

Pregnancy - your options

Unplanned pregnancies are very common, with an estimated 200,000 occurring in Australia every year. Not all, however, are unwanted. In some cases, the woman, though surprised, looks forward to raising the child. In other cases, the news comes as a shock. When a woman doesn't want to become a parent, her pregnancy options include abortion, foster care and adoption.

A number of government and community counselling services offer information on pregnancy options, which can help a woman make this often difficult decision.

Issues to think about

An unplanned pregnancy often makes a woman think about a number of complex issues such as:

- Her feelings about parenthood, abortion, adoption and foster care
- Her health and age
- The needs of her existing children (if she has any)
- Her relationship with her partner
- Her career options
- Her financial situation
- Her life goals
- Her religious beliefs
- Her moral values.

Professional counselling for pregnancy

When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, deciding what to do isn't always easy. Talking with family members and friends can help. It's important that the woman makes her own decision and doesn't let pressure from other people affect her own judgement.

It can help to talk with an independent, trained counsellor who can provide up-to-date information on each pregnancy option to support a woman in making a free and fully informed decision.

Pregnancy options

Pregnancy options include:

- Parenting
- Abortion
- Adoption.

Parenting

When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, some women choose to continue with the pregnancy and then raise the child.

Prenatal (pregnancy) care is extremely important for the health of the woman and the unborn child. The woman also needs to decide quite early in her pregnancy where and how she wants to have the baby. A doctor can provide more information and referral to support services that can help. There are a number of childbirth options to choose from.

Factors that might influence a woman's decision of whether or not to become a parent include:

- Where she lives (not all options are available in all regions)
- Her health and life circumstances
- Her previous experiences of pregnancy or birth
- Her feelings about certain types of care
- Whether she has public or private health insurance.

Depending on the woman's relationship with her partner, her parenting options might include:

- Shared parenting as a married, separated or de facto couple
- Single parenting while living with family or independently.

Talking with an independent, trained counsellor can help the woman understand each option.

Parenting is a skill that has to be learned and relearned as a child grows through different life stages. A number of government and community support services are available to help parents through each stage. A doctor can provide more information and referral to support services that can help.

Abortion

Some women decide to terminate (end) their pregnancy by having an abortion. Estimates suggest that almost half of all unplanned pregnancies in Australia are terminated. Abortion laws are different for each Australian state and territory, but early abortion (up to 14 weeks) is available Australia wide, and later abortion is available in most states and territories.

Abortion is a medical or surgical procedure where the fetus or embryo is removed or expelled from the uterus (womb). Most abortions are performed during the first trimester of pregnancy (up to 12 weeks), but some might be performed in the second trimester (12 to 24 weeks) or, in rare circumstances, in the third trimester (24 to 36 weeks).

Studies show most women who have had an abortion feel they made the right decision and aren't more likely than those who haven't, to experience long-term psychological or emotional problems. In most cases, emotional distress peaks before the procedure and resolves soon after.

Adoption

A relatively small number of women continue with the pregnancy and then give the baby up for adoption. The adoptive parents then become the child's legal parents and the birth parents voluntarily give up all their legal rights and responsibilities in relation to the child. There is the opportunity for the birth parents to choose to maintain some level of contact with the child.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Women's Pregnancy Advisory Service, Royal Women's Hospital Tel. (03) 8345 3063
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952
- Family Planning Victoria's Youth Action Centre (for people aged under 25 years) Tel. (03) 9660 4700
- Foster Care Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9489 9770
- Adoption and Permanent Care Program:
 - Eastern Metropolitan Region Tel. (03) 9843 6413
 - Southern Region Tel. (03) 