

Problem Pregnancy

There's Always A Father

Does the Father Have a Problem, Too?

Is your partner pregnant? If so, you may feel shaken and confused. You may feel trapped, panicky, desperate and possibly angry and bitter.

If you're not married to your partner, the disapproval and removal of support from those around you might lead you to put pressure on your partner or to run from the situation or to deny that you are the father. You may know what you want to do, but have no money to help your partner. You may not love each other, even though your families want the two of you to marry. You may feel you're too young for this kind of responsibility.

You may feel all alone, having to make such important decisions about your future and your relationship. Even if you are married, pregnancies can cause severe problems. How do you face the decision such a problem pregnancy forces on you? How do you go about making decisions? Where can you turn for help?

First, remember that you are not alone. God is present with you in all circumstances of your life, even now. There is always the hope of God's presence with us in every moment of our lives. "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us." With that hope, you have crucial matters to consider.

This resource has been developed for men facing the news of problem pregnancy with an unmarried partner in a variety of difficult circumstances.

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 General Assembly Mission Council

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of your life, even now.*

What Do You Need to Think About?

How about your relationship with your partner?

Your partner may feel all alone now. She may be angry, confused, hurt, worried and feeling betrayed. She may feel that she's the only one who has to suffer, even though you're both involved in this situation. She may feel left out of her usual activities, because of her pregnancy. She may be in trouble with her family or worried about her job. Your partner may be turned away by her friends. She may also wonder if she can expect any help or sympathy from you, her church, or her school. Maybe you thought you both were being careful, but either her birth control method or yours failed. What do you do now?

Communicate with her.

This is your problem pregnancy, too. Both of you are impacted by the pregnancy, even if the decisions that follow are hers. You may be able to share in the decisions that have to be made about this pregnancy. You have a responsibility to remain involved with your partner throughout the problem pregnancy. Let her know you won't abandon her. You don't always have to agree about everything, but the two of you can still face the future by talking with one another.

Find someone with whom you both can talk.

Don't try to make all the decisions by yourselves. Consider talking with parents, other relatives, pastors, teachers, counselors, health care professionals (such as nurses and doctors), or other professional helpers (such as social workers). Be sure to consult with people with whom both you and your partner are comfortable.

When you listen to your friends, remember that they may say things you want to hear, yet those may not be the most helpful things. Don't expect everyone to agree with your decisions. Some of your friends may support you, while others may react negatively to your situation. Some may even abandon you. You'll find, however, that there's plenty of help available for you. So don't be discouraged.

If you're in school, stay in school if you can.

A good education is important for both of you. A high school diploma is more necessary than ever if you want to have a chance of getting a good job some day. Your chances are even better if you can complete studies at a vocational school or college. It may be difficult to do, but finish your education no matter how hard it might seem to be because of the pregnancy. Finish your education if you possibly can.

You don't always have to agree about everything, but the two of you can still face the future by talking with one another.

What Are Your Choices?

You Have Two Basic Choices:

1. Avoid responsibility (Run or deny it)

When a crisis hits, often the first reaction is to run. You want to get away from what you do not want to face—to deny any responsibility for the crisis. This is a very real temptation. If this is an option you are considering, give serious thought to the following:

- Is this just an attempt to escape responsibility? Are you denying that you're the father? If you had a part in the relationship, now is not the time to avoid responsibility.
- Is running away fair to your partner? Can you live with the hurt and the guilt this may produce?
- Is running or denying the right thing to do?

At this moment, you may not be able to find answers to your problem. Although there may not be any easy answers, there are solutions that will allow you to admit your involvement and to help out in realistic and constructive ways. You can still feel good about yourself now and later on. Running or denying is not responsible behavior.

2. Share the responsibility

Your partner faces serious decisions. The pregnancy is a definite part of her life every minute of the day. She can't run away or avoid making a decision. She has three basic options:

- Keeping the baby
- Making an adoption plan, or
- Having an abortion

What part can you play in these choices?

Keeping the Baby

Your partner may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of motherhood. She may be unsure of her ability financially to provide a good home, food, and clothing for the baby. She may not feel able to raise a child on her own. Such feelings can be very strong if, for example, there's any reason to believe the baby may have serious health conditions. In spite of these concerns, she may still decide she wants to keep the baby. Under these circumstances, what can you do?

You could stay closely involved with your partner and be a great deal of help in terms of financial support for her and the baby. When the baby is born, you can help raise the child to be a responsible person and by your involvement, set a good example for the child to follow.

If you love your partner and want to make a lifelong commitment, you can ask her to marry you and together raise the baby. However, marriage may not be a good solution, if you're doing it only because of the pregnancy.

If your partner decides to keep the baby but is uncertain about her ability to care for the child on a day-to-day basis, you might be able to keep the baby and let her share as much of the responsibility as she can. If the decision is made to keep the baby, please help to ensure that your partner receives good medical care during the entire pregnancy.

What if you disagree with your partner's decision to keep the baby?

Be honest with your partner and let her know your feelings. Let her know what your realistic commitment is toward her and the baby. However, remember that she has the final decision as to whether or not to have the baby and whether to keep the child afterwards.

Making an Adoption Plan

There are many circumstances that might lead a woman to decide that motherhood, at this time, is not right for her. Adoption is another option to consider. Adoption can allow the child to have the care neither of you feel you can now provide. Adoption can give both you and your partner the chance to put your lives back in order and to plan your futures.

