

LA OPINION

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A guide for teenage parents

Young people share their experiences about what it is like to have a baby at an early age

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While Pablo Alarcón enlisted yesterday morning to make his presentation to a group of young people and parents at California State University Dominguez Hills, he said he is grateful for his own experience as a teenager.

"I remember we were eating hamburgers and my girlfriend brought me the pregnancy test that said positive ... I was young and scared but at the same time, I also felt happy," the man recalled with his now wife, Dulce Espinoza.

Both, 21 years old, became parents for the first time when they were 16 years old and just four months ago, they received their second baby.

Alarcón acknowledged that his first child was difficult; However, it was also the motivation I needed to mature.

"I was not on the right path and I was always on the streets," said the Mexican.

Alarcon confessed that in a beginning, he thought about getting away from Espinoza, who was already gestating, because he thought it would not be a good company for her or her son.

But shortly after, she began attending a program for teenage mothers at El Nido Family Center and he accompanied her.

"When I attended the classes of parents I learned that from 0 to 5 years old, 80% of children's brain development occurs and I understood that only with that I would be missing the best years of my son when wanting to flee", Alarcón said.

For his part, his wife indicated that although at first he felt that he disappointed his parents with the unplanned pregnancy, both have been able to show their families that they are moving forward.

"Now I want to go back to school and take a nursing career," he said.

<image002.jpg>Jennifer Rodríguez (left) and Ashley Grijalva are young mothers and volunteers with El Nido Family Center. (Jacqueline García)

Mothers create bond with their babies

The presentation of Alarcón was the fourth annual conference of Teenagers and Young Parents in CSUDH, sponsored by El Nido Family Center - an organization that is responsible for providing educational, youth development, health and therapeutic services to adolescent parents and young adults.

The conference also included sisters-in-law Ashley Grijalva, 21, and Jennifer Rodríguez, 20, and a girlfriend of Grijalva's brother.

The latter said she had been pregnant at age 19, which initially was a great disappointment to her mother, since she was the youngest of eight children.

"When I realized I already had three months. I went for a physical exam and they confirmed it. I was in shock but I knew it was possible because I did not use protection," he said.

"My mom did not take it very well at first ... but we almost did not look at her because she had two jobs and was the only provider in the house," she said, adding that her father had been deported when she was about 12 years old.

Grijalva said that shortly after she learned about the El Nido program in South Los Angeles and that when she chose to participate, she started attending Mommy and me classes, where she learned how important it is to talk to the baby since is in the womb.

Feeling in a family atmosphere and with attention, motivated her so that even while pregnant she graduated from high school.

Currently Grijalva is the mother of three girls, 2 and 1 year old and another 3 months old.

The young woman indicated that she continues in the relationship with the father of the girls and both do everything possible to get ahead.

"I do not regret anything and seeing my daughters grow is very beautiful. When I'm sad they come and they make me happy," said the Compton resident.

For her part, Rodríguez, who is married to Allen Martín Urzúa - Grijalva's older brother - said that she had been pregnant at the age of 16.

With the baby in her arms, she confesses that she was not interested in the El Nido program but Grijalva told her that they gave her diapers, wipes and baby things for free.

Initially that was his motivation to get to the center but once there, he says he felt like a family.

"I was very self-conscious to talk and here they taught me to speak in public. They also teach you classes on how to breastfeed and how to take care of the baby," said Rodríguez, 20 years old.

Both continue to attend El Nido Family Center where they not only receive training to become mothers but also volunteer for events like this conference.

<image003.jpg>Jennifer Rodríguez with her son Allen Martín Urzúa, 3 years old. (Supplied)

Family support

Javier Ramírez, youth director at El Nido, said the main objective of the annual conference is for young parents to share their experiences with one another.

"Because many times parents tend to feel isolated and it is better to share experiences and resources," he said.

"We learn from other parents. We also discussed how to have healthy and stable relationships and how to continue with higher education. "

Ramírez said that one of the main reasons why the conference takes place on the university campus is to motivate young people who have never set foot on a higher education campus on many occasions.

The South Los Angeles Nest serves around 500 youth but there are also locations in Panorama City and Pacoima. The young people who are part of the program assure that with the necessary help it is possible to get ahead.

Alarcón and Espinoza, who now have two children, said they enjoy family time very much and especially when they go to community events.

"I always try to involve my children and teach them what I can," said the father.

The couple said that with patience and help everything can be done.

"We are not telling them to have children but if they already have them remember that a child comes as a blessing," the couple stressed.

Dozens of young parents attended the conference on Tuesday

To learn more about El Nido and its programs

visit: <https://www.elnidofamilycenters.org/>