. If you can talk to me I can get you the help you need. What do you think?




It could be possible (crying). I didn't want to tell my Aunt because I am worried she will judge me and treat me badly.



You have been very brave to tell me about your experience. You have not done anything wrong. I am here to support you in the ways that I can. I will do my best to ensure your privacy.


Ms. Mallon and Andiswa agree that if circumstances change, they'll come together to agree on who needs to be told. They decide to go together to the principal to think through what needs to happen next.

With these steps Ms. Mallon has done her best to listen empathetically to Andiswa and create a comfortable space for her to share.




Andiswa agrees to have a pregnancy test


Now both Ms. Mallon and Andiswa suspect that Andiswa may be pregnant. Ms. Mallon wants to assist Andiswa to remain healthy, to manage her pregnancy, and to stay in school as long as possible. She knows how important it is to have the support of caregivers. Ms. Mallon asks Andiswa if she could tell her Aunt that they think she might be pregnant, and suggests they could talk to her together. Andiswa is nervous, but agrees. They tell her Aunt, who seems shocked and saddened. Ms. Mallon reassures her that they will try and support Andiswa as best they can. She advises Andiswa and her Aunt to go to the clinic to have a pregnancy test. They go and Andiswa finds out that she is indeed pregnant. From hereon, Ms. Mallon can work with other educators and support networks to create a supportive environment for Andiswa at school.



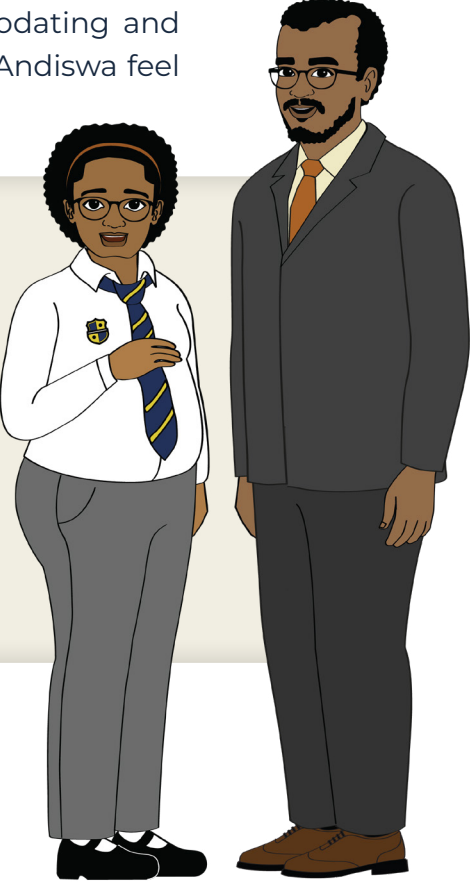
Imagine that Andiswa went to a school that was accommodating and understanding of her situation and tried their best to make Andiswa feel safe to share that she was pregnant...



The principal at Andiswa's school is sad to hear that she is pregnant, but he is prepared and knows what to do to help her keep on track and stay in school. He records the details of her pregnancy and her expected due date. He is happy that she felt safe to share because now she can get the support she needs. He has worked hard with the other educators in the school to ensure that they have procedures in place to keep learners safe and supported. It has been a difficult journey, but it has been worthwhile.



- How does Andiswa's story make you feel
- Why do you think it is important to facilitate a supportive environment for someone like Andiswa?





## Finding solutions to help Andiswa

Here we discuss some problem-solving steps to overcome challenges to help learners. While responding to complex problems isn't always easy, a step-by-step process can help find and implement an effective solution. Steps include: 1) Generate potential solutions to the identified problem. 2) Evaluate and select the most appropriate solution. 3) Implement the chosen solution and check to see if the chosen solution is working. This approach enables educators to efficiently address challenges and improve their problem-solving skills.

Here we revisit the story about Andiswa and her teacher, Ms. Mallon.

Andiswa, Ms. Mallon, the school principal and her aunt come together to discuss possibilities for Andiswa. They agree that Andiswa is struggling with the physical and emotional effects of her pregnancy.

- One option is for Andiswa to stop school for now and come back when she is no longer pregnant. *However, if Andiswa gives up school, she will miss a lot of work and might end up finding it too difficult to come back to school.*
- Another option suggested by the school principal is that Andiswa could be excused from some classes when she is feeling very unwell and then ask her friends to help her catch up when she is feeling better. *Andiswa thinks that being excused from some classes could help her cope. She thinks it will be possible for her friends to help her catch up.*
- Ms. Mallon suggests she could help by linking her to a peer-support group. *Andiswa thinks that this could help her through this difficult situation.*
- The principal says they will connect Andiswa to a nurse they know at the clinic, as well as the social worker. They say that she will be given time off school to go to these appointments. *Andiswa and her aunt say this will help. Andiswa's Aunt says she will go with her to her appointments.*
- Together they decide that her being excused from some classes and catching up later, being connected with a peer support group and social and health services are the best ideas to help.
- A few weeks later, Ms. Mallon catches up with Andiswa and asks how things are going. Together they agree that these steps have helped.



Every person and situation is different. This problem solving example is just one version of what could happen and can be adapted for you and your context.

Now that we have talked about how teachers and principals could help an individual learner, here are some ideas of things that could be implemented to help build a supportive environment for all pregnant learners in the school:

- Create a community of practice for educators across schools who work with pregnant learners to learn from one another (but remember to respect the privacy of the learners).
- Create catch-up plans for pregnant learners who miss class due to pregnancy.
- Introduce clear and equitable procedures to address issues such as attendance and academic accommodations
- Create strong communication and support pathways between the school and families of pregnant learners. Make sure there is open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities.
- Focus on Life Orientation class as a safe space to discuss and cover all important topics related to learners' personal development. Life Orientation should encompass comprehensive sexuality education as well as life skills. Comprehensive sexuality education, as defined by the Department of Basic Education, provides scientifically accurate information, and builds positive values and attitudes which enables young people to safely navigate the transition to adulthood.
- Awareness campaigns that educate other learners about pregnancy and the many challenges that pregnant learners face could help promote a culture of respect, kindness and understanding in the school. The Representative Council of Learners could coordinate these campaigns with the help of the School-Based Support Team.
- A feeding scheme for pregnant learners could help keep them healthy.



## Pregnant and Mother Learner Rights

The school community must uphold the learner's right to dignity and not prejudice her right to education, equality or privacy as highlighted in the Department of Basic Education's Policy on Learner Pregnancy in School.

This means:

- The learner may not be suspended or expelled because she is pregnant.
- The learner may not be prevented from writing exams or made to automatically repeat a grade,
- The learner may not be forced to stay at school until the day she gives birth to her baby.
- She may not be victimised, stigmatised, or discriminated against in any way.
- The school may not disclose any information without the learner's written consent, or the consent of the learner's parents or guardian if she is under 12 years of age.







### Suggested Activity

#### **Procedure for Identification, Disclosure and Management: Creating clear steps.**

We suggest this activity for you and other educators in your school to put in place clear steps on how to handle situations where a learner discloses their pregnancy. You could also ask the school social worker or nurse or health promotion officer to join, if you have one at your school. This should be a participatory activity where educators and service providers share and reflect together on their knowledge and experience of learner pregnancy. The purpose is to generate an agreed-upon action plan for how to respond at your school.

Remember to refer to the Department of Basic Education's Policy on Learner Pregnancy and its Implementation Guidelines.

1. Bring together all participants, if the group is large, divide into smaller groups to start with. Ask participants to discuss their experience / examples of how and where they have encountered learner pregnancy. What happened? How did they manage the disclosure? What were the successes? What were the challenges? Remember to tell participants not to share names and to be careful to keep the story anonymous, to respect the learner's privacy.
2. Identify who is most likely to initially find out about a learner's pregnancy (or suspected pregnancy) and the likely circumstances.
3. Think about who else would need to be informed of the pregnancy in the school and how best to disclose it to others (Both educators and other key role players like parents).
4. Identify the referral pathways for learners to access the health and social services for their pregnancy, including pregnancy testing and antenatal care (Referral pathways are discussed in the next section)
5. Use the information gathered in the above steps to write a procedure that can be followed in your school when an educator finds out a learner is pregnant.

**Below are some helpful ideas and things to consider for this activity.**

**While every learner and situation are different, the key to a great disclosure procedure is:**

The creation of a supportive environment

- Making sure learners feel listened to and cared for.
- Creating realistic and helpful solutions to the challenges facing pregnant learners.
- Respecting the learner's right to privacy and confidentiality. It is important that educators and others interacting with pregnant learners do their best to respect their privacy and be as discrete as possible. Not all educators in the school need to know about the learner's condition. Think through who needs to be told and gain permission from the learner before sharing. The learner can choose who they wish to disclose to.

Strong referral pathways and support networks

- The support that a learner needs is unique to them and their situation but it is important to harness all the sources of support for a learner. In the next section we discuss engaging support networks.
- A medical certificate indicating the status of their pregnancy and estimated delivery date is a requirement for all pregnant learners over six months pregnant. Remember that medical information must be kept strictly confidential to protect the learner's right to privacy.

Sometimes pregnancy is a consequence of sexual violence. If sexual violence is disclosed, there are certain actions that are required of the teacher / professional.



