

## The trials and tribulations of being a teenage parent

### Young parents talk about bringing up babies in a hostile world

*The government says it plans to give children a real voice in its radical shake-up of children's services. Young journalists from Children's Express speak to people of their own age about teenage pregnancies.*

Slappers, sluts, loose girls who don't listen. According to Senab Adekunle, 16, this is how the majority of young people view teenage mothers. Young fathers fare no better. She says they're thought of as frustrated idiots who don't know whether to come or go. Mehrak Golestani, 14, adds, Teenage mums seem easily forced into things, people who try too hard to be accepted. Teenage dads seem poor judges, inexperienced.

Mya Elmelem, who became pregnant at 15 and is now 19, says I felt like I was fighting the whole world when Jake was first born. The public take a negative view. People look at you and think baby with a baby, boyfriend in prison. That annoys me. It's just stereotyping.

Professionals come in for similar criticism, as Chloe Kilroy, 18 with an 18-month-old daughter, explained: When I first thought I was pregnant, the midwife looked down on me. Elisha now goes to a posh nursery because I was given a grant through a special project. They look down on me there, too. Elmelem was able to complete her education thanks to really good teachers, but was aware they fought to secure her a home tutor. She'd like flexible support for teenage parents.

Jason Nicholson, 15, thinks parenthood is seen as an escape route from school pressure, parents and choices about the future. But Elmelem tells a different story: I went out with Jake's dad for a long time. I was taking the pill, but I didn't take it properly and fell pregnant. I considered a termination and I had the appointment booked, but I didn't go because I knew I'd regret it. Now it's the real life issues which make it hard. The money I get to live on isn't enough. It puts the food in my mouth and it pays my electricity bill.

Elmelem was lucky. Although her mother has since moved to Australia (she hadn't spoken to her father for years), she was very supportive. For many teenage girls, becoming pregnant can mean a withdrawal of support when it is most needed. Lee Hynam, 19 and father to 20-month-old Chantel, says the parents of his girlfriend, Tracey, didn't want her to have the baby. They gave her an ultimatum, he says. Have an abortion or move out.

Teenagers' youth can hamper the search for affordable accommodation. The neighbourhoods they find themselves housed in can be intimidating. Elmelem says: People think: Oh, she only did it to get a council flat, but for the first four months after the birth my mum had to support me because I wasn't old enough to get benefits. I had to wait ages for my flat. I cried when I saw it. There was damp, mould, old furniture and broken glass, and there are still rats and fuck you on the door. It was no place to bring up a baby. Young, single mothers, she points out, are vulnerable and, if anything, need extra help.

Young fathers and mothers may have different priorities. Hynam wants an end to barriers to active fatherhood. He'd like father-and-baby groups, where dads could talk while the babies play. Elmelem wants a more concerted effort to help mothers help themselves back into work. She tried to go back to college but there was no nursery and no chance of studying part-time. I went to my MP who wrote a letter to my local nursery to get a place for me, but it wasn't accepted. I really want to go back to work.

Contrary to popular opinion, teenage parents don't need to be coerced into being responsible or working harder. They need help rebuilding their lives.

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### About the team

This article was produced by editors Oliver Robertson and Karen Loughrey, 16, and Rachel Bulford, 18, with reporters Ruth Sewell, 14, and Kierra Box, 13. It was published in [Community Care](#).

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