

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide information on the challenges teen moms face
- Create support for teen moms who are breastfeeding

## RESOURCE

[Hopehouseofcolorado.org](http://Hopehouseofcolorado.org)

## INTRO

During our 60 minutes together, we will look at the obstacles teen mothers face and effect this has on their breastfeeding relationship with their child. We will discuss statistics that impact teen moms right here in Colorado. Some will shock you. To understand why breastfeeding success is so low among teen mothers, we must understand the root of the problem. This includes factors outside of nursing. The topics will include:

- EDUCATION
- TEEN MOTHERS LIVING BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE
- TEEN MOTHERS RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE
- ABUSE AND NEGLECT

## MY STORY

I'll be telling my personal story! I had my daughter when I was 18 years old. I have struggled, but I have also conquered. My daughter is now 3 years old and still nursing! There's no doubt that being a mother is one of the most challenging jobs on the planet, especially for a teen mother; add breastfeeding to the mix, and you have a whole new set of battles. I want to paint a picture of what it truly looks like for a teen mom on a day to day basis, from school, to family, to nursing! Financial, mental, and situational struggles play a huge role in the outcome of breastfeeding relationships between mother and child, and I want you to see exactly what I'm talking about through my eyes and my journey.

***Your packet will include a full print out of my story.***

## HOPE HOUSE

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Hope House of Colorado is a nonprofit organization that helps teen mothers reach self-sufficiency. Some of the programs they offer include GED, College & Career, Legal Advocacy, Parenting, and Early Learning. They also provides meals, diapers, wipes, and formula! Hope House will serve 200 teen moms this year, but even in this safe and loving community, there are teen moms struggling with breastfeeding. They need your support.

## CONTACT

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## TEENS AND BREASTFEEDING

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I will be connecting everything I talk about to real teen mom stories and either what I've observed or what they have said themselves about breastfeeding. Nursing is sometimes a touchy subject for some people, so I appreciate the moms that volunteered to participate in my research. I created a survey that included a total of 26 questions, all related to breastfeeding, economic status, and mental/physical health. I hosted a lunch session at the Hope House of Colorado Resource Center, where I invited teen moms to sit with me and chat about breastfeeding for an hour and participate in this survey. Here are few topics that I will be highlighting in this portion of my presentation based on what teen moms have reported:

- Support Systems
- Length of time the teen moms successfully breastfed
- Financial Struggles
- Mental/physical health of mother
- Formula before 1st birthday
- Knowledge of breastfeeding benefits
- Support at Hope House

## YOU ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION

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I want to hear what you think. How do you think we can help teen moms in Colorado breastfeed successfully? What do we need to provide for them? How can we help teens breastfeed while helping them balance school, work, money, and stress that comes along with motherhood? Do we need volunteers? Do we need donations? Do we need funding?

### How are YOU equipped to help?

Reach out to me or to Hope House if you want to partner with us to support teen moms who are nursing.

## MY STORY | JADA GALASSINI

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My love for breastfeeding starting three years ago on July 29th, 2015. The moment I heard my daughter's first cry, saw her sweet face, and latched her on, I knew I wanted to continue our breastfeeding bond for a long time. But there were many problems and challenges that came my way over the next few years that I wasn't quite prepared for.

I found out I was pregnant in my Senior year of high school. I was just 17 years old. I didn't even know how to drive at the time (LOL). Like most teenagers, I didn't have many responsibilities and didn't care about much. My priorities were hanging out with friends, my boyfriend, and staying up late listening to music.

At the time of my pregnancy, I was already attending an alternative high school in the evenings and did most of my work online. So I was able to continue going to school there. I sat down with my school counselor to see how many credits I needed to graduate. It was difficult to realize that I needed to complete an extra year of schooling and would not be graduating with the rest of my class. An extra year of school -- that left me with a big problem. What about my baby? How will my baby be cared for while I'm finishing school and who would watch her? How would she be fed and when would I have time to spend with her?