#### **Violence and exploitation is a serious issue facing many women and girls and can be a reality for pregnant and mother learners.**

- Experiences of violence can be physical, emotional, and sexual.
- Physical violence is when a person uses a part of their body, an object, or weapon to physically harm someone else.
- Emotional or psychological abuse is when someone says or does something to make another person feel worthless or control them.
- And sexual violence is when a person forces or coerces someone else into sexual activity without their consent, which must be clearly given, with full understanding, and can be withdrawn at any time.



#### **There are many different kinds of sexual abuse. They can include:**

- Rape or unlawful sexual intercourse without consent.
- Statutory rape or sexual intercourse or other sexual relations with a person under the legal age of consent. A child below 12 cannot give consent. Therefore sex with a child below 12 years is always considered rape. A child between the ages of 12 and 16 can consent to sexual intercourse but if consent is given to a person who is 18 years or older, then the man is guilty of statutory rape. School principals are always required by law to report a learner's pregnancy to the South African Police Service (SAPS) if the learner is under the age of 16 years.
- Sex between a teacher and learner is prohibited and must also be reported. It makes no difference if consent was given by the learner or if the learner is 16 years and older, it is still prohibited.

#### **What does consent mean?**

Consent means saying yes clearly, willingly, and happily to doing something with someone else, knowing exactly what you're agreeing to. It only applies to that specific activity, and a person can change their mind and take it back anytime.





**What must an educator do when violence (of any kind) is disclosed.**  
**Reporting processes**

Educators are also required by law to report suspected incidents of sexual violence to the police. If the school suspects that the learner has been raped or is a victim of sexual violence (defined as a Level 4 in the Department of Basic Education's Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools) they are compelled by law to report this to a social worker and the South African Police Service (SAPS). If the learner discloses that the father is a teacher, this must immediately be reported to the School Governing Body (SGB) and SAPS.

It is important that when or if the learner discloses any abusive situation she is believed and the necessary steps are taken to report the abuse. In abuse situations the learner may be very fearful and is usually at considerable risk of further physical harm.

Reporting can provide a sense of closure, help deliver justice for the learner, and send a clear message that violence is unacceptable. In some cases, formally reporting an incident and pressing charges can help prevent future harm—either to others or to the person making the report.

**Levels of violence**

**Level 1**

Making rude jokes. Graffiti of a sexual nature.

**Level 2**

Circulating offensive material (depending on the nature of the material, this could be level 4)

Improper suggestions of a sexual nature.

**Level 3**

Sexual harassment.

**Level 4**

Persistent harassment despite previous corrective measures.

Public indecency.

Sexual assault and rape.

- Appearing fearful or agitated
- Low mood
- Social withdrawal
- Missing assignment deadlines

**Your immediate reaction and response in the event of disclosure**

If you are the first person to hear about a learner's experience of sexual violence, your reaction is crucial. You need to offer care and support, listen without judgement or discrimination, respect the privacy and dignity of the learner, and encourage them to seek help.

Even when support systems exist for learners, it can be difficult for learners to trust that they will be supported and protected. They are much more likely to be able to follow each step in the reporting process properly if they have help from an adult they trust like an educator.

Learners need to be connected to support services, as part of the mandatory reporting process as well as to support them physically and mentally. As part of the mandatory process, educators need to report to the school or community social worker and the police. This may be difficult for the learner.

Violence, especially sexual violence, can often be an ongoing and recent event, demanding immediate referrals for things like counselling, HIV testing, PEP, emergency contraception, and medical examinations. In South Africa, Thuthuzela Care Centres can provide these. If there isn't a Centre close by, local clinics or hospitals will provide these services. Every school will have access to different resources, so it's important that educators know what's available in their area to partner with them.

Despite services being available, learners may choose not to use them for various reasons. They may be deterred by the ways that they and others understand what violence is. They could see seeking help as not likely to help or leading to judgement from others. They could be worried about the practical consequences that they think will occur when taking up services. They may be worried about what their families will think. Practical barriers may also exist such as having to travel far to access the services. Learners might also be fearful if they are unfamiliar with the services, facilities or staff.

At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.

On page 31 and 32, there is a participatory mapping activity for educators and other staff members to map referral networks that your school is, or could be, connected to.

**Some ways of identifying if a learner is experiencing violence**

People can experience many forms of violence all at once or at different times in their lives. They can find it difficult to disclose their experiences for many reasons. They might be scared of the perpetrator. They may feel ashamed. They might be scared of other people's reactions to their disclosure or consequences of disclosure. They also may be afraid of the reporting process itself and what might be expected of them.

Some potential signs that suggest someone is experiencing violence include:

- Unexplained physical injuries
- Loss of interest in activities

You cannot force learners to take up the services you refer them to. You can only encourage them.

### Key things to keep in mind throughout:

- Always make sure the learners' needs, wishes and capacities are at the heart of the response processes.
- Always make sure that the learner is safe above all else. Avoid decisions or actions that could put them in danger
- Outside of the mandatory reporting requirements, everything should be done to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the learner.
- Be respectful and maintain a non-judgmental manner. Be patient with them. If they are not ready to speak, do not push them to do so.
- Make sure all learners get equal and fair treatment.

### Here is one example of how Ms. Smith put of all this into action...

Ms. Smith is packing up for the day when she's approached by 17-year-old Yonela, who seems upset. Ms. Smith immediately calms her down by saying:



"I'm here for you. It's OK.  
Take your time."

She then lets Yonela sit in silence for a bit until she's ready to talk.



My stepfather has been forcing me into sex. I haven't had my period in two months and I think I might be pregnant.



"This isn't your fault.  
You didn't do anything wrong"



I am very worried about how my mother will react.

Ms. Smith carefully explains why she needs to involve other adults to help, starting with the principal. Then they can all work together to decide how best to tell her mother or another trusted adult.

It's also important that Ms. Smith proactively connects Yonela with the services she needs. As she's not a counsellor herself, she refers the case to health and social services.

On page 13, there is information on what an educator must do when violence (of any kind) is disclosed.

Luckily, Yonela's school has a good relationship with the local clinic, where she can talk through her options to make informed decisions.

Ms. Smith also refers her to the school social worker but Yonela is scared to go. So Ms. Smith reassures Yonela that a social worker will help her through this process.

Ultimately, it's up to the learner to decide if she wants to formally pursue the case but Ms. Smith has played her part by reporting this.

Helping learners in these kind of cases can be very challenging. It is pivotal to look after your mental wellbeing. On page 45, there are tips on how to look after your mental wellbeing.



**Next we will be talking about who to engage with to support the learner including social workers, clinics and family members**

## SECTION 2

### WHAT ARE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND HOW CAN WE BUILD THEM?

Here you will learn about engaging support networks for pregnant learners as they become aware of their pregnancy including:

- Support from family members, peers and the father of the baby
- Support from health and social services



Educators are not alone in supporting pregnant learners. Depending on the circumstances, pregnant learners can draw support from their family members, the father of the baby and their peers. Access to service providers like nurses, social workers, mental health professionals and community health workers is very important. Referrals should happen as soon as possible so that learners get the care and support they need to stay healthy.

There are many reasons why pregnant learners might not access these services, despite them being available. They could live in areas where the services are very limited or very far away. They can be quite costly to travel to. It is also important to consider whether the services in your community are adolescent and youth-friendly (that they are approachable and kind, and that adolescents and young people trust them). It may be the case that they are not supportive towards pregnant learners, for example learners may face judgemental attitudes when using healthcare services because they are pregnant at a young age.



#### The creation of strong referral pathways and partnerships is important.

Partnerships with health and social services are important as it is not the role of educators to provide these services.

Ideally, learners who disclose that they are pregnant should be referred to:

- A local clinic or healthcare centre for antenatal care. This should happen as soon as possible and the learner should be encouraged to keep her follow-up appointments.
- A social worker to talk through her pregnancy and her options. Learner Support Agents, if in the school, could help with these referrals.

If the learner is open to it, try to include caregivers or family members in the referrals or encourage learners to involve someone in their family who they feel supported by.



If an adolescent, who is sexually active and has regular periods is more than a week late with her period she may be pregnant. She urgently needs to go to a health clinic for a urine pregnancy test. She could also buy a self-test kit from a pharmacy, but this is not always reliable.

Educators can support pregnant learners by mapping services they need access to when they are pregnant such as clinics for scans, psychosocial services for counselling, and in cases of potential abuse, referrals to a social worker and the South African Police Services. There may be organisations that can provide additional resources such as school uniforms and food parcels. It is important that the mapping of services is done as early as possible so the most relevant referral networks are close at hand when a learner is identified as needing them.

It is increasingly being recognised that providing health programmes in the school setting is an acceptable and feasible way to reach school-going adolescents. An option for educators is to explore the possibility of pregnant learners accessing health services during school hours or on school premises through mobile clinic services.

Family members ranging from biological parents to grandparents, aunts and cousins are an important support network for pregnant learners and have a role to play. For example, a family member could go with the learner to clinic or social worker appointments.



It is especially important to consider the role of the father of the baby. If the pregnant learner and the baby's father have had or have a consensual and positive relationship, the baby's father could be an important source of support. They can provide emotional and practical support such as going to clinic appointments with the learners. If the father is a learner, they will also need support.

On page 31 and 32, there is a participatory mapping activity for educators and other staff members to map referral networks that your school is, or could be, connected to.



At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.





