

Pregnancy Advisory Centre

Support for Parents: Helpful ways to respond to an unplanned pregnancy

Finding out that your child is pregnant or that your child is the partner involved in a pregnancy can be a very stressful and difficult time, one that carries a variety of feelings, for not only you, but also your children.

Ways to respond to a pregnancy if you are feeling overwhelmed by feelings.....

STOP! Give yourself time to manage your own feelings. What you say at this point can influence the outcome positively or negatively. Your initial reaction can either 'shut down' further discussion or can open the door to trust and cooperation. It's OK to say **"I'm in shock. Give me some time to absorb this news". "I love you. We will figure this out together."** Then set a time to talk soon (generally within 24 hours). Take the time to talk to a professional or someone you trust, possibly your partner, family member or good friend, taking care to ensure the private nature of the information.

Become more informed: A good place to start is

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/pregnancyadvisorycentre>

www.childrenbychoice.org.au

[Metropolitan Youth Health](#)

Elizabeth – phone 8255 3477 (with outreach to Salisbury)

Christies Beach – phone 8326 6053

Angle Park – phone 8243 5637

Talking Realities Young Parenting Program - phone 8243 5637

SHine SA www.shinesa.org.au 1300 794 584

Parent Helpline 1300364100 in SA or www.cyh.com website.

If you have already said something to your child you wish you hadn't, acknowledge that you spoke without thinking, apologise and 'start over' with a more constructive message. Some ideas: **"When I said, '_____' I was in shock and I wasn't thinking. I'm sorry. I really want to be there for you now. I hope you will let me help"**. Be prepared for more anger or hurt, and give your child time to recover. Taking responsibility for your words and apologising can do wonders for communication and your relationship.

Listen and be respectful

Listening to what your child has to say may never have more impact than right now. Have these conversations when you are relatively calm and centred. Your child may say things that anger you, or seem naïve or wrong. Remember, they are forming their own ideas and opinions when thinking about various beliefs and possible future directions. They may not "know" everything, but understanding how they *feel* and what they *believe* is essential in helping them make a plan. You both may benefit from the help of a counsellor to hear each other and to sort through the feelings you each have. Even if you have had a difficult journey with your children previously, this is a critical time to be helpful and supportive, and most importantly, **listen** to them.

Speak from the heart

Sometimes parents are so often playing the role of parents that they, and especially their children, forget that they are people who have made mistakes and were, in fact, once young themselves. Speaking from your heart makes you human. Your child may benefit from hearing about your experiences and your feelings about your life and choices you've made. It is important that when you are speaking about your experience your purpose is to connect with your child and not to manipulate, coerce or covertly influence their decision.

Discussing your life experiences and world views, and how you came to your beliefs, can assist to develop the relationship with your child. Sometimes it's the first time a parent speaks honestly or openly about their personal experience or their feelings about parenting, abortion, or adoption. Stories about first love, mistakes made, or wisdom learned may open minds. Telling a young person what to do or trying to force them to do what you view as best may close their minds, or worse, push them to make decisions out of rebellion.

For all involved, especially the woman or pregnant person, a pregnancy decision is complex, and there are both positive and negative aspects to each choice. Even if you can only see the negative aspects of the decision your child is leaning towards it is still important to listen and acknowledge *their* feelings views and beliefs. It is important to be aware that a pregnancy decision can only be acted upon by the young pregnant person and if their thoughts are not acknowledged, they may strengthen those views by focussing on them more (and making a decision whilst in this state of mind) as they have not felt heard by you.

Keep it positive.

"I want the best future for you." vs **"You can't even clean up your own room!"**



Government
of South Australia

SA Health

Express your love Even if you struggle to verbally express your emotions, this is a great time to let your child know that the bond between you is strong. ***“I will still love you regardless of what you tell me”... “You are my child and you always will be, no matter what”.***

Acknowledge previous statements

Parents sometimes make strong statements as a way to discourage young people from having sex, such as ***“I’ll throw you out of the house if you come home pregnant”***. Unfortunately this tends to create a culture of silence due to fear when actually this is a time your child may need your help the most. Acknowledge what you have said previously and articulate what you really mean, for example, ***“I know I previously said____, and it’s true I would be/ I am upset, but, we would/will work it out. I want you to come to me if you are ever in trouble”***.

The person who is pregnant

It may be confronting to realise your child is pregnant and is sexually active, has had sex once, or may have experienced non-consensual sex (rape). A parent’s natural urge is to protect their child and their future, but it is not as simple as when their child was younger.

Grounding your child, forbidding them from seeing their partner, and calling them names will not help them learn and grow from this situation. Your child needs support in order to learn how to problem solve and make sound decisions. Even as adults we are not always so good at working through a dilemma or crisis. Your child needs you to listen to them, and your responses to be respectful.

The other partner involved in the pregnancy

The partner involved in the pregnancy may seem like an easy target for your anger and frustration, especially if you disapprove of them. However, it would be wise to avoid putting your child in the position of choosing between them and you. Remembering also that peers are often more influential and important to young people and their decision making during this stage of their development, so maintaining those lines of communication is crucial. It is normal for young people to test boundaries, explore other cultures, religions, ways to live, lifestyles, and values. Criticism regarding your child’s choice of partner or lifestyle rarely helps the situation.

It is up to your child if they choose to tell the partner involved in the pregnancy that they are pregnant. It is also important to understand that if the other partner is aware of the pregnancy, they can offer support, voice their preferred option and viewpoint, but ultimately it is solely the woman or pregnant persons’ decision to make. The partner involved in the pregnancy may benefit from a gentle reminder about their responsibility to respect that the choice is not theirs to make, but how they can play a significant role in the decision making by acting responsibly, respectfully and clearly articulating their position (regarding the relationship, hands on parenting and future directions).

It might be confronting to know that they have had sex, and that they are involved with someone who is pregnant. Allowing them to discuss their thoughts, feelings, wants and what their choice might be is important. At the same time they might need gentle reminders about their responsibility to respect that the choice is the young pregnant persons to make, but how they can play a significant role in the decision making by acting responsibly and respectfully.

You’re both “Doing Your Jobs”

Your job as a parent is to protect your child and provide them a safe space to learn, grow and develop into a responsible adult. As your child grows up and becomes more independent, you cannot be with them every minute of the day, and although there may be an instinct to keep tabs on them all the time, remember that the goal of parenting is to assist them in learning to, problem solve, and be assertive.

Your child is growing up and their job is to try to figure out who they are. As we will recall from our own adolescence, young people need to try things out, make mistakes, and take risks. Developing a relationship which acknowledges that is a normal part of development and should be encouraged but with enough communication to discuss the consequences of different choices. Although it may seem that your child is moving away from you, they still need to know that you care what happens to them and that you are willing to support them.

Encouraging a young pregnant person to make their own decision based on support from you, and if possible the partner involved in the pregnancy, as well as responsible consideration of all their choices is useful. If you feel you would like further support as a parent, please contact the [Pregnancy Advisory Centre](#) on 7117 8999.

*Reference: Adapted from www.momdadimpregnant.com
Reviewed by Pregnancy Advisory Centre 2021*

For more information

**Pregnancy Advisory Centre
Central Adelaide Local Health Network
707 Port Road
Woodville Park SA 5011
Telephone: (08) 7117 8999 or Free Call 1800 672 966 (country callers only)
<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/pregnancyadvisorycentre>**



Government
of South Australia

SA Health