

So now what?

Decision-making and the unintended pregnancy

There are many feelings when a woman discovers she is pregnant. There is disbelief and shock as well as often, anger, pride, happiness, depression and anxiety. It can be difficult to think about what to do. It can be hard to know who to talk to about this problem. (See the last page for helpful phone numbers.)

In order to make a good decision for yourself you will need reliable information on all your options, some space and time to yourself and a person to talk to when you want to talk during this decision-making process. It is not always easy to make a decision when faced with an unintended pregnancy, but remember that it is YOUR decision and ultimately you need to make it for yourself.

You may never feel absolutely great about what you decide, but you will feel better if in the future you can look back and say, "I made the best decision I could at the time with the resources that I had." Life offers us many challenges and for some women, the decision of how to handle an unintended pregnancy can be one of the most difficult. It can also be a powerful learning experience as you may now question your beliefs, values, goals and possibly relationships.

This may seem overwhelming but it is very important that you actively make the decision and not just '*let things happen.*' There is the pressure of time with pregnancy – to postpone the decision may prove to be the decision.

It is hoped that this guide will help you sort out your feelings and make a decision. Try working on it alone the first time. If you choose to, you can work through it with your partner, parent or other support person. You may seek help from a pregnancy options counselor, like those at Planned Parenthood.

A word of caution:

Be careful when involving someone else in your decision.

*Ask whether they have a particular viewpoint – for example, anti-abortion or anti-adoption

*Make sure this is your decision.

*If you feel manipulated or intimidated after talking to someone about this, look for other sources of help.

*Think about talking to someone who will accept and support you and respect your decision whatever it is.

*If you need more help– talk to an options counselor like those at Planned Parenthood.

There is no typical woman who has an abortion. The same decision has been made by women:

☞ at every age between puberty and menopause

☞ of every religious background

☞ of every race

☞ of every economic bracket

☞ of every occupational and educational field

About 40% of women will have an abortion before they reach menopause.

About 80% of women who choose abortion, were using some type of birth control when they got pregnant.

To Begin

Your first step is to identify your options. Consider the options below and list other options you may have:

- terminate the pregnancy by having an abortion
- continue the pregnancy and parent on your own
- continue the pregnancy and parent with your partner
- continue the pregnancy and parent with your parents
- continue the pregnancy and give up the child through adoption

Concerns you may have

The decision to have an abortion or not is made in a context of social, religious and political controversy. On one side, people tell you abortion is wrong because of the right to life of the fetus. On the other side, people will tell you that it is your right as a free woman and equal citizen to have absolute authority over your body.

Women have had abortions of some kind for thousands of years. During the 118 years it was illegal in Canada, women still sought and had abortions. Although abortion has always been a part of women's reproductive lives, it is not often talked about so a woman is left thinking she is the only one who has ever made this decision.

Despite the rhetoric and the eternal history of abortion, each woman must make the decision for herself—only a woman faced with an unexpected pregnancy can judge and decide what is best for her. She alone evaluates her goals, beliefs and values. You may ask yourself some of the following questions:

- What view have I had about abortion up until now?
- What is the impact of having a baby, to parent or place for adoption?
- What are my beliefs about the nature of life and death and spirit and god?
- Could I place a child for adoption? How would it impact me emotionally?
- Could I parent right now? Do I have support?
- Could I have an abortion? How would it impact me emotionally?
- Are my thoughts about this issue tied to my family or their religious beliefs?
- How would my family or friends view this?
- What are my educational/career goals? Am I comfortable in my financial situation?
- How will my choice effect the relationship I have with the man involved in the pregnancy?

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list – but perhaps will help you think of other considerations that are important to you.

	Feelings		Family	
Pros and Cons	Future	Decision	Friends	Intuition
	Finances		Relationship	

Significant others

This decision and these questions are for you to ask yourself. A successful decision will be one that you will have arrived at of your own accord with some support from a friend, partner, family member or even doctor or counselor. You may talk to someone who has been in the same position.

You may not care at all about what others are saying, but if you are feeling confused and undecided, it helps to see what others are saying to you and how that is affecting you. Try listing the important people in your life presently involved in your decision. What advice or opinion has each given you and why do you think they feel this way?

Name

<u>Significant Person</u>	<u>Advice/Opinion</u>	<u>Why they want this?</u>

What do you think about this? Is there someone who you usually listen to for advice? Does it sway you toward their opinion or does it make you want to rebel? Other thoughts?

Pros and cons

Think realistically about your life as it is now. It won't be a good decision, if it is made on 'what ifs' Look over the options again and try to imagine the consequences of each, realistically and in some detail. Make a list of pros and cons for each option.

There are some pros or cons that are more important than others. You may choose to give each of the pros and cons a weight value (say 1-5). If one thing is a really big deal to you, give it a number 5. If something is minor, then give it a 1. If something is just neutral, give it a 2 or 3. In the end you can look over your pro and con lists and if you want, add up your numbers.

Option #1: _____ (parenting, adoption, abortion)

Pros	#1- 5	Cons	#1-5

Think of the practical and emotional impact this option will have on you and perhaps to those closest to you. You may want to think of the impact as short-term and long-term effects to you or others.

Impact on me:

Significant impact to others?

Now do a similar exercise with another option you have been considering.