## Support from peers can make school more manageable for a learner who is pregnant.

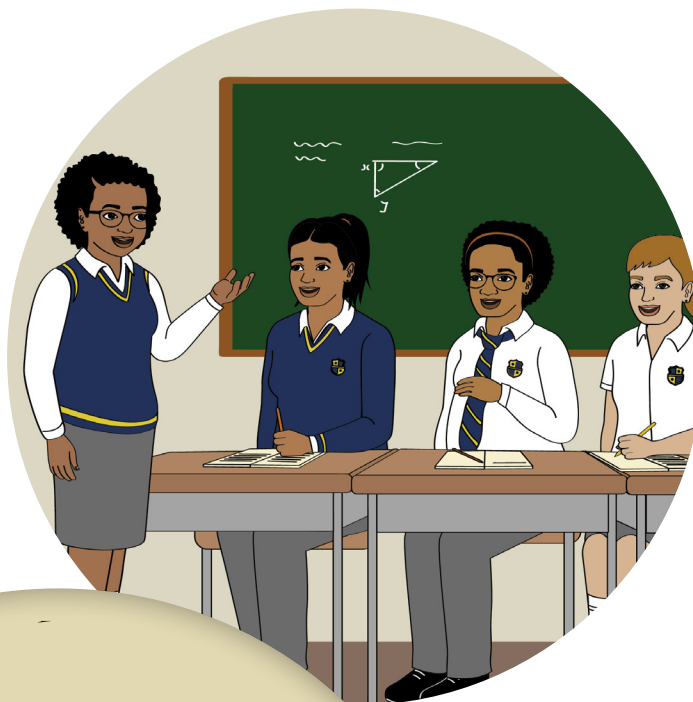
Peer support is one of the few forms of support that educators can encourage within the school setting. Some examples of peers and the kind of support they could provide:

- Friends of the learner could provide emotional support, companionship, and opportunities for leisure and recreation.
- Peers who have similar life experiences can relate to the challenges of early parenthood, providing understanding and encouragement. They could be positioned as mentors, offering valuable guidance and support.
- Peers and friends could help with coursework, study sessions, and academic advice.

### Here are some ideas that could be put into place to engage peer support.

- Connect pregnant learners with existing peer support groups in the community.
- Engage the school's Representative Council of Learners to spread the message of understanding for pregnant learners and their situation.

Do you have any more ideas on how to engage peer support?



### Suggested Activity

#### Working with family members to accept the learner's pregnancy.

Family members have an important role to play in supporting pregnant learners. Learners can struggle if their caregiver is unsupportive. It is important to remember that some family members may feel scared or intimidated by the school environment. This activity is suggested for brainstorming ways of sensitively and proactively engaging family members to support pregnant learners. This should be a participatory activity where educators and service providers share and reflect together on their knowledge and experience of learner pregnancy.

Bring together all participants, if the group is large, divide into smaller groups to start with. Ask participants to discuss their experience/examples of engaging family members of pregnant learners. Remember to tell participants not to share names and to be careful to keep the story anonymous, and to respect the learner's privacy. Everyone shares their experiences with identifying learner pregnancy and/or learners disclosing their pregnancy to them. Remember to respect the learner's privacy in this discussion. No need to share names or too much detail about the learner.

1. Thinking about:
  - Were these experiences positive?
  - How did these experiences make you feel?
  - How do you think the attitudes of the family members affect the learner?
2. Everyone shares how they handled the attitudes and actions of the learner's family members about their pregnancy.
  - What do you think were helpful things to do?
  - What things did not work well?
3. Take all you have learnt from one another to decide on the best ways to work with family members to accept the learner's pregnancy when they are struggling to be supportive.

The larger community surrounding the learner such as the church or local NGOs can also play a role in supporting the pregnant learner.

**Next we will be exploring the experiences of learners who are more advanced in their pregnancy and are preparing to leave school to give birth.**



# Module 1

## THE STRUGGLES THAT PREGNANT LEARNERS FACE

Here you will learn what it is like to be a pregnant learner as they are further along in their pregnancy. You will:

- Learn about and reflect on their physical, psychological and social struggles

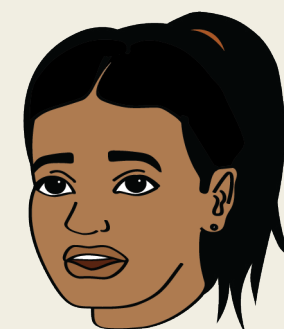
# Late Pregnancy to birth

MAKING A PLAN.



### Chantel's story: Experiencing late pregnancy

Chantel is a 14-year-old, 7-month pregnant learner. She lives with her single mother and her two younger brothers. She is an outgoing person who loves people. She has aspirations of becoming a teacher. Her boyfriend pressured her to have sex although she didn't feel ready. He is 19 years old. Chantel found out she was pregnant over 6 months ago when she went to the clinic after missing her period and feeling nauseous. She was offered the option of a termination of pregnancy. She knows that some people frown upon this, although the nurse told her it was her choice. She spoke to her family and decided not to go ahead with an abortion. Since becoming pregnant, she has been struggling to concentrate at school. It has affected her self-esteem as she does not have clean clothes all the time and her uniform does not fit her anymore. Chantel knows that all her teachers know she is pregnant. She can see the way that they look at her. She feels they are judging her for having a boyfriend and getting pregnant. Some of the other learners make fun of her in class. She feels so alone.



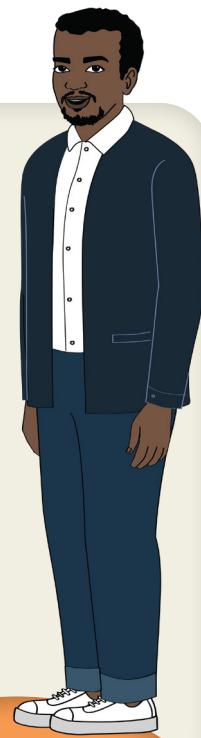
This story includes an example of statutory rape and forced sex. REMEMBER that action needs to be taken in cases of sexual abuse. Look for more information above on page 12 to 16.



- How do you feel about Chantel's story?
- Is this example familiar to you / have you come across similar situations in your experience?
- What are the struggles that Chantel faces?



Mr. Thabeng, Chantel's teacher, is passionate about helping learners. He believes that getting pregnant at a young age especially without being married is bad. At the same time, he sees the struggles learners face and worries about them. He wants to help but feels he cannot actively condone the pregnancy of a learner. As it gets closer to Chantel needing to leave school to give birth, he is worried for her. He fears that Chantel will not come back to school and that she may never get her matric and achieve her dreams of becoming a teacher. He talks to the school's LO teacher about the situation: He tells her that he is feeling conflicted between wanting to help and his own beliefs. The LO teacher understands and suggests that he try to focus on the learner and the problems she faces. He asks her if she can talk to the learner, and she agrees. The LO teacher approaches Chantel who discloses to her that she is pregnant



### Self-reflection activity: Thinking pairs

Here we are going to reflect on beliefs and attitudes surrounding adolescent pregnancy.

You can do this activity alone, or with a friend or colleague. Share in pairs, each person takes a turn to share for five to ten minutes, whilst the other person listens actively, without interruption and without judgement. At the end of the thinking pair, share a positive quality that you see in one another.

### Beliefs and attitudes

Here are some questions to think about in your Thinking Pair:

- Does the story above about Chantel and Mr. Thabeng feel familiar?
- If you were Mr. Thabeng, how would you feel?
- What might make it challenging for Mr. Thabeng to hear Chantel's story?
- What would you do next?

If you have time, here are some more questions to think about:

- What kind of discomforts do you feel about supporting pregnant and mother learners?
- Why do you think we feel judgement towards pregnant and mother learners?
- What would you like to see change in relation to pregnant and mother learners?

### REMEMEBER

that women have many legal options when it comes to being pregnant, including the right to terminate their pregnancy if under 13 weeks pregnant. It is important that learners know their rights. On page 5, we talk about these rights.

### Everyone

has different values and beliefs. Sometimes we can change our attitudes, through self-reflection on our experiences and assumptions, for example towards girls' and young women's sexuality. Sometimes, if we are not ready to change these views, it is necessary to set them aside and focus on what the learner needs.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW?



Now that we have had a chance to reflect on a learner's and a teacher's experiences, we'll look at what we know about the struggles that pregnant learners face during the late part of their pregnancy as they prepare to leave school and give birth.

### Pregnant learners experience many difficult physical symptoms:

- Feeling nauseous
- Tender, swollen breasts.
- Struggling to concentrate
- Struggling to sleep
- Mood swings
- Fatigue
- Feeling hormonal
- Changes to the way their body looks.

Learners may need help managing these physical symptoms and staying healthy.

### Along with physical symptoms, learners can struggle with their mental health during this stage, including:

- Feeling anxious
- Feeling scared
- Feeling alone
- Feeling worthless

Pregnant learners can experience a great deal of fear and distress as they prepare to give birth. They may feel isolated and lost, and struggle at school. They might lose some of their confidence as their bodies change.

