

modernmother



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embracing *Motherhood*

*one young woman balances school, motherhood,
and being a teenage girl.*

“**T**hose girls are just full of drama really. I don’t like them. Well, I do and I don’t. Their show shows me what I don’t wanna do and what I might want to do,” says Jaylynn Zimmerman about MTV’s hit series *Sixteen and Pregnant*. The series has gained mixed reviews from the public. The show has come under fire before for supposedly glamorizing the issue of teenage pregnancy and making it more appealing to teenagers. It has also been applauded for showing the struggles of motherhood and that it is a life-changing decision. Jaylynn’s opinion on the show, however, is more relevant than some critics’ analysis might be. Jaylynn is a teen mom herself, but she is not 16 and pregnant. She is just 15-years old and has her two-month old daughter, Natalie Schall.



Tyrell plays Playstation 2 with his cousin, Ricky (not pictured), while holding Natalie so Jaylynn can help her sister, Jasmine with her homework: a report on her puppy.

Jaylynn's youngest half-sister, Jasmine Jones, holds and kisses Natalie as Jaylynn plays Playstation 2 with Tyrell. "I don't think I would be able to do it without all the help I get from everyone," Jaylynn says.

Taylor Jones, one of Jaylynn's half-sisters, holds Natalie so Jaylynn can make her a bottle. The two younger sisters frequently watch Natalie if Jaylynn is busy or must run errands.

Teenage pregnancy is not a new trend, and the rates are actually declining in the United States. The most recent statistics show that for every 1,000 people in the country there are 34 teenage (ages 15-19) mothers. Jaylynn lives in Glouster, Ohio which is in Athens County where there have been 461 teenage pregnancies so far this year. Despite being part of this statistic, there is one number she is not a part of: the dropout rate for teenage mothers. The top reason young women drop out of high school is because they are ashamed that they are young mothers. Jaylynn is not apart of the 70% of teen moms that do not finish school after having their baby. This is a fact she is pretty proud of.

"I decided to stay in school because if I wouldn't have stayed in school and I dropped out I wouldn't have provided a good life for Natalie and me, so I decided to stay in school," says Jaylynn.

She is currently a sophomore at Athens High School. Her schedule is mostly study

halls to help her make up the work that was due while she was out earlier in the semester when she gave birth to Natalie. Jaylynn made honor roll every year from the fourth grade on until last school year. She is determined to make up her work, bring up her grades, and graduate. She has her goals set high. Jaylynn is considering going to college to further her education beyond high school, but has yet to decide for sure.

"I'm going to play volleyball again next year, and my baby is going to be in the stands cheering me on. She's gonna be my biggest fan," Jaylynn says proudly.

Jaylynn is qualified for Women, Infants, and Children benefits (WIC) which is a government-funded program that helps mothers afford nutritional food for their children up until they are old enough to go to school. The program is for low-income families. Neither Jaylynn or Eric, or as his friend know him Tyrell, work. Tyrell hopes to join the military, preferably the Army, soon.



Jaylynn's study hall teacher Mrs. Pierce hugs Jaylynn during her study hall. "She is just such a sweetheart," Mrs. Pierce or, as students called her Mama Pierce. Mrs. Pierce was also a young mother. She has a photo of Natalie that Jaylynn gave her. Tyrell took the photo while Natalie was still in the hospital. He has taken photography classes at school.

Jaylynn is lucky to have a strong support system surrounding her which includes her sisters, her mother, and her boyfriend, Eric, who is also Natalie's father. Many young mothers find themselves very much on their own. Her family did not throw her out. Her boyfriend did not leave her. No one is shunning her in her family.

"My mom wasn't happy at first. She made me make her dinner the night that I told her. Then, after that she didn't talk to me for weeks," Jaylynn recalls. "Now she will help with whatever I need. She loves Natalie."

The support flows over into her school life. Mrs. Pierce who is referred to as Mama Pierce by her students is Jaylynn's study hall teacher. She holds a special place in her heart for Jaylynn because she can relate.

"I got pregnant shortly after I dropped out of high school in '72. I did not even get my diploma until 2002 when I went back to school. Girls weren't allowed to go to school and be mothers back then. It was a different time. She's doing well for herself. She's just such a sweetheart," Mrs. Pierce says of Jaylynn.

The families of the couple also help out with whatever they need whether that be babysitting or helping with purchasing typical baby items. Jaylynn has four babysitters



“The challenges I face are taking care of Natalie, going to school, and still getting to be a teenager.”



Natalie sits beside her friend Dharma in the cafeteria during lunch at school as she, Dharma, and Maddie look at nail art and nail polish ideas on Dharma's iPhone. Jaylynn decorates Natalie a Christmas stocking with glitter pens.

she can turn to just within her family. Her mother and grandmother can babysit for her while she is at school during the week. Her younger half-sisters, Taylor and Jasmine, also help babysit for Jaylynn if she has to run errands. Jaylynn credits the help she receives from Tyrell, his family, and her family as to why she is able to handle being such a young mother.

“She’s a daddy’s girl. She always smiles with me,” Tyrell says. “Being away from them is the most challenging part for me because the distance and everything. And with me going to school and being far from the girls and stuff, it’s kind of the worst part about being a dad.”

Tyrell and Jaylynn have been together for almost two years now. They have broken up several times during their relationship but have not during Jaylynn’s pregnancy or

since they have had Natalie. Jaylynn wears a pink gemstone ring on her ring finger that she and Tyrell once found outside one day. Despite going to different high schools, the couple still spends the majority of their time together.

“We do get to have time to ourselves. It’s like usually when we stay up late after Natalie goes to bed,” Jaylynn says.

Jaylynn and Tyrell get to find time to spend with each other almost every day but spending time with friends is not quite the same scenario. Between going to school, coming home taking care of a baby, and maintaining a relationship, most of Jaylynn’s time is booked.

“My friends were supportive while I was pregnant, but I don’t really talk to them as much as I used to,” Jaylynn admits.

Her friends sit around her at school and make plans to study and stay at each others’ houses.



Jamie, Jaylynn's mother, holds Natalie at Holzer Clinic in Athens, Ohio during Natalie's two-month check up for her vaccinations. "She smiles more with me than she does you," Jamie tells Jaylynn.

Despite being sometimes judged for being a young mother, Jaylynn is ahead of most of the young women her age that find themselves in similar situations as herself. A 15-year old mother who is also a student is definitely the minority. Jaylynn and Tyrell have accepted the new responsibility of parenthood and are doing the best they can to ensure Natalie has a good future. Both are working toward their high school diplomas and are planning on working.

"I mainly want her to stay in school and to not have kids at a young age," Jaylynn says as she describes what she wishes for her daughter's future.