Initially, I thought about formula because it would be easiest to transport and easiest to feed her. Well, I quickly realized that formula is expensive! A 33 ounce container of Target brand formula costs \$22; a 32 ounce container of Similac costs \$29; and a 20 ounce container of Enspire by Enfamil costs \$40. At the time, although I felt a special bond while nursing my daughter, I didn't know much about the benefits of breastfeeding over formula. But the cost of formula alone was enough for me to say, "I'm nursing my baby!" I had other expenses to worry about, like diapers, clothes, bottles and all the gear my baby was going to need. As teen mom, I knew I was going to struggle. During this uncertain time, the one thing I knew I could do when my baby arrived was feed her. That was my plan because I simply couldn't imagine spending money I didn't have on formula.

That school year, when summer vacation final arrived, I had the time to begin preparing for my baby's arrival. Man, let me tell you, if it wasn't for my mom and my dad, I don't know what would have happened. They kept me afloat for a very long time. My mom was there to help me prepare for my baby, she was there for the delivery, and she showed me how to nurse lying down, how to swaddle, and how to treat diaper rash. She was also able to get me my first breast pump through her health insurance. However, it only worked some of the time and could only pump one boob at a time. It was BAD! But it was all I had, so it was a blessing. I could not afford anything else. That bad pump helped me feed my daughter while I finished high school. I carried it every day when I walked in the halls. I was ridiculed for it. I plugged it in in storage closets and empty staff offices. I prepped each bottle with care for my daughter. At the time, I couldn't even afford a nursing bra. I wore baggy shirts every day, and I'm sure I was made fun of for that, too.

Being a teen mom and trying to nurse at school was a challenge.

Down the street from my school, there was a teen moms' group that was run by a local church. We met every Wednesday evening, and we talked about everything young moms talk about. I really loved it, but out of that group, I was the only one breastfeeding my child. I wondered why the other teen moms weren't nursing, but I was too nervous to ask about it. Through this group, I realized how rare it is for teen moms to successfully breastfeed. For the first time, I began thinking through some of the obstacles teen moms face with nursing.

When my daughter reached 7 months old, a lot of big things happened. I finished school a little earlier than expected and was able to spend the last couple of months of the school year at home with my baby. All at once, it seemed my daughter was learning how to crawl and walk. I had my first big parenting scare when she contracted RSV, a really bad respiratory virus. And around the same time, I develop mastitis and got food poisoning. I felt like I was just barely holding on, with a crazy, biting, nursing baby. It was overwhelming. I felt like I wasn't doing anything right in caring for my daughter. I felt that way every single day.

Nursing and motherhood were taking so much out of me. But through it all, I was grateful for the time I had at home with my baby. It was because of my family support that I was able to push through, and I am still able to push through. I often think of all the other teen moms who feel overwhelmed like I did but also must work and go to school while that breastfeeding bond is still being established.

The reality is, many teen moms have limited support and limited funds; remember 67% live below the federal poverty line, and they carry the stress and burden of providing the basic needs of the household and the basic needs for themselves. Can you imagine?

Being a teen mom is not easy, and it was not easy for me, but I always take a second to think about how lucky I am to have been able to breastfeed my daughter this long and to have the support that I do. My daughter is three years old now, and I am still nursing her. Through everything, nursing has been the most consistent thing in our relationship and the biggest reason why she is so close to me.

I am pretty open about breastfeeding with everyone; if breastfeeding does become normalized, I feel that I deserve at least half the credit. It's that important to me, and I love talking about it. But as a nursing teen mom, it is hard to feel accepted, and it is hard to feel like you belong with other moms.

For example, when I was almost sure I had thrush because my daughter's latch hurt so badly, I went to a breastfeeding group that was offered at my doctor's office for all nursing moms. When I got there, I immediately realized something: all of the moms were older than I, and none of them were teen moms. I got the sense that they were not interested in talking to me! They had fancy strollers, Gucci diaper bags, pumps and nursing equipment plated in gold. But there I was. I was dropped off by my older brother who could drive, I had holes in my shoes, and a list of problems clouding my head. As I sat in that room full of moms that I had nothing in common with, I had so

many nursing questions, but I was too embarrassed to ask. Of course, I wasn't going to ask about how to make sure you are getting the proper nutrition to nurse when buying all three meals plus snacks a day is a problem. Of course, I wasn't going to ask about how to find the right nursing bra when my budget was \$5. And of course, I wasn't going to ask, "What if I really have a breast-feeding problem, and I need a lactation consultant to come to my home?"-- when I knew that I couldn't possibly afford that.