At this stage of pregnancy, it is often obvious that they are pregnant which can make them targets for discrimination. Along with the academic consequences, the psychological consequences can be severe such as isolation, lowered self-esteem and in worse cases, suicidal ideation. Ultimately, some decide to leave school because of these experiences. When family members are unsupportive of their pregnant adolescent, learners can struggle: At this

### REMEMEBER

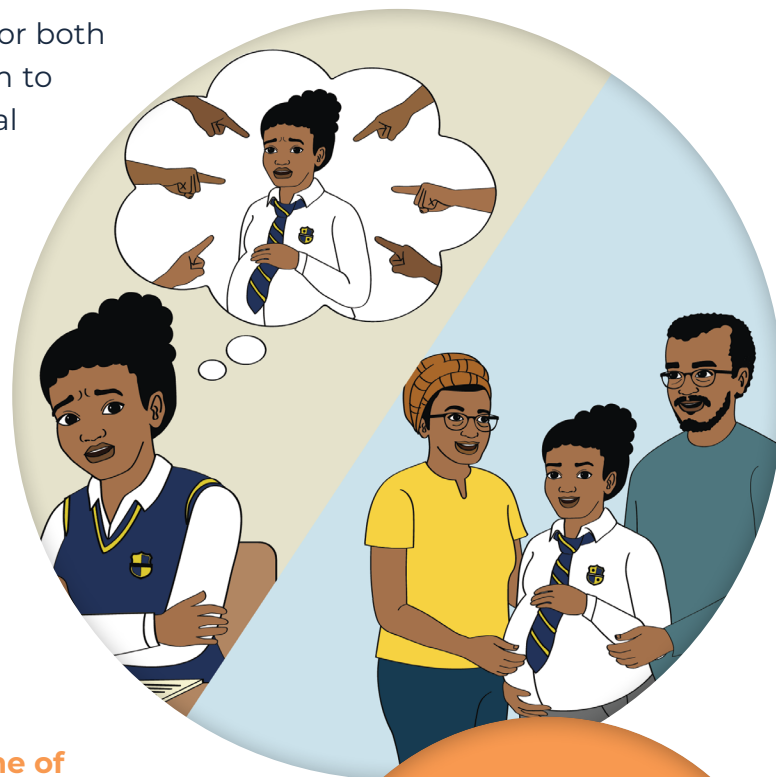
that it is important for the pregnant learner to have mental health support for herself and for the health of her unborn baby.



stage, they rely heavily on them for both practical support like taking them to scans at the clinic and emotional support.

The father of the baby may also be a source of distress. They may continue to deny that they are the father. They may acknowledge their paternity but refuse to support the learner. All of this can further isolate and distress her, making it even harder to keep up and stay in school.

**Next we will be talking about one of the ways to support pregnant learners, facilitating a supportive environment.**



REMEMBER  
the pregnant or mother learner might need support from a counsellor or a mental health professional. This is especially the case if she has experienced sexual or other forms of abuse.

# Module 2

## SECTION 1

### WHAT IS A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND HOW TO BUILD IT?

**This section focuses on the importance of creating a supportive environment for pregnant learners.**

You will:

- Learn what a supportive environment is
- Engage with a case study about providing support to a learner in late pregnancy

For every chapter, we start with the facilitation of a supportive environment inside the school and then the engagement of support networks outside the school



As discussed in Module 1, a supportive school environment is inclusive, empathetic, and understanding, free from misconceptions and discriminatory attitudes. Clear and emphatic communication between educator and learner is critical. Remember the active listening activity we did in Module 1? This is an effective way to engage with the learner about her pregnancy. It is important that a learner feels able to disclose early on in pregnancy, be supported in school and access services to support. Later on in her pregnancy journey, she requires specific support in the build-up to giving birth, for her health and well-being and to keep up with school.

At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.





## Finding solutions to help Chantel

Here we discuss some problem-solving steps to overcome challenges to help learners. While responding to complex problems isn't always easy, a step-by-step process can help find and implement an effective solution. Steps include: 1) Generate potential solutions to the identified problem. 2) Evaluate and select the most appropriate solution. 3) Implement the chosen solution and check to see if the chosen solution is working. This approach enables educators to efficiently address challenges and improve their problem-solving skills.

Here we revisit the story about Chantel, her teacher, Mr. Thabeng and the school's LO teacher.

After the LO teacher approaches Chantel, Chantel tells her about her pregnancy and how she is feeling scared and anxious. The LO teacher suggests they meet with the principal and her class teacher to discuss the options available to her regarding her schooling and her leave of absence to give birth. Chantel agrees. Chantel, her LO teacher, Mr Thabeng, her school principal and Chantel's mother come together to discuss possible ideas for Chantel to stay in school and be prepared to leave when she needs to. They know that if Chantel leaves now without a plan to come back, she will struggle to get back to school due to the new pressures of being a mother.

- Mr Thabang says he will encourage Chantel's classmates to take notes from lessons, to visit and discuss their homework with her whilst she is out of school. *Chantel says this will be helpful.*
- The LO teacher suggests that she can meet with Chantel and her mother to make a realistic plan about the best time to come back to school after she has given birth. Chantel thinks this would be a really good idea. *Her mother is trying her best to support her and having her teacher with them for the discussion would be helpful.*
- The LO teacher connects Chantel and her mother to the local clinic (providing Chantel and her mother with their contact information). The educators in this school have built referral pathways with local services and organisations, and know which ones are youth-friendly. Mr Thabeng tells her that she will need to get a report from a doctor if she wants to stay in school after 32 weeks of her pregnancy. *Chantel's mother says she will encourage and help her attend all her clinic appointments both before and after the baby is born.*
- The LO teacher asked her if she would like to see a counsellor. She provides Chantel with a few options, a toll-free helpline and referral to the social worker. *Chantel thanks her and says she will think about counselling.*
- A few weeks later the LO teacher catches up with Chantel. *Chantel says she feels so much more prepared to leave school and give birth.*

Every person and situation is different. This problem solving example is just one version of what could happen and can be adapted for your context.



If the learner and her unborn baby remain healthy and the pregnancy continues normally most learners can continue attending school until 36 weeks of pregnancy. They may need to stop attending school earlier if there are pregnancy complications.

## Building a safe and trusting classroom environment

At this stage of pregnancy, the learner may face more stigmatisation and bullying from other learners. It is important that she feels accepted and cared for in her school environment, so that she is encouraged to continue with her education. Creating a safe, non-judgmental and trusting environment at school for learners like Chantel requires certain changes and interventions. Teachers, principals and educators can:

- Create a safe and trusting school and classroom environment by promoting a culture of respect, kindness and understanding towards pregnant learners. This can include, for example, taking action against acts of bullying or stigmatisation towards learners.
- Running an educational intervention to sensitise the staff and learners in the school on learner pregnancy. Education and awareness campaigns can bring in knowledgeable people from outside of the school, such as a nurse from the local clinic.
- Increase empathy and understanding by educating other learners about pregnancy and the challenges that pregnant learners face. The Representative Council of Learners could be helpful in both encouraging empathy and understanding and calling out acts of bullying.

**Next we will be talking about engaging support networks as a an important way to support pregnant learners.**



## SECTION 2

### WHAT ARE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND HOW CAN WE BUILD THEM?

Here you will learn about engaging support networks for pregnant learners as they get towards the end of their pregnancy and prepare to leave school to give birth, including:

- Support from family members, peers and the father of the baby
- Support from health and social services



As the learner gets further along in their pregnancy, referral pathways become more and more important. It is critical to create strong partnerships with those who work in these services such as nurses, community health workers, social workers and mental health professionals. Partnerships are important as it is not the role of educators to provide these services. Ideally, learners should be referred to

