

# TIPS ON CLINICAL LINKAGES: CONNECTING YOUTH WITH REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

## SUGGESTIONS FROM TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS & YOUTH

*Connecting youth to reproductive health care is a key aspect of continuing the decline of teen birth rates. Teen pregnancy prevention programs face many challenges referring and tracking youth who access family planning services. These include weak partnerships between programs and clinics, lack of knowledge about and discomfort accessing clinical services, confidentiality concerns, and poor access to transportation. Here are some strategies used by Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) agencies and suggestions from TPP youth participants on how to confront these barriers and find solutions.*

### Program-Clinic Partnerships

- Think about which clinics/programs are nearby and convenient for your participants. Proximity is one of the most important success factors in youth accessing services.
- Be persistent in developing relationships. It takes time and energy, but can pay off in the long-run.
- Don't be discouraged if you only have a few people working to spearhead a relationship between a program and clinic. It often only takes the commitment of one person or a small group to make it work.
- Programs can ask youth what they know about local clinics. Call and visit the clinics to assess how easy it is to get an appointment, and how youth friendly the clinic is.
- Show appreciation to staff at your partnering site by giving incentives, thank you notes, or holding a staff appreciation event.
- Health education staff and clinic staff can participate in workshops together and attend each other's staff meetings to increase communication and program/clinic visibility.

### Training Staff

- Set up opportunities for health educators to shadow clinic staff, to become more familiar with clinical aspects of Family PACT, and more accurately inform youth of the clinic process.
- Devote part of staff meetings to discuss clinical linkages, youth-friendly care, and follow-up training on any issues that arise.
- Create a binder with training materials and clinical linkage information. The binder can

include topic ideas for meetings, clinical linkages policy specific to each service area, a contact list for partnering programs and clinics, a strategic plan, resource guide, recent news articles/research regarding clinical linkages, examples of incentives for youth, and quarterly updates about clinical activities.

### Informing Youth about Family PACT

- Go through the clinic/Family PACT paperwork with the youth step by step, so that they are not intimidated when they arrive at the clinic and they are familiar with the process.
- Provide youth with transportation information including any assistance provided (bus tokens, rides, bus route information etc.)
- Implement a "tell a friend" program to encourage youth to talk to their peers about accessing clinical services. This method was noted as one of the most important ways youth learn about family planning services by youth.
- Distribute information about clinical services, such as a list of providers and contact information, at health fairs, other community events, school fairs, school newspapers, or public places like the mall. Be sure to update provider contact information on a regular basis.
- Encourage clinic staff to give presentations to program participants, in order to increase visibility of the clinic and to make youth more comfortable accessing clinic services.
- Talk about parental/minor consent and confidentiality laws with youth, so they are aware of their reproductive rights.

- Remind youth about Family PACT services available to them, that they are free, confidential, and are also available to pre-sexually active youth.

### *Youth Friendly Clinic Environments*

- Organize a staff training, specifically for front desk staff, on how to be youth friendly and nonjudgmental. Encourage youth input in the training content.
- If a clinic does not have a separate waiting room for youth, consider alternatives like having youth enter through the back door. It is important to note that some youth and agencies felt that separate waiting rooms was not the best method to encourage youth to access clinics.
- Implement a “first in line” rule or pass where youth can be seen first to minimize their time in the waiting room and vulnerability to seeing someone they know.
- Think of ways to protect and assure youth of confidentiality, such as calling a number instead of a name in the waiting room, or developing a system to “red flag” youth with particular confidentiality concerns.
- Consider providing: lunch and weekend appointments, waiting rooms for teens only; and the choice of teen, adult, male, or female providers. Different youth feel comfortable in different situations.
- Direct youth to call clinic staff by first names to make the environment more informal.
- Ensure physical space is appealing to youth: decorate with bright colors, have a television or video game system in the waiting room, provide free snacks, let youth decorate with their own artwork or choice of posters/decorations, display teen magazines and health education materials specifically for youth, play music popular with youth.

- Provide incentives to youth when possible. Some programs/clinics provide vouchers for free movie tickets or pizza. If funding does not allow or the program’s philosophy does not support individual monetary rewards for clinic access, other options include popular items among youth like condoms, snacks, or a pizza party.
- Get youth feedback on clinics through youth advisory boards, focus groups with teens, a survey, or “secret shoppers”. Findings can be used by the clinic to improve service delivery.

### *Tracking Clinical Services*

- Programs can give youth referral cards or vouchers for incentives to present at the clinic. Youth can be tracked by the cards turned in or the incentives given out. Since this relies on youth to remember to bring their cards, you may want to use this in conjunction with another tracking method.
- Ask youth how they heard about the clinic when they are checking in at the front desk. One example is to have a sheet with pictures of the health educators and ask youth to identify any educators who told them about the clinic.
- Give an anonymous posttest survey at the end of the program asking if youth have gone to a family planning clinic and/or received a HAP card.
- Initiate discussions between program and clinic staff to identify the most feasible and effective strategy to keep track of youth access, while keeping confidentiality concerns in mind.
- Talk with other programs and clinics in your area to share ideas on tracking.

### *To Find Local Family PACT Providers:*

- [www.familypact.org/locator](http://www.familypact.org/locator)