

# Pregnancy Advisory Centre

## Men and unplanned pregnancy

### When faced with an unplanned pregnancy

Some facts and information:

- In Australia approximately 50% pregnancies are unplanned
- 1:4 women will have an abortion in their lifetime
- Making a decision about an unplanned pregnancy can be extremely stressful for all involved in that decision
- Men have expressed feeling scared, guilty, sad, powerless, confused, angry or regretful for being in the situation and worried about the woman involved
- You may be worried about how the unplanned pregnancy may affect you as she considers parenthood, abortion or adoption
- Although no contraception is 100% effective, contraceptive options assist you to manage the risk of unplanned pregnancy <http://www.shinesa.org.au/health-information/contraception/>
- Men's choices to help in trying to avoid unplanned pregnancy are either to choose not to have sex, or to use condoms
- Condoms or vasectomy (male sterilisation) are the only form of contraception over which a man has full responsibility
- When men do not desire parenthood, engaging in conversations and decisions about contraception can make men feel more empowered and more able to take responsibility in their role when it comes to preventing pregnancy

### Making a decision about an unplanned pregnancy?

Many men have not fully contemplated what it would be like *for them* if a pregnancy results from the sex they have engaged in. Australian society seems to focus more on the risk that women take when engaging in sex and the risk that men take is sometimes unrecognised.

However, the risk that men take is significant because men do not have the legal or ethical right to make the choice about whether or not to continue the pregnancy.

It can be really difficult because men and women are in different positions in relation to the pregnancy decision. Men have no control over the decision, and may feel powerless. Women have the burden of responsibility for the decision. This can lead to resentment of the situation or each other.

Sometimes the reality of the pregnancy can change previously held ideas. You or the woman may react differently to how you thought you would react. This can be quite a shock to you and you might find it difficult to comprehend. No-one can be completely sure how they will feel or react to something until they have experienced it themselves.

### How can you help?

- Some women are clear in their decision, and some women are undecided
- If a woman has made a decision, or is leaning towards a decision that is different to your view, it can be exceptionally hard for both of you

### *If you believe that she should have an abortion and she wants to continue the pregnancy*

You may know women who have had abortions, managed their feelings well and got on with their lives. You may feel that the woman just needs to have a termination and this would be better for you and her.

The majority of women who choose termination of pregnancy are relieved, if they are supported to make their own decision, free from pressure. However, some women experience negative emotions, and being or feeling pressured into making a decision is a significant risk factor for this. Studies have found that women are the best predictors of how they will cope emotionally after an abortion, so it is a good idea to listen closely to her thoughts on this.

Some women blame themselves for the pregnancy and worry about how the man will cope with the decision she makes. You may need to help her to understand that *each of you* is individually responsible for how the unplanned pregnancy affects your own individual life. For instance, the woman is not obliged to have an abortion because the man may not feel ready for parenthood, or required to continue a pregnancy based solely on the man's preference.

If the woman does have an abortion based on your beliefs and feelings rather than her own, there is a risk to her mental health and well-being.

*If you would like her to continue the pregnancy and she intends to have an abortion*

It can be really difficult because you are in different positions in relation to the pregnancy decision.

If you have a values based issue with abortion you need to understand that she is also making this decision based on her own values framework: her own beliefs, feelings, thoughts and knowledge.

You may experience a variety of emotions and these may be different to hers and you may feel that a decision not to continue with the pregnancy is a rejection of you or the relationship. If you have different views you may need to listen more closely to her to understand her decision better. Sometimes it may be still difficult to understand completely, but respecting that she has different views is important.

You may find that your beliefs about abortion are less important than supporting her. Men can find additional support from the following services to help work through these different feelings: [Mensline](#), or from the social work service at [Pregnancy Advisory Centre](#).

**How can I communicate with her about the decision?**

The man involved will be affected by the decision, though it is the woman who accepts the greatest consequences for the decision.

Some men accept that the decision around a pregnancy is a woman's choice and others find it very difficult, given the significant impact that the pregnancy decision will have on both of their lives. While difficult feelings and views are understandable in this circumstance, it is not okay to pressure the woman's choice.

On the other hand, a man may feel clearly that it is a woman's right to decide. However, he may be concerned that she will make a decision for him that is against her wishes. He may understandably feel worried that if he expresses an opinion, it may inadvertently influence the woman. In this case, men can withhold their feelings about the pregnancy even when the woman asks what it is that he wants. Sometimes this is not helpful for the woman, who is trying to gather all the information she can to make a decision. Women also may misinterpret this and believe it is a sign that the man does not care. Being open and honest about your feelings and thoughts whilst providing reassurance about supporting her to make her own decision is helpful.

An unplanned pregnancy can create communication challenges, conflict or confusion in the relationship that may not have been apparent before.

If you are concerned about how to have open, honest and helpful communication about the pregnancy decision, it may be beneficial to have a counselling appointment with counsellors experienced in unplanned pregnancy decision making.

Adapted from the Royal Women's Hospital – Victoria June 2016

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**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>**



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