

**Problem
Pregnancy**

**There's
Always
A
Father**

*Does the Father
Have a Problem,
Too?*

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Second Edition

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Is your partner pregnant? If so, you may be shaken and confused. You may feel trapped, panicky or desperate and possibly angry and bitter. If you're not married to each other, the disapproval and nonsupport of those around you might lead you to put pressure on your partner or lead you to run or to deny that you are the father. You may know what you want to do but don't have any money. Your families may want you to marry her but you don't feel you really love her. You may feel you're too young for this kind of responsibility. It's a lonely feeling for you to have to make such important decisions about your future and your relationship to her. If you two are married but the pregnancy causes severe problems, how do you face the decisions such a problem pregnancy forces upon you? If you find yourself in any of these positions, how do you go about making such decisions? Where can you turn for help?

What do you need to think about?

How about your relationship with your partner?

She may feel all alone now. She may be angry, confused, hurt, worried and feeling betrayed. She may feel she's the only one who has to suffer even though you're both involved. She may feel left out of her usual activities. She may be in trouble with her family. She may be turned away by her friends. She may wonder if she can expect any help or sympathy from you, her church or 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. You may be able to share in the decisions that have to be made about this pregnancy. She may not know how to approach you; she may even say she doesn't want to see you. Let her know you won't abandon her and you're willing to stay involved. You don't always have to agree about everything, but the two of you can still try to decide on the future by talking together.

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 workers (such as nurses and doctors) or other professional help (such as social workers). Be sure to consult with those people with whom both of you are comfortable. When you listen to your friends, remember 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 but some people may react negatively to your situation. Some may even abandon you. You'll find, however, there's plenty of help for you - so don't be discouraged.

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

If she's in school, encourage her to stay in as well. A good education is important for each of you. A high school diploma is more necessary than ever if you want to have a chance at getting a good job someday. Your chances are even better if you can finish a vocational school or college. It may be difficult to do, but finish your schooling no matter how hard it might seem to

be because of the pregnancy. Finish school if you possibly can.

What Are Your Choices?

YOU HAVE TWO BASIC CHOICES

Avoid Responsibility *(Run or Deny It)*

When a crisis hits, often the first reaction is to run—to get away from what we may not want to face—to deny any responsibility for the crisis. This is a very real temptation, but one which doesn't spare us soul searching and possible guilt feelings later on. If this is an option you want to consider, you're urged to give serious thought to the following:

- Is this just an attempt to escape or are you serious in denying you're the father? If you had a part in the relationship initially, now is not the time to try to get out of it.
- Is running away fair to your partner? Can you live with the hurt and the guilt this may produce?
- Is running or denying really what you want and feel you should do?

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

Share the Responsibility

Your pregnant 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:

- 1) Keep the baby.
- 2) Make an adoption plan
- 3) Have an abortion.

What part can you play in these choices?

1. Keep the Baby

She may feel overwhelmed by the idea of motherhood, unsure of her ability financially to provide a good home, food and clothing for the baby. Such feelings can be much stronger if, for example, there's any reason to believe the baby may not be normal. In spite of these

concerns, she may still decide she wants to keep the baby. Under these circumstances, what can you do? You can offer to marry her and you both keep the baby. Marriage may not be a good solution if you're doing it only because of the pregnancy. Ideally, marriage is a decision made out of love and a sincere, lifelong commitment to each other.

Another possibility for you to consider is not to marry but still stay closely involved with the mother and the baby. You could be of much assistance in terms of financial support for both the mother and the child. You can still help to make decisions that will allow the child to grow up as a morally responsible person and, by your involvement, be a good example for the child to follow.

If your pregnant partner decides to have the baby but is uncertain about her ability to care for the child on a day-to-day basis, you might want to consider your own circumstances. It might be possible for you 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 do what you can to see that good medical care is provided during the entire pregnancy.

What if you disagree with her decision to keep the baby?

What, if anything, can you do or say about this disagreement? You should be honest with her and let her know your feelings. Let her know what your realistic commitment can be toward her and the baby: however, remember she has the final decision as to whether or not to have the baby and keep the child afterwards.

2. Make an Adoption Plan

There are many circumstances that might lead her to decide that motherhood, at this time, is not right for her. Adoption is another option to be considered. What adoption does for the baby is to allow him or her to be born and can allow the child to have the care neither of you feels you can now provide. What adoption can do for both you and your partner is to give you the chance to put your life back in order and to plan your futures. Your agreement or approval may or may not be required in your home state: however, your emotional support can be very important to the mother at that time. It's equally important that you help in making sure she gets good medical care during the entire pregnancy.