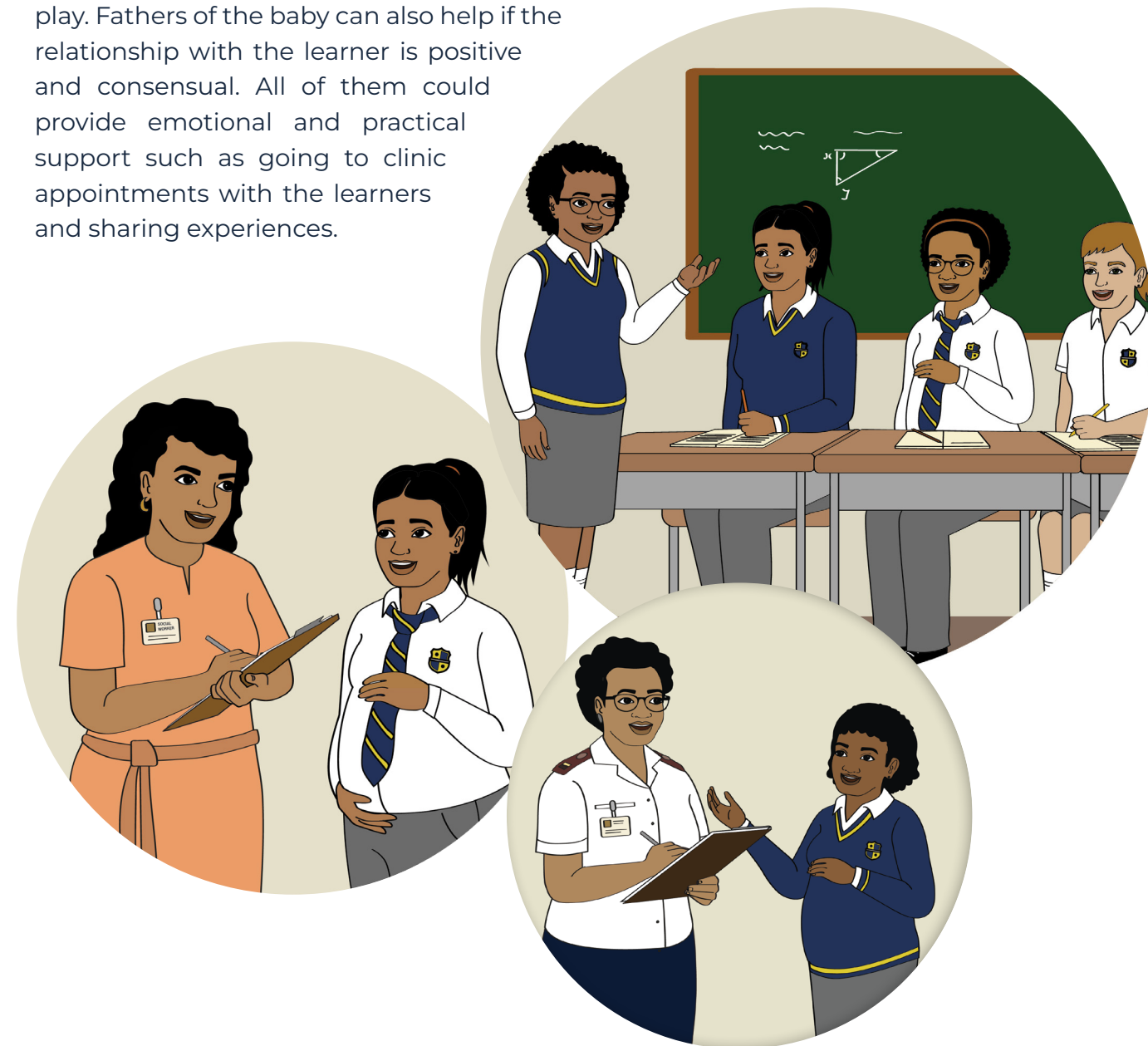
- a local health clinic. It is crucial that learners keep getting antenatal care to stay healthy. Remember, if a learner wants to stay in school 6 months or more into her pregnancy, the learner must provide a medical certificate to say that it is safe. Another medical report is needed if she wishes to stay in school beyond 8 months of her pregnancy. Remember that it is important to keep all medical information strictly confidential to ensure the learner's privacy.
- a social worker can provide an important source of support, for example, psychosocial support if the learner needs it.

If the learner is open to it, try to include caregivers or family members in the referrals or encourage learners to involve someone in their family who they feel supported by.

At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.

Educators can support pregnant learners by mapping services they need access to when they are pregnant and preparing to give birth such as clinics for scans and antenatal healthcare and organisations and services that offer psychosocial support and counselling. It is important that the mapping of services is done as early as possible so the most relevant referral networks are close at hand when a learner is identified as needing them.

Family members ranging from biological parents to grandparents, aunts and cousins have a role to play. Fathers of the baby can also help if the relationship with the learner is positive and consensual. All of them could provide emotional and practical support such as going to clinic appointments with the learners and sharing experiences.



#### Support from peers can make school more manageable for a pregnant learner.

Peers can be an important source of help while the learner is preparing to give birth and leave school. Peer support is one of the few forms of support that educators can encourage within the school setting.

Some examples of peers and the kind of support they could provide:

- Friends of the learner could be there to support her emotionally and also to help with schoolwork.
- Peers who have similar life experiences can help with the emotional struggles and suggest practical advice on how to handle the physical struggles as they get closer to giving birth.



### Suggested Activity

#### Mapping services to support pregnant learners.

We suggest an activity where educators come together to map the services that learners can or should access. This is a participatory activity that is about drawing on your and other educators' knowledge of your area and the most relevant services. You could also ask the school social worker, nurse or health promotion officer to join if you have one in your school. Together, you will create a map of available services and where they are located. You will then discuss what these services provide, and how well they are working to serve pregnant and mother learners (for example, whether or not they are youth-friendly and accessible). The outcome will be to have a visual map of services and action plan to build strong, effective referral networks for pregnant and mother learners. Remember to refer to the Department of Basic Education's Policy on Learner Pregnancy and its Implementation Guidelines.

1. Bring together educators who work to support pregnant learners in your school. If the group is large, divide into groups of up to 5 participants. Ask participants to share their experience and knowledge of antenatal health care and other services that could help support pregnant learners. Remember to tell participants not to share names and to be careful to keep the story anonymous, to respect the learner's privacy.
2. Identify all the services that pregnant learners can and should access to stay healthy and able to stay in school while pregnant e.g. mobile clinics, school nurses, social workers, counsellors. Draw a visual map of these services and where they are located in the area.
3. Next, write the services down on a flipchart paper: Ask participants to draw up a table or chart marking out who is doing what to provide services for pregnant and mother learners, where they are working, how well they are doing it (a mark of 1 out of 10) and an explanation as to why (if high score or low score).
4. Explain that the objective of this exercise is not to show who is the best organization/ service provider, or to show up those who are performing badly – but to provide an accurate overview of the options of services for pregnant and mother learners, including services that are strong, and others that need to improve – in order to develop good referral networks. This is an example of the beginning of a table:

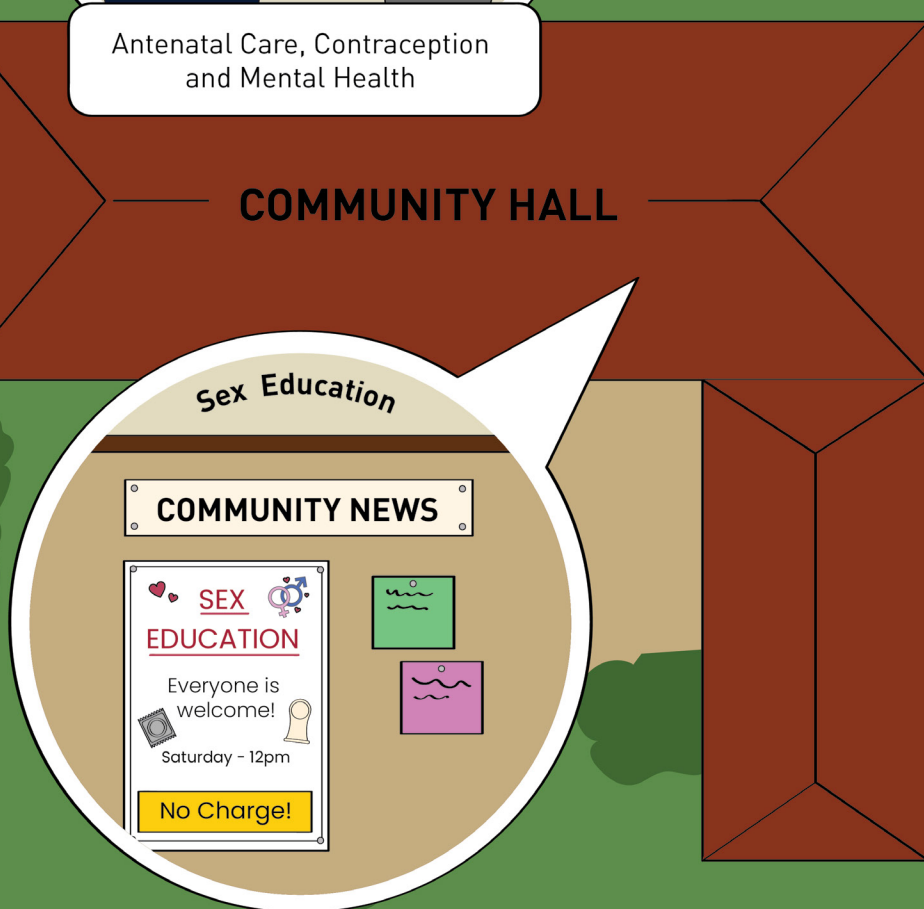
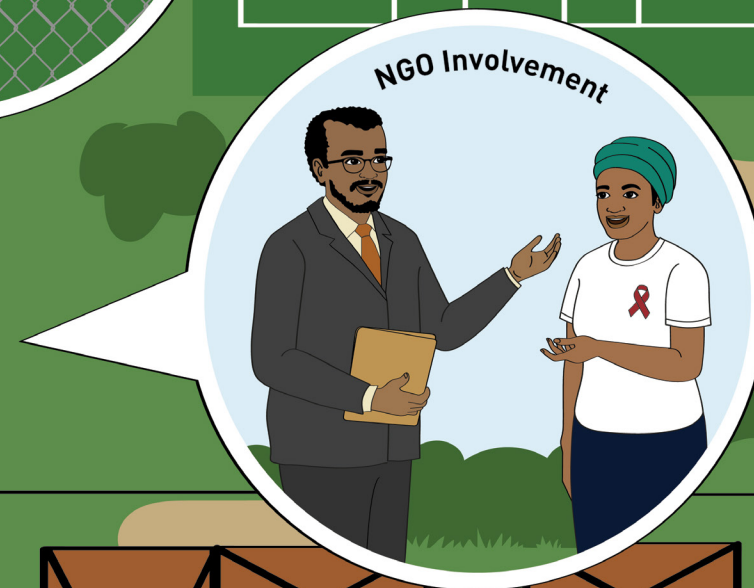
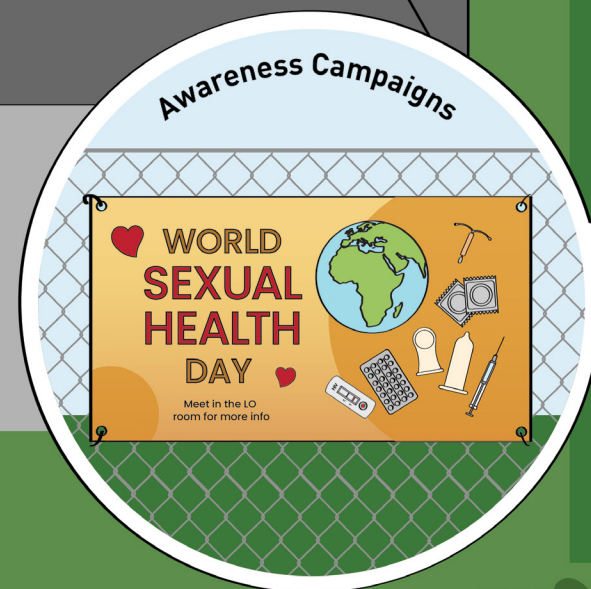
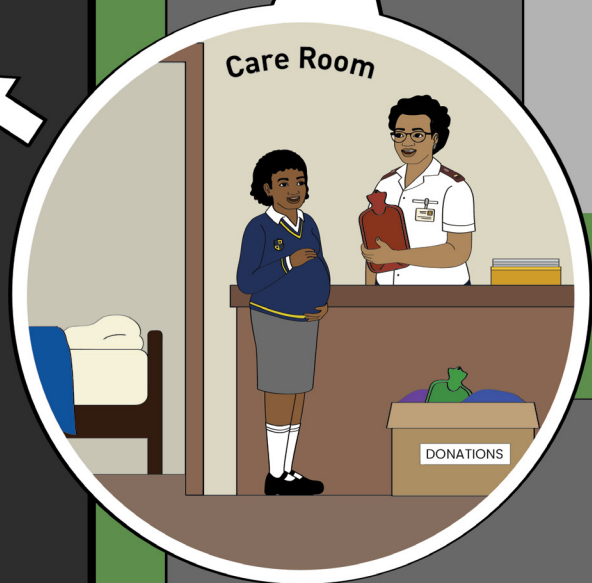
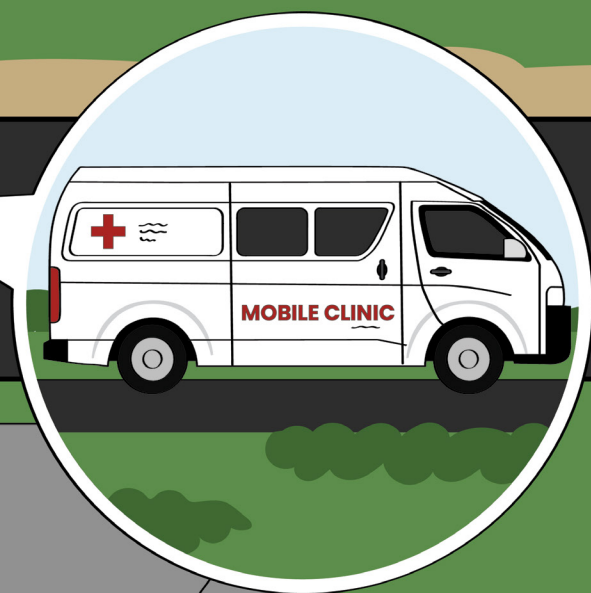
Adolescent and youth friendly services are one that are accessible and acceptable to adolescents.

