

So now what?

Decision-making and unintended pregnancy

An unintended pregnancy can cause us to experience a flood of emotions: shock, disbelief, pride, anger, joy, fear, sadness, and anxiety are only a few. It can be difficult to think about what to do. When you are not certain that you want to continue with the pregnancy, it can be difficult to know who to talk to.

To make a good decision for yourself you will need: 1) reliable information on all your options; 2) some space and time to yourself; and 3) a neutral person to talk to when you feel like talking. It is not always easy to decide what to do about an unintended pregnancy but remember that it is **YOUR** decision and ultimately you need to make it for yourself.

You may never feel 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, 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 reflect on your beliefs, values, goals and even relationships. You may find it hard to believe, if you are struggling now, but you will come out of this a stronger person.

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.

We hope that this guide will help you sort out your feelings and make the decision that is right for you. 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 also want to seek help from a pregnancy options counsellor.

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 with a counsellor like those at Woman’s Health Options.

There is no typical person who has an abortion. The same decision has been made:

- ☞ at every age between puberty and menopause
- ☞ of every religious background
- ☞ of every ethnicity or culture
- ☞ of every economic bracket
- ☞ of every occupational and educational field

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

About **80% of people** 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 the child to someone you know.
- continue the pregnancy and put the child up for adoption through an agency.

Concerns you may have:

The decision to have an abortion or not is made in a context that is unique to all of us and can be influenced by 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 an individual and equal citizen to have absolute authority over your body.

People have had abortions of some kind for thousands of years. During the 118 years it was illegal in Canada, people still sought out and had abortions. Although abortion has always been a part of reproductive health, it is not often talked about so you may be left thinking you are the only one who has ever made this decision.

Despite the rhetoric and the eternal history of abortion, everyone must make the decision for themselves – only a person faced with an unexpected pregnancy can judge and decide what is best for them. The individual alone evaluates their 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 affect the relationship I have with the other person 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.

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 and perhaps with support from a friend, partner, family member, doctor or counsellor.

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>
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

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 will not be a good decision if it is made on 'what ifs'. Look over the options again if you feel you need to and try to imagine the consequences of each, realistically and in some detail. Make a list of pros and cons for each option.

There may be 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 big concern 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 on 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 on others?

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

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

Pros	#1- 5	Cons	#1-5
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Impact on me:

Significant impact on 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 on 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 your ideal situation:

Describe what 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 many of us 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 these 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 that 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 unintended 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 of the following options (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 need 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 few minutes 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 need 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.

Putting it all together:

Trying to decide what to do if you have an unintended pregnancy can leave you feeling like you are going in circles and not able to pick a direction. 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 general choices, and

you pick the one that has the least number of 'negative' 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. Our head can be a logical place that knows why parenting is a bad idea and our heart wants to believe that there is a way to make it work.

Try to stay realistic. If there is a way you can make parenting or adoption work, then go for it. Look at what support you have and put in place the people you need to make it work. Create the circumstances you need 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 choosing abortion will feel like their only option. And others may choose to have an abortion and still feel very sad about it. For anyone who is grieving the loss after an abortion, there are many supports available. 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.

Laine Parsons Living our Losses magazine #477-2380

Useful Links and Phone Numbers in the Edmonton Area

Abortion Information

Woman's Health Options 780-484-1124

Adoption Information

A Small Miracle Adoption (Edmonton) 780-421-1177
Adoption Options (Edmonton) 780-433-5656
AMARIS Adoption and Family Services (Edmonton) 780-438-3455
Terra Association for teens (Edmonton) 780-465-9272

Parenting Information

Children's Services: Resources for families 780-422-6647
The Family Centre 780-423-2831
Terra Association for teens 780-465-9272

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights Access Line

The Access Line is a 7-day a week toll-free, confidential phone and text line. It is available for questions about sexual health, pregnancy options, abortion, and safer sex.

Toll free from across the country: 1-888-642-2725

Please be aware that Pregnancy Crisis Centers, Pregnancy Counselling Centers, Birthright and the Back Porch are anti-choice organizations and will give you inaccurate information about abortion. They will be able to help you regarding parenting support and adoption.