Option#2: _____ (parenting, adoption, abortion)

Pros	#1- 5	Cons	#1-5

Impact on me:

Significant impact to others?

If there is a third option you have considered, go through this process again.

Option#3 _____ (parenting, adoption, abortion)

Pros	#1- 5	Cons	#1-5

Impact on me:

Significant impact to others?

Ideal versus real

Now, think about what your ideal is for being pregnant and parenting a child. When would it be? Where would you be living? What role would your partner take? Your parents and family? What would you be like?

Write down your description of you ideal situation:

Describe what actually exists now.

Think about the differences between your present and your ideal situation? Can they be overcome or is there too much difference? Does the ideal matter?

Realizing that for most people ideal scenarios rarely come true, what are the minimal requirements you need to carry through with your pregnancy and parent a child?

Think about the differences between this minimal requirements and your present situation? Can you overcome the differences? Do you have the means to make the minimal requirements happen?

Time travel

Try to send yourself back in time. Go back to about one year ago. Think clearly about that time in your life. What were you doing then? Who were your friends? Your work or school? Get a clear picture in your mind about yourself at this time, and then answer the following questions.

What was important to you then? What were you involved with, what were your goals or aspirations at the time?

What were your views on unplanned pregnancy? How did you feel about each of the options (abortion, parenting, adoption) for an unplanned pregnancy at that time?

Picture yourself now. What is important to you, what are you involved with and what are your goals and aspirations/ have they changed? Have your views on unplanned pregnancy or on the options changed?

Now imagine yourself one year from now. What are your biggest fears surrounding each option? What is the best thing that could happen for each option?

Option	Biggest fear	Best outcome
Abortion		
Parenting		
Adoption		

Realistically, what do you imagine each option will bring to your life?

Try it out for a day

If you are still torn between two (or more) options you may find the following exercise helpful. Take 2 (or 3) separate days to complete it. There are helpful phone numbers on the last page of this handout.

Day One:

Assume you have chosen one option (parenting, adoption, abortion) for one entire day. From the moment you wake up concentrate on the details for carrying through on that option and on what the results will be.

Make phone calls and gather information about how you would proceed with that option. For example, how soon could you get an appointment for an abortion? Or what doctor would you use for pre-natal care? Or how do you go about arranging for adoption?

Write out tasks you have to complete to follow through with that option. Complete or find out about as many of the tasks as possible.

At the end of the day, take a minute to ask yourself how you feel about your decision. How intense is that feeling for you?

Day Two:

On the next day, repeat the entire exercise using another option. Try to think about the details and if your mind wanders to the first option try to bring it back to this one.

Again, write out the tasks you have to complete to follow through with this option. Complete or find out about as many as you can. Really be as if you had already made up your mind.

Again, at the end of the day, take some time to ask yourself how you feel about this option being your decision. How intense is this feeling?

Day Three:

If you are considering a third option, try it out on day three. Go through the same steps and try to feel what making this choice feels like.

Pulling it all together

Making the decision with an unintended pregnancy can feel like an exercise of running in circles. You may be able to see the benefits and costs of each decision. Remember that often in this situation, there is no one clear 'good' decision, but rather you have three choices and you pick the one that has the least number of 'bad' things for you and those in your world.

If you have tried some of the exercises from this handout, you likely have a good idea about what you want to do. Often, the decision between abortion or not comes down to what your head and your heart tell you.

Try to stay realistic. If there is a way you can make adoption or parenting work, then go for it. Find out about your supports and put in place the necessary people and circumstances to welcome this unexpected challenge into your life.

If you really don't know how you could possibly carry a pregnancy to term, then consider the option of abortion. For some women choosing abortion will feel like their only option. A woman may choose to have an abortion and still feel very sad about it. For a woman who is grieving the loss after an abortion, there are a number of supports available to you. Do not let the possibility of sadness be the only influencing factor.

This is not an easy decision. This may be one of the biggest challenges of your life. Just remember that you can only make the best decision for you with the resources you have. Try not to judge yourself too harshly- you are only human, doing the best you can.

It's Okay

*It's okay to be afraid
Of the things we don't understand
It's okay to feel anxious
When things aren't working our way.
It's okay to feel lonely...
Even when you're with other people
It's okay to feel unfulfilled
Because you know something
Is missing
(Even if you're not sure what it is).
It's okay to think and worry and cry.*

*It's okay to do
Whatever you have to do, but*

Just remember, too...

*That eventually you're going to
Adjust to the changes life
Brings your way.
And realize that
It's okay to love again,
And it's okay to get to the point
Where the life you live
Is full and satisfying and good
To you... and it will be that way
Because you make it that way.*

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Useful Links and Phone Numbers in the Edmonton Area

Abortion Information

[Morgentaler Clinic](#) 484-1124

[Planned Parenthood](#) 423-3737

Adoption Information

Child and Family Services 422-6647

[Adoption Options](#) 433-5656

[Terra Association for Teens](#) 465-9272

[Planned Parenthood](#) 423-3737

Parenting Information

[Edmonton and Area Neighborhood Centres](#)

[Terra Association for Teens](#) 465-9272

[Planned Parenthood](#) 423-3737

Parenting information from anti-abortion agencies

Birthright 488-0681

Pregnancy Counseling Center 424-2624