Who	What	How well	Why
Clinic	Contraceptive and antenatal services	6	Services are available Learners say some (not all) health workers are judgemental and unfriendly towards them
Social services			

5. Each group presents back. What did participants learn from this exercise?
6. Think together about the possible opportunities there are in working with these services to build referral networks for pregnant and mother learners.
7. Think together about the possible challenges there might be in working with these services
8. Think through some possible solutions to overcome these challenges.
9. Think about how learners can be prepared in cases where the services they are referred to are unfriendly or even discriminatory.
10. Decide together on what possible partnerships could be created with local services, considering all that has been discussed.

**Next we will be talking about the experiences of learners who have given birth and are ready to come back to school.**







# Module 1

## THE STRUGGLES THAT MOTHER LEARNERS FACE

Here you will learn what it is like to be a learner once they come back to school after giving birth. You will:

- Learn about and reflect on their physical, psychological and social struggles



## Motherhood

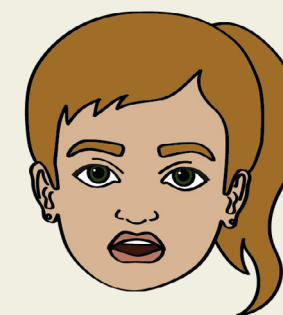
REINTEGRATION  
INTO SCHOOL.



### Daniella's story: Experiencing motherhood

Daniella is 19 years old and lives with her stepmother and father. She has a baby boy who is 2 months old. She loves reading novels and playing netball. She is kind and friendly but also a bit shy. She aspires to be a lawyer. She loves her baby and her stepmother has been looking after him while she is at school. However, sometimes she feels her stepmother is resentful of her, and it is not always easy to ask her to take care of him. Daniella says she is finding it hard to sleep at night because her baby keeps waking up and crying.

Daniella also feels judged for having a baby. She is depressed and lonely. Daniella is finding school very difficult. She is trying to balance motherhood and school. She feels like she is letting her baby down because she knows there are many things he still needs, like his birth certificate and vaccinations. She knows these things are so important, but she is also desperate to stay in school and get her matric. Her family is struggling financially so she doesn't always have the things she needs for her and her baby.



- How does this story make you feel?
- Have you come across stories like Daniella?
- What opportunities do you think are available to Daniella as a young mother, to continue with her education?



Daniella's teacher, Ms. Smith, is glad that Daniella returned to school. She knows not all learners who have babies come back to school. Ms Smith is worried about how Daniella will catch up on the work she has missed. She is also concerned about how she will balance her schoolwork with her responsibilities as a mother. After a few weeks, she notices that Daniella is struggling to keep up with the work and she is often late or absent. She feels unsure how to support Daniella in this situation.



- Do you ever feel like Ms. Smith?
- What do you think the challenges are for mother learners who return to school?
- What do you think you would do in Ms Smith's shoes?

## WHAT DO WE KNOW?



Now that we have had a chance to reflect on a learner's and a teacher's experiences, we'll look at what we know about the struggles that learners face after they have given birth and come back to school.

### Mother learners can experience many difficult physical symptoms:

- Leaking breast milk
- Tender, swollen breasts.
- Struggling to concentrate
- Fatigue
- Feeling hormonal

A leave of absence is not only important for the learner to recover physically from giving birth but also for learners and their babies to have time to bond. It is important to work with the learner and their support network to tailor a leave of absence that will work best for them.

### Along with physical symptoms, the learners might also struggle with:

- Feeling anxious
- Feeling scared
- Feeling alone
- Feeling worthless

Once a learner has a baby, they can struggle with fear, loss and anxiety, and might feel different to their peers. These struggles can make it hard for them to keep up with their schoolwork and their friendships might be negatively affected. They can also struggle to balance their dual responsibilities of having a child and being a school learner.



They may miss more classes, exams and assignments and have a hard time concentrating when in class, due to childcare responsibilities. These educational and mental health challenges can be exacerbated by the stigma and judgement that learners can face inside and outside the school. While learners and teachers can be an important source of support, they can also make the school environment feel judgmental and scary. Experiences of judgement and stigma can affect the way mother learners cope with school and having a baby.

Outside the school, mother learners often rely on family members to provide childcare while they are at school and help guide them as they raise their children. They could share their own experiences of parenting. When their family members are unsupportive or unable to help, they can struggle with school and might want to leave to focus on their childcare priorities.

The father of the baby may also be a source of distress for the learner. They may deny that they are the father or start to question the paternity once the baby is born. They may acknowledge their paternity but refuse to support the learner. All of this can further isolate and distress her, making it even harder to keep up with and stay in school.



# Module 2

## SECTION 1

### WHAT IS A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND HOW TO BUILD IT?

This section focuses on the importance of creating a supportive environment for mother learners. You will:

- Learn what a supportive environment is
- Learn about active listening
- Engage with a case study about providing support to a mother learner

For every chapter, we start with the facilitation of a supportive environment inside the school and then the engagement of support networks outside the school.



This is a challenging phase of the learner's journey where they try to balance their responsibilities as a parent and their schoolwork. Building a supportive environment for mother learners can help them overcome the struggles they face.

At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.

#### How to use active listening

Active listening is a skill that could be helpful for educators to create a supportive school environment. It provides a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space for the learner to share her experience. It is crucial to building an open, trusting relationship between educator and learner, helping her to feel heard and accepted.

Here is an example of how Ms. Smith could use active listening to encourage Daniella to share. Ms. Smith asks Daniella to stay after class for a few minutes and starts to ask questions about her and what is happening with her. She listens carefully and repeats some parts back to Daniella to show she is interested. She uses open, friendly body language, and small verbal responses to show that she is listening. She asks questions that include some observations about what she has noticed about Daniella, being careful to make sure Daniella knows she is only concerned with her well-being, not that she has done anything wrong.



How are you feeling?  
What has been happening at home?  
How have things been going?



I am struggling to sleep at night because my baby wakes up crying a lot.  
I am anxious all the time. I am so scared about what is going to happen to my baby.



