



## Teens & Tots: An Inclusive Approach to Family, Literacy, and Early Childhood Development

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The Teens & Tots program consists of three interactive components. The first component will develop the parenting skills of teen parents to increase the likelihood that their young children are entering kindergarten mentally and physically healthy and ready to learn. The second component will increase the literacy skills of teen parents and thus the likelihood of their graduating from high school and being prepared for college and/or career, and the third component will provide up to 90 hours of credit toward earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, a step toward meeting the requirements for entry-level employment as a childcare professional.

Based on evidence from empirical early childhood research, the Teens & Tots early childhood curriculum will guide teen parents in understanding ways to support optimal social, emotional, and cognitive growth for infants and toddlers age birth through four years old. Teen parents will learn ways to develop skills in their young children, including:

- building trust and healthy relationships;
- setting routines and procedures;
- supporting safe exploration and independence;
- using positive guidance and discipline;
- understanding infant and child temperaments;
- managing stress;
- recognizing abuse and neglect; and
- supporting early language development such as phonological processing, vocabulary, and print awareness.

Early childhood and literacy specialists will mentor and coach teen parents in applying practices that focus on age-appropriate interactions with their children in real-world skills such as expanding children's utterances, dialogic reading, and building vocabulary. Early childhood specialists will accompany the teen parents on visits to early childcare facilities, and guide them in ways to assess the quality of the facilities and whether it would be a good fit for their child.

Because teen parents need to be able to financially support their young children, and because low literacy levels limit employment opportunity, the Teens & Tots program will concurrently provide evidence-based, systematic instruction and support that will increase the teens' literacy levels. Each teen parent's reading, writing and speaking skills will be assessed, and specific, targeted instruction will be given to meet their literacy needs.

Over 

**Population to be served:** Teens & Tots will serve 30 teen parents ages 14 – 18 who are currently enrolled in a New Orleans public school. Recruitment efforts will be facilitated through collaboration with public high schools (charter and direct-run), churches and community organizations. Interested teens will be interviewed and selected based upon their commitment to (a) increasing their parenting skills and literacy skills, (b) punctual and consistent attendance, and (c) active participation.

**Removing the barriers:** Childcare will be provided for qualifying teen parents who want to participate but have no one to care for their child while they are in attendance. Also, because the teen parents will be foregoing summer employment to attend Teens & Tots, they will be awarded a stipend.

**Duration of the program:** The nine-month program will begin in March and conclude in November 2015. Participant recruitment and commitment will take place in April and May. Parenting, early childhood, and literacy classes will take place Monday – Friday from 8:30am to 3:30pm in June and July. Four monthly 2.5-hour follow-up coaching and mentoring sessions will be held, one each in August, September, October, and November.

**Anticipated Outcomes:** Increased knowledge and skills of teen parent participants in the following areas:

- Child development and parenting skills as measured by pre- and post-assessments
- Reading skills as measured by pre- and post- assessments
- Writing skills as measured by a pre-and post-writing sample analysis
- Speaking skills and public service as measured by individual community presentations and participant surveys