Your agreement or approval may or may not be required for an adoption in your home state. However, your emotional support can be very important to your partner at this time. It's equally important that you help in making sure she gets good medical care during the entire pregnancy, so that she is able to deliver a healthy baby.

What if you disagree with your partner's decision to put the baby up for adoption?

You should express your honest feelings to her. You may, by declaring the child to be yours, obtain the "rights of a father," including the right to agree or not agree to the adoption. However, being the biological father of the child does not mean you automatically have any legal claim to the child.

To get answers to these legal questions, you should seek professional help to find out about your rights and all that's involved in this type of decision.

As you are making this very important and difficult decision, you may hear different messages even from people in the church who want to help you.

Having an Abortion

Like the other two options, this choice should be made only after serious and careful thought has been given to the short-term and long-term consequences of such an action. If the decision to have an abortion is made, your emotional support is very important. In about half of all abortion clinic appointments, the man accompanies the woman to give her emotional support. Financial support from you can be extremely important, too. If abortion is the choice, remember the safest abortions are performed during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. A delay in making this decision may create greater risks for the woman during the procedure.

What if you disagree with your partner's decision to have an abortion?

You should express your honest feelings about the matter to your partner, however your consent is not required. Whether the man agrees with her decision or not, the final decision about having an abortion is the woman's to make. You may be disturbed about this lost opportunity for fatherhood, but the final decision still belongs to her. Most men realize that the final decision about having an abortion belongs to the woman. It is important that you express your honest feelings about the matter to her.

What does the church say about abortion?

While Presbyterians do not agree on when human life begins, we do have deep respect for human life. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has recognized that in certain circumstances abortion can be morally acceptable. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) believes that each woman has the ability and the responsibility to make good moral choices regarding a problem pregnancy and that abortion ought to be an option of last resort.

As you are making this very important and difficult decision, you may hear different messages even from people in the church who want to help you. Some may tell you that no matter what the situation, abortion

is wrong. Others may suggest that you should think about abortion only if you have been raped or are the victim of incest. Some may say that you should consider abortion only if your physical life is in danger. Others may say that if you believe you have a severely deformed baby, you should consider abortion. Some people believe that early abortions are more acceptable than those occurring closer to viability, when life could possibly be sustainable outside the woman's womb. Still other people may say that abortion should be considered if you believe that there is no way you can provide care for a baby.

Problem pregnancies are the result of and are influenced by so many complicated and unsolvable circumstances that the church does not have the wisdom or the authority to address each situation. However, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does offer guidance based on reflections and discernment. Abortion is a serious decision and should not be considered as "an easy way out." Abortion should not be used as an alternative to contraception. Abortion should not be used for gender selection or to obtain fetal parts for transplantation. Abortion should be your decision only when you have considered it carefully, along with the other two options, keeping the baby or making an adoption plan.

Additionally, the church has expressed grave moral concern about a particular late term abortion procedure, intact dilation and extraction (commonly called "partial birth" abortion), and has stated that this procedure is appropriate only to save the life of the pregnant woman.

What Now?

This resource has presented the choices you and your partner will consider in making a decision about a problem pregnancy. There are no easy solutions, but satisfactory answers can be found if you look carefully. Your life may change, but it's not over. Through God's grace, you will be able to handle the challenges that a problem pregnancy may present.

You are facing new responsibilities that you may feel you're not ready for, but it is important to try to continue living a normal life. You may have heavy decisions to make, but allow yourself a break every now and then. Be supportive and caring toward your partner because, unlike you, she may not be able to continue with her usual activities. It may take time for everything to work out. Be willing to do things and find solutions one at a time.

Whatever the circumstances, remember that you are not alone. God is with you and help is available, so look for help and accept it. Now is when you need your family, your friends, and the church.

Below are some more suggestions about where to find help:

- pastor (your own or another)
- campus minister or chaplain, if you're in college or the military
- physician
- trusted teacher
- trusted friend
- school counselor
- employee assistance programs
- welfare social worker
- hospital social worker
- certified adoption agency
- other certified counselors or psychologists
- family planning clinics

The Church wants you to feel its love and support, no matter what you decide. Remember that you are a person who is valuable in the sight of God. As the familiar hymn tells us, “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy, like the wideness of the sea. There’s a kindness in God’s justice, which is more than liberty. There is no place where earth’s sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. There is no place where earth’s failings have such kindly judgment given.” You are not alone. God is with you, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Resources

Available from Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS)

Call (800) 524-2612 or visit www.pcusa.org/store to order. The resources are free, however there is a charge for shipping and handling.

Problem Pregnancy — When No Choice is Easy

PDS# 27-526-10-001

Problem Pregnancy — There’s Always a Father.

Does the Father Have a Problem Too?

PDS# 27-526-10-002

Problem Pregnancy — When Pregnancy Involves Loss

PDS# 27-526-10-003

Problem Pregnancy — When You Need Wisdom

PDS# 27-526-10-004

Report of the Special Committee on Problem Pregnancies

and Abortion: Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly (Micah 6:8)

(policy statement and study paper)

PDS# OGA-92-017

The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community and Covenant Creation:

Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion

(policy statement and study paper)

PDS# OGA-88-109

On Late Term Pregnancy

(2006 policy statement of the General Assembly, Item 10-01)

Notes

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