You know, Daniella, I have noticed that you are perhaps not feeling yourself, and are sometimes struggling to keep up with your schoolwork. It sounds as if perhaps you need more support with your new responsibilities as a mom. How can I help you? Is there anything you need from me?

With these steps, Ms. Smith has done her best to listen empathetically to her and create a comfortable space for her to share.



#### Finding Solutions to help Daniella

Here we discuss some problem-solving steps to overcome challenges to help learners. While responding to complex problems isn't always easy, a step-by-step process can help find and implement an effective solution. Steps include: 1) Generate potential solutions to the identified problem. 2) Evaluate and select the most appropriate solution. 3) Implement the chosen solution and check to see if the chosen solution is working. This approach enables educators to efficiently address challenges and improve their problem-solving skills.

Let's think again about the story of Daniella and her teacher, Ms. Smith...

Daniella, Ms. Smith, and the principal come together to discuss what is happening. Together they think about some possible ideas to help Daniella stay in school.

- One option that Daniella thinks about is to skip some classes. However, Daniella feels that if she does this, she will find it very difficult to pass her matric.
- Ms. Smith suggests that she and Daniella could together speak to her stepmother and emphasise how important school is for Daniella.
- Daniella agrees to have Ms. Smith there when she talks to her stepmother about being more consistent with helping with childcare so Daniella can come to class.



Every person and situation is different. This problem solving example is just one version of what could happen and might not make sense for you and your context.



SECTION 2  
 WHAT ARE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND  
 HOW CAN WE BUILD THEM?

Here you will learn about engaging support networks for pregnant learners once they come back to school after giving birth, including:

- Support from family members, peers and the father of the baby
- Support from health and social services

- Ms Smith says there might need to be a plan for the days that Daniella’s stepmother can’t help her and for overall health and social support. She says she will refer her to the local clinic and social workers, and a local organisation that supports mother learners, which the school has identified through a mapping activity. *Daniella agrees to seek help from these services.*
- Ms. Smith says she can help by linking Daniella with a group of young mothers. *Daniella thinks that talking to peers who have had similar experiences could help her.*

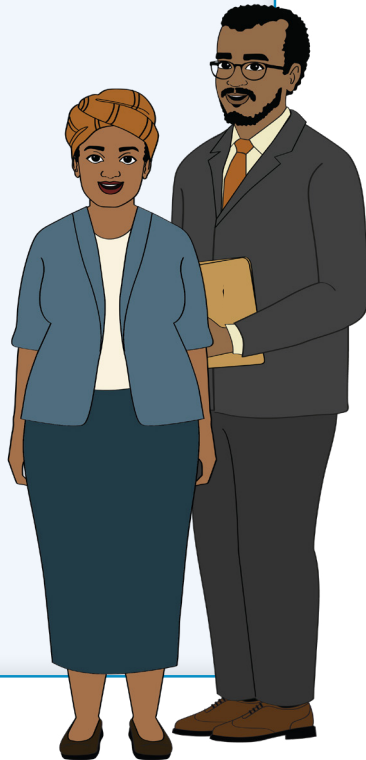
A few weeks later, Ms. Smith catches up with Daniella and asks how these actions to help her are working. Daniella says she feels much more supported in her young moms’ group and appreciates Ms. Smith’s support to keep her coming to school. *Daniella goes on to finish matric and has applied to different colleges and universities.*



Suggested Activity  
 Creating flexible policies for learners  
 re-entering school

We suggest this activity for you and other educators in your school who work to support mother learners to help put in place clear steps on how to support learners who come back to school after their leave of absence. You could also ask the school social worker, nurse or health promotion officer to join if you have one at your school. Remember to refer to the Department of Basic Education’s Policy on Learner Pregnancy and its Implementation Guidelines.

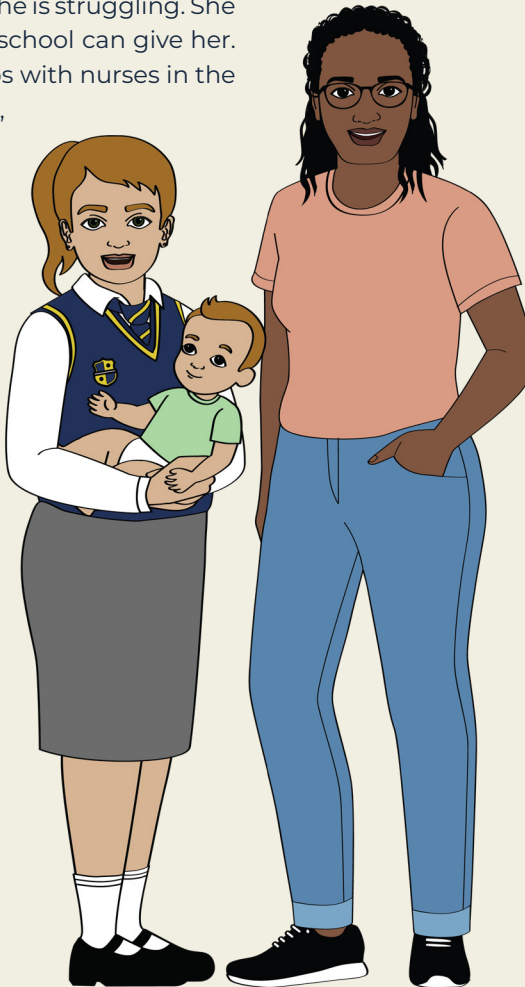
1. Bring together all educators. Everyone shares their experiences with learners who have come back to school after their leave of absence. Remember to tell participants not to share names and to be careful to keep the story anonymous, to respect the learner’s privacy
2. Think about what practices you put into place to accommodate these learners to address things like attendance, leave of absence, and academic accommodations.
3. Identify what things could make it difficult for them to return and stay in school.
4. Think about how you can help learners overcome these challenges.
5. Use the information gathered in the above steps to write a procedure that can be followed in your school when a learner comes back to school after their leave of absence.



Next we will be talking about engaging support networks as a way to help mother learners.



Ms Patel, Daniella’s Life Orientation teacher, notices she is struggling. She can tell that Daniella needs more support than the school can give her. She is so grateful to have created strong relationships with nurses in the local clinic and a few social workers. Where possible, she has also worked hard to communicate and create good relationships with pregnant learner’s families, helping to ensure that they are also a good source of support. She knows just how important they are in keeping pregnant and mother learners well and able to stay in school. Ms Patel sits down with Daniella, and they talk about the kind of support that she needs. Ms Patel explains the support that is available and what Daniella can expect and cannot expect. Ms Patel knows that not everyone is always so supportive of pregnant and mother learners, so she wants to prepare Daniella. Ms Patel then tries to connect Daniella to people she thinks will be supportive.. Ms Patel refers Daniella to a social worker and a nurse at the local clinic to assist with getting her the things she and her baby need, including his birth certificate, and his vaccinations. Ms Patel communicates with the school principal and Daniella’s teachers to make sure they will be understanding of her taking time off when she needs to go to appointments.





As mother learners take up their role as parents, they face many challenges and need the support of family members, peers, and referral services to keep themselves and their baby healthy and to keep them going to school.

### The creation of strong referral pathways and partnerships is important.

Partnerships should be sought with social and health services including nurses, social workers, mental health professionals and community health workers. Partnerships are important as it is not the role of educators to provide these services.

It is important that partnerships and referral pathways are sought as early as possible so the most relevant referral networks are close at hand when a learner is identified as needing them. In Chapter 2 there is a suggested activity for creating a visual map of services available to pregnant and mother learners, evaluating how well they are working, and developing an action plan for building strong, effective referral networks.

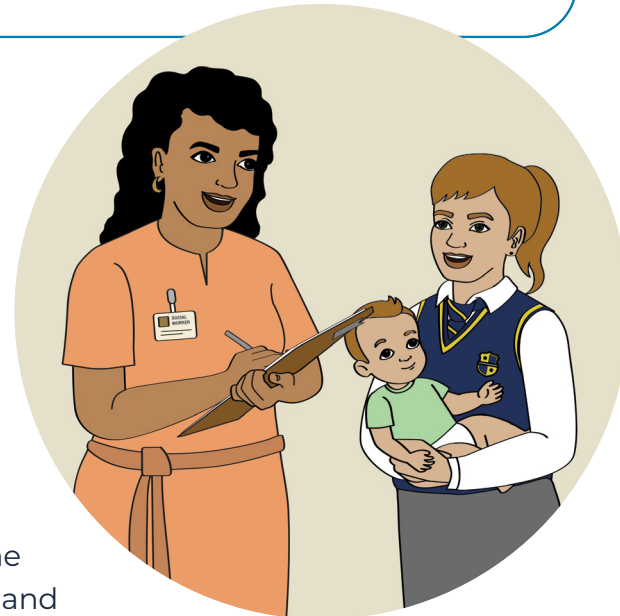
There are many different support services that mother learners need, not just for themselves but for their babies. This includes:

- childcare
- breastfeeding assistance,
- HIV testing and Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission services
- post-birth counselling
- immunizations for the baby
- birth certificate for the baby
- help to apply for the child support grant
- contraceptives to prevent rapid repeat pregnancies
- general healthcare

If the learner is open to it, try to include caregivers or family members in the referrals discussion, or encourage learners to involve someone in their family who they feel supported by.