How can any teen mom navigate through all of this while going to school, working, or taking care of a child and sometimes other family members as well?

The reality for many teen moms is that they also take care of other family members and the bills of other family members. My family took care of my grandparents before they passed away, and I made most of my grandpa's meals before he died. Before that, I lived with my mom and helped with my younger siblings. My parents both worked a lot, and sometimes that's a necessity when you have so many people living in a household. You depend on each other. I remember it being hard sometimes to just find a moment to nurse my daughter in peace in the chaos of my home, and it made my mind chaotic, too. My mental state and living situation definitely made it hard to love motherhood and breastfeeding in my daughter's first years.

For teen moms, committing to nursing and understanding the benefits is hard when you have so many other obligations and challenges in your life that feel like they should be more important. For some moms, that's the pressure of family members, the pressure to help with bills, or feeling like we are obligated to give other people the chance to feed our baby how they want to. Without proper support or knowledge, and living in downright stressful situations, how can we possibly stick up for ourselves, our children, and our choices when, frankly, we're just too tired sometimes?

Every single teen mom I know is incredible. But every one of them has difficult backgrounds. The things that they have endured and overcome are truly remarkable. Teen moms who cannot rely on the support of family alone need a second family. That's what Hope House of Colorado has been to me. A second family. Hope House is a non-profit organization with the mission to help teen moms reach self-sufficiency. They run completely on donations, resources, and time given by volunteers, and their truly incredible staff. Like I said, some of the girls are coming from pretty tough situations, so it's important they have a place to take classes on healthy relationships, parenting, educational/career development, and legal guidance; a place to safely enjoy a nutritious meal with other moms and staff; a place to get diapers wipes and formula; and for myself and three other girls, a safe place to live.

I currently live at the Hope House Residential Program, where my daughter and I each have our own bedroom and a place to just be ourselves. I can enjoy parenting my daughter, including nursing, in a peaceful home. Hope House helped me get the job I have now where I am able to bring my daughter with me to work as often or as little as I like. Hope House's legal advocate helped me leave my toxic and abusive relationship, helping me through the process to get a permanent restraining order, and make sense of my life.

Hope House loves their girls. I'm incredibly blessed to have found this amazing organization. At Hope House, I am part of a community with 200 teen moms. It in this community that my passion for supporting teen moms has developed, and I've realized that we can do more at Hope House and as a community to support teen moms. My goal is to see breastfeeding classes offered at Hope House and to create a breastfeeding support group. I would also like to see Hope House partner with a lactation consultant to answer critical questions teen moms have about nursing.

If Hope House, and other non-profits like it, are going to offer support to teen moms, like supply costly breastfeeding supplies for nursing moms, it needs partners in the community like you who can offer solutions and can help teen moms overcome challenges. Teen moms need information on how to safely store milk while at work or school; information for family and care givers on the importance of pace feeding; information on the laws that ensure safety and adequate nursing space for working teen moms. We need people like you to make sure that teen moms are not forgotten in the breastfeeding world.

As a teen mom, I'm committed to seeing positive change, I won't stay silent any more. I'm over any embarrassment I've felt in the past, and I've come to this conference to ask for help because Lord knows these teen moms need it.

It's not a coincidence that I'm up here and I'm talking to you today. There's a reason why I applied when I saw the call for abstracts for the 2018 lactation conference. I remember when I first walked into Hope House, and I had a feeling that I was meant to do something there. I didn't know what it was at the time, but now I know I am called to help other teen moms who come from situations similar to mine. I plan to become a Registered Nurse and earn my IBCLC. And maybe one day I'll be on staff at Hope House, running breastfeeding groups and giving support to teen moms just like me. But for now, I will use my voice to advocate and spread my awareness of the problem these teen moms are facing. That is my career mission.