What if you disagree with her decision to put the baby up for adoption?

Again, you should express your honest feelings to her. It may be possible that by declaring the child to be yours, you may obtain the “rights of a father” including the right to agree or not agree to adoption. Just because you are 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. You shouldn't attempt to prevent an adoption, however, unless you want to raise the child and are able to do so yourself.

3. Have an Abortion

Like the other 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 for abortion is made, emotional support by you is very important. Studies have shown in about half of all abortion clinic appointments that the man goes to the clinic with the woman to give her emotional support. Financial support from you can be extremely

important too. If abortion becomes the choice, remember the safest abortions are performed during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. A delay in making this decision may mean greater risks for the woman during the procedure.

What does the church say about abortion?

The “official” church policy notes that problem pregnancies are the result of, and influenced by, so many complicated and unsolvable circumstances that the church has neither the wisdom nor the authority to address each situation. The church has deep respect for human life but not substantial agreement on when it begins. In certain circumstances, abortion can be a morally acceptable decision to make but abortion ought to be an option of last resort. Abortion should not be used instead of birth control, for gender selection only or to obtain fetal parts for transplantation. Additionally, the church has expressed “grave moral concern” about a particular late term procedure, dilation and extraction, and has stated the opinion that this particular procedure is appropriate only to save the life of the pregnant woman. Not all Presbyterians agree with church policy: however,

Presbyterians share the belief that God alone is the Lord of the conscience and most Presbyterians support a woman's ability and responsibility to make good moral choices regarding a problem pregnancy. For additional information on the church's policies, see page 12.

What if you disagree with her decision to have an abortion?

In the case of abortion, your consent is never required. Most men realize the final decision about abortion belongs to the woman, whether the man agrees with her decision or not. You may be disturbed about this lost opportunity for fatherhood but the final decision still belongs to her. It's important, however, that you express your honest feelings about the matter to her.

What Now?

This pamphlet has presented the choices you and she have to consider in making a decision about this problem pregnancy. The possibility of marriage was mentioned in an earlier paragraph. If the two of you are already engaged or are already married, having a baby still may not be the right thing for you at this time. Having a baby may be a threat to

your or her emotional health, education, financial plans or her physical health. An unplanned pregnancy might be a particularly stressful problem if you already have young children. Be as responsible as possible in sorting these things out. There are usually no easy solutions, but satisfactory answers can be found if you look carefully.

Your life may change but it's not over.

You may be facing new responsibilities that you feel you're not ready for, but try to continue living a normal life. You may have heavy decisions to make but allow yourself a break every now and then. Try to be supportive and caring toward your partner because she may not be able to continue with her usual activities. If the two of you decide to share the responsibilities of raising a baby, remember there are joys that will be experienced also. It will take time for everything to work out but be willing to do things and find solutions one-at-a-time and little-by-little.

No matter what the problems or the questions are and no matter what the circumstances are, you are not alone. Help is available, so look for 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 armed services
- physician
- trusted teacher
- trusted adult friend
- school counselor
- welfare social worker
- hospital social worker
- certified adoption agency
- other certified counselors or psychologists
- family planning clinics

The church wants you to feel our love and support, no matter what the decision is. We want you to remember throughout the decision-making process that you're a person who is valuable in the sight of God, and God loves you and will be with you, no matter what.

**For the following resources call
PDS at 1-800-524-2612**

Web address:

www.pcusa.org/marketplace

There's Always A Father

PDS # 72 710 99 015

*When You Need the Wisdom of
Solomon*

PDS# 72 710 99 016

When No Choice is Easy

PDS# 72 710 99 017

Problem Pregnancies and Abortion
(1992 policy paper)

OGA-92-017

*The Covenant of Life and the Caring
Community and Covenant Creation:
Theological Reflections on
Contraception and Abortion (1983
policy paper)* OGA-88-109

**For more information on resources,
contact:**

*Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive
Options (PARO)*, a network officially
affiliated with the church through
the National Ministries Division

Tel: 502-569-5794

Web address:

www.pcusa.org/phewa/paro

Women's Ministries Program Area,
National Ministries Division

Tel: 502-569-5382/85

*Religious Coalition for Reproductive
Choice (RCRC)*, an interfaith group
with Presbyterian participation

Tel: 202-628-7700

Web address: www.rcrc.org

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