

## Valentina Suarez



Most teenagers' lives are a juggling act. Figuring out how to balance school, extracurricular and social commitments can often prove to be a challenge.

**Valentina Suarez** certainly knows the feeling. During her sophomore year in high school, Valentina carried a full class load, maintained good grades, was involved in her community and had more friends than a she could count.

Valentina's stress level rose to an unexpected high later that year when she discovered she was pregnant. Once she got over the initial shock, Valentina began to wonder how she could handle the pressures of high school and motherhood. She was also concerned that she may never realize her dream of going to college. But more than anything, Valentina feared how her friends and family – particularly her mother – would take the news.

Scared and unsure about her options, Valentina turned to her school social worker for advice. The social worker suggested she participate in the **Young Parents Program**

group held at her school. While she was apprehensive at first, Valentina was relieved once she realized the group was consisted of other girls who knew exactly what she was going through.

In addition to providing Valentina with the support and counseling she needed, the Young Parents Program helped prepare her for her new role as a mother. She learned about the importance of healthy prenatal habits, parenting tips and what to expect at each stage of her baby's development. The Young Parents Program also connected Valentina with day care providers and encouraged her to continue her education.

When Valentina looks back on her pregnancy, she'll be the first to say that it was an uncertain time in her life. But today, she is focused on being the best mother she can be for her two-year-old daughter, Nicole. Valentina is also looking forward to her own future. She recently earned her high school diploma and is now enrolled in college courses in hopes of becoming a judge one day.

"The Young Parents Program was with me every step of the way," she said. "The support and advice I received really made a difficult situation so much easier. And because of the program, I am a better mother and a more confident person."