Family members ranging from biological parents to aunts, grandparents and cousins are an important support network for mother learners and have a role to play. Family members can provide childcare that the learner needs to stay in school. They can also help with applying for birth certificates and social grants.



### What can the educators do to encourage peer support at this stage?



Peer support at this stage could be crucial to helping the mother learner stay in school and keep up with their schoolwork. Here are some ideas on how educators could encourage peer support.

- Connect mother learners with existing peer support groups that include other adolescent mothers. These groups can offer emotional support and parenting advice.
- Creation of study groups to help mother learners catch up with work missed.

Fathers of the baby can provide emotional and practical support such as providing childcare while the mother studies. If the father is a learner, they will also need support. At the same time, the father of the baby can be a source of distress for the learner.



At the end of this toolkit, there are resources to help.

### Here is one example of how Mr. Thabeng helped one of his learners with a challenging situation.

Mr. Thabeng has noticed that 14-year-old Jasmine seems very tired and distracted. He knows she recently had a baby, and wonders if this is causing her stress.

Mr. Thabeng checks in with Jasmine after class, saying



"You're not in any trouble, but I'm concerned about you. Is there anything you want to talk about?"

Reassured that she's in a safe space, Jasmine opens up about her much older boyfriend. She admits he can be controlling – sometimes even scary – but says he's not a bad person and he helps her out with money. With her baby to worry about, she doesn't know what to do.



"I'm really glad you felt comfortable sharing this with me. It sounds like you've been having a tough time. Let's work together to figure it out."

Mr Thabeng explains to Jasmine that the school has a good relationship with a local organisation that provides counselling and a support group for young moms. He asks Jasmine if she'd like to be put in touch with them, and she agrees. Through this organisation, Jasmine can talk about her experiences with a professional and also with other moms, which will help her to decide what she wants to do about her boyfriend.

Self-care

It's important to acknowledge that cases of violence can be distressing for educators who already face various pressures. Looking after your mental health is pivotal. This can take many forms:

- Physical activity
- Listening to music
- Reading
- Journaling
- Breathing exercises
- Stretching

It is helpful to keep in mind the following things:

- Be compassionate to yourself
- Seek out trusted people to support you
- Take breaks
- Seek out professional help if you're finding the situation overwhelming



CONCLUSION

We hope this toolkit has helped you think about the ways that you can support pregnant and mother learners through their journey. We wanted to show you the whole picture behind what happens as a learner goes through pregnancy and through school. There are many struggles that these young learners face, psychologically, socially and physically. At the same time, there are many opportunities for them to grow and develop, with the right kind of support. You as an educator have an important role in empowering pregnant and mother learners to thrive in their new reality and enjoy and complete school.

Remember, educators are not alone. It is important to cultivate and access networks of support, not only for the learner but also for you in your effort to support her. These networks include other educators at the school, services, family members of learners, and peers.

Thanks for your commitment to supporting learners through their life journeys as adolescents and developing a healthy generation of young people.

RESOURCES TO GET HELP

Health

The Department of Health has created a service to support maternal health using cell-based technologies integrated into maternal and child health services. MomConnect is free to the user, and messages are available in all 11 official languages. It is voluntary and the pregnant woman can opt out at any time. Dial \*134\*550# from your cellphone to register.

Another platform they created provides young people with sexual and reproductive health information. BeWise is a website with information on family planning, HIV prevention and pregnancy advice among other topics. It can be found on:

<https://www.bwisehealth.com/>

The Where to Care map online tracks abortion services throughout South Africa: <https://bit.ly/WhereToCareMap> (Best viewed on a cellphone with location services on). It is zero-rated.

Mental Health

24- hour toll-free emergency helplines

- National Counselling Helpline  
0861 322 322
- Suicide Crisis Helpline  
0800 567 567
- Department of Social Development Substance Abuse Helpline  
0800 12 13 14 or SMS 32312
- Cipla Mental Health Helpline  
0800 456 789 or SMS 31393
- NPOwer SA Helpline  
0800 515 515 or SMS 43010

8AM-8PM toll-free helplines

- Dr Reddy's Mental Health Helpline  
0800 21 22 23
- Adcock Ingram Depression & Anxiety Helpline  
0800 70 80 90
- ADHD Helpline  
0800 55 44 33
- Pharma Dynamics Police & Trauma Helpline  
0800 20 50 26

8AM-8PM SADAG office number

- South African Depression and Anxiety Group  
011 234 4837

Whatsapp-based helplines 8AM – 5PM

- Cipla Mental Health  
076 882 2775
- Maybelline BraveTogether  
087 163 2030
- Ke Moja Substance Abuse  
087 163 2025
- Have Hope Chat Line  
087 163 2050

SASSA Child Grant advice

- 0800 60 10 11 or 012 400 2322  
GrantEnquiries@sassa.gov.za

Violence

- Stop Gender Violence Helpline 24/7  
0800 150 150

Childline

- 116

HIV/AIDS

- AIDS Helpline  
0800 012 322

Add any contacts that you think will be helpful

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## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

### Here are the policies that we refer to:

- Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools by Department of Basic Education, <https://t.ly/giFy>
- Integrated School Health Policy by Department of Basic Education and Health, <https://t.ly/oSTsU>
- Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support by Department of Basic Education, <https://t.ly/SuYgo>
- Abuse No More Protocol by Western Cape Education Department, <https://t.ly/kkDIQ>
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education by Department of Basic Education [rb.gy/pr0ldu](https://rb.gy/pr0ldu)
- National Adolescent and Youth Health Policy, The Department of Health, [rb.gy/o4jnsk](https://rb.gy/o4jnsk)
- Protocol for the management and reporting of sexual abuse and harassment in schools, the Department of Basic Education, <https://bit.ly/3W20K9T>

### Here are some guides and pamphlets to learn more:

- Teenage pregnancy and the school teacher: Guide for teachers and community workers by Small Projects Foundation
- A teen's guide to pregnancy: giving birth and life as a mom by Western Cape Government, [rb.gy/wkm0lw](https://rb.gy/wkm0lw)
- Abortion or termination of pregnancy is a legal right in South Africa. Accessing abortions in the Eastern Cape: Know your rights and the facilities to approach for services by the Women's Legal Centre is a helpful resource (while focused on the Eastern Cape, it has a lot of important information that applies nationally), [rb.gy/4b66ce](https://rb.gy/4b66ce)



### Here are some research papers to learn more:

- Amod, Z., Halana, V., & Smith, N. (2019). School-going teenage mothers in an under-resourced community: lived experiences and perceptions of support. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(9), 1255-1271. [rb.gy/za0gl5](https://rb.gy/za0gl5)
- Groves, A. K., Gebrekristos, L. T., McNaughton Reyes, L., Moodley, D., Raziano, V., & Maman, S. (2022). A mixed-methods study of resilience and return to school among adolescent mothers in South Africa. *Global Public Health*, 17(9), 2111-2124. <https://tinyurl.com/4hmyhz2j>
- Jochim, J., Meinck, F., Steventon Roberts, K.J., Wittesaele, C., Langwenya, N., Toska, E., & Cluver, L. (2022). Which factors affect postpartum educational enrollment of adolescent mothers in South Africa? A latent class analysis. *Psychology, Health, and Medicine*, 27(1), 1-17. <https://tinyurl.com/3a5hammb>
- Jochim, J., Meinck, F., Toska, E., Roberts, K., Wittesaele, C., Langwenya, N., & Cluver, L. (2022). Who goes back to school after birth? Factors associated with postpartum school-return in South African adolescent mothers. *Global Public Health*, 18(1), 1-15. <https://tinyurl.com/yuzcjk8x>
- Jochim, J., Cluver, L., & Meinck, F. (2021). Learner pregnancy in South Africa's Eastern Cape: the factors affecting adolescent girls' school withdrawal during pregnancy. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 87(1), 102484. <https://tinyurl.com/3k785rdx>
- Jochim, J., Cluver, L., Sidloyi, L., Kelly, J., Ornellas, A., Mangqalaza, H., Coakley, C., Pillay, M., Nogoduka, C., George, G., & Toska, E. (2023). Improving educational and reproductive outcomes for adolescent mothers in South Africa: A cross-sectional analysis towards realising policy goals. *Global Public Health*, 18(1), 2206465. <https://tinyurl.com/mwcnw63v>
- Kelly, J., Ornellas, A., Coakley, C., Jochim, J., Mangqalaza, H., Cluver, L., Zelmanovitz Axelrod, I., Sidloyi, L., Price, Y., Thabeng, M., Dipa, Y., & Toska, E. (2022). Investing in our future: supporting pregnant and mother learners' return to school. *CSSR Working Paper No. 471*. Cape Town: Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town. <https://tinyurl.com/rtutak9w>
- Mathebula, R. N., Runhare, T., & Mafumo, T. N. (2022). Educational support for pregnant and parenting school girls in rural South African school settings. *Issues in Educational Research*, 32(2), 593-612 <https://tinyurl.com/yrd3pev8>
- Naidoo, J., Muthukrishna, N., & Nkabinde, R. (2021). The journey into motherhood and schooling: narratives of teenage mothers in the South African context. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(10), 1125-1139. <https://tinyurl.com/3ysakzx2>
- Pillay, N. (2021). 'There is no more future for me? Like really, are you kidding?': agency and decision-making in early motherhood in an urban area in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Global Health Action*, 14(1), 1886456. <https://tinyurl.com/582an2nv>