

Aprale

People should be more sympathetic and understanding. Don't just say, 'Oh, she's a teen mom. She's dumb. She made a bad choice.' You're judging the person based off something that's not in their control anymore. Recognize that everybody's story is different.



My name is Aprale. I am twenty-three years old, and I have a six-year-old son. He will be seven in July, which is one month after I graduate from Cal State San Bernardino. He loves to read. And he's in baseball. Basically, his interests are my interests right now. His life is what I do. I think that's part of what it means to be a parent. You can't be selfish anymore in your time and your expectations.

You can do the math - I was fifteen years old when I got pregnant. At first I was in denial. My period was late, and the days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months. It was six months before my parents found out I was pregnant. I was just barely showing. My mom told me later she had just been hoping that I had been drinking a lot of beer.

I'm telling you, my whole house was just chaotic with fighting and animosity. It was horrible. When my dad found out he called me on the phone when I was at school and he said, "I don't want to f'in talk to you ever again. You're

nothing but a ho." I still remember that, to this day. That stuff that they say, and that feeling, it never leaves you.

I was a good student. I had straight A's. I never did anything bad. Getting pregnant was totally out of character for me. And it's totally on me - I didn't have a horrible childhood or anything. I wasn't looking for a father figure. We were just together, and it happened. I just had this mentality, like, "Oh, it can't happen to me." But it did!

I was ashamed of myself when I got pregnant, and I became depressed. I had to get dragged out of the house because I just wanted to stay in my room, and I would do whatever I could to hide my big belly. There were just so many people staring.

Physically, I could just flip them off and be like, "Whatever." But mentally, I'm gonna go home and be thinking, "Dang, five people stared at me today." I have no pictures of me pregnant. I didn't want anybody to see me pregnant, and I didn't want any reminders. I wasn't at all attached to my son, though



Photos of Aprale after giving birth at the age of 16, and graduating Cum Laude from CSUSB, clipped to a hand-crafted board along with her graduation cap.

that all changed immediately when he was born.

When I was pregnant, and still after I had my son, a lot of my friends, their parents didn't want them hanging out with me because they saw me as this horrible person. When you're a teen mom, people also think you're too young to make your own decisions. At the hospital, when I delivered my son, they were really rude. They wouldn't even bring me water when I asked. Then, at his first wellness check-up, all the doctor gave me was dirty looks. He would only talk to my mom.

A lot of people assumed I wasn't raising him. I did go back to school two weeks after my son was born. My mom would take care of him during the day. But when I got home at 2:30, he was all mine. I remember being half asleep, burping

him, feeding him, and then going off to school. My mom did help me, but she was also clear that this was my child.

People also assume I'm on welfare. I've never been on welfare. And at his baseball games I get people rolling their eyes when they hear him, "Mom, look at this!" I don't think the stigma of being a teen mom is ever going to go away. I'm gonna be thirty with a teenager, and his friends are going to be saying, "That's your mom?" It's something I'm always going to live with.

I wish I could say that being a teen mom doesn't define me, but it does. That doesn't mean my life is over. I'm graduating from college! My life is just beginning. And, kids are a joy! Yes, they're pains in the butt, but they're also a joy. And at the end of the day you can laugh about the annoying stuff they do.

You can't be self-centered when you have a kid. You have to change your whole life to accommodate them. But when you see they're becoming a good person, and you're teaching them that, I feel like it's totally worth it.



"The DIY project as a whole signifies my biggest struggle and my biggest accomplishment, all in one. Just because you look young doesn't mean you're not a good mother. Just because you're a young mother doesn't mean you won't be successful."