

## **Showcase NC: Baby Think It Over Program™**

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Teen pregnancy is one of our nation's most talked about problems. In the United States today, an estimated 1 million teen girls will become pregnant. In Cumberland County, [\[1\]](#)North Carolina, the number of pregnancies to girls between the ages of 15 and 19 years was 99.3 per 1000 teens. (Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina 1998.) These numbers place Cumberland County third in the state for teenage pregnancy.

As high school students in family life class, many of us may remember carrying home a boiled egg or a sack of flour to simulate a real baby and its personal needs. However, this boiled egg or sack of flour did not cry at inopportune times or wake us up in the middle of the night for a feeding. Rick Jurmain, a scientist, noted the lack of realism in this type of experience as he and his wife watched a TV show about teens simulating the care of babies in this type of program. Tinkering in his garage, Jurmain created a prototype to realistically simulate a baby's constant and unpredictable demand for attention, and the Baby Think It Over Program™ was born.

The Baby Think It Over Program™ is an intense education program used for teen pregnancy prevention and parenting education. The goal is to educate both male and female teenagers by using "infant simulators" that are designed to help teens understand what it is like to be the primary caregiver for a baby. The program consists of a life-like vinyl baby that may be normal, cranky, or easy, and that cries at random 24 hours a day. Unlike the egg and sack of flour, you cannot simply hide the baby in a locker or give it to someone else because the baby will "tattle" on you. Each student is given a plastic probe for "feeding" or "tending" to his or her baby when it cries. The probe is strapped to the student's wrist with a tamper proof armband to make sure the student is the only one who cares for the baby he or she is issued.

The Baby Think It Over Program™ allows teenagers to explore the physical, emotional, social, and financial consequences of teen parenthood. This innovative project helps teens understand three important facts about babies.

- Babies' demands are unpredictable and must be met promptly.
- Babies require a great deal of time and attention.
- Babies change a parent's life profoundly.

The program in Cumberland County consists of four sessions. During the first session, students attend a three-hour workshop. The first two hours consist of a pre-questionnaire, The Baby Think It Over™ video, "What's in the Nursery" activity, how the baby works, diary, budgeting worksheet, and setting goals. Students are also divided into hands-on learning groups. Here they learn how to operate the stroller and car seat/carrier, insert the care key (probe), and hold the baby. During the last hour, students are issued their babies. The second and third sessions involve actual parenting simulation. The fourth session consists of students bringing back their infants, answering a post-questionnaire, parent evaluation, and recording computer simulation readout. Students are given a letter grade according to how many times the head was not supported, and if the baby was abused and/or neglected.

In November 1998, Cumberland County Cooperative Extension received more than \$20,000 from Cumberland County Community Development and the March of Dimes to implement The Baby Think It Over Program™ in the county. Forty-four infant simulators were purchased, as well as strollers, car seat/carriers, diaper bags, and other equipment.

As of June 1999, Cumberland County Cooperative Extension enrolled 381 students between the ages of 10 and 18 during an eight-month period. The success rate for these teens has been tremendous. To our knowledge, not one teen who went through the program has gotten pregnant or has gotten anyone pregnant. The program is in such high demand that Cumberland County Community Development has agreed to fund the project again. This additional money will go towards a full-time project coordinator. High school teachers have already scheduled the program for the year 2000.

The biggest reward is to hear the remarks after the four-day simulation. Here are just a few. **"Cut this key off my arm, I am going to wait to have kids," "I don't want to have kids," "I am going home to catch up on my sleep," "I cannot afford a baby at my age," "I could not even talk on the phone because of this baby,"** and lastly, **"People gave me ugly looks because they thought I was a teen mom."**

The results in Cumberland County can be repeated in other counties and other states. The program is expensive, but the old saying that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" holds true with The Baby Think It Over Program.™ Compare the cost of preventing teen pregnancy with the cost of programs supporting families headed by teens. Compare the cost with

the lost and limited opportunities for teen parents, many of whom fall into a life-long cycle of poverty and welfare dependency. For these teens, **some decisions last a life time.**[\[2\]](#)

**Notes:**

1. More than 307,800 residents made Cumberland County home in 1998. Fayetteville, the county seat, has nearly 113,500 residents. Fayetteville is among the fastest-growing areas in the state. Newcomers from all over the world arrive in Greater Metro Area of Fayetteville every day. Some come because of their military link to Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base. The city, with its solid military and retail business base, is ever changing. Cumberland County has an unusual population growth pattern, with extremely large number of births combined with net out-migration. [Return to text.](#)

2. *Editor's Note:* The state of North Carolina has awarded \$250,000 in grants from the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program (APPP) to fund North Carolina teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Four projects in Vance, Haywood, Swain, and Camden/Currituck/Pasquotank counties will receive five-year grants. The grants will support work in teaching life skills and sexuality education, matching high-risk youth with mentors, and providing academic assistance and career preparation activities to teens. For more information, see the [June 28, 1999 press release](#) from the Department of Health and Human Services. [Return to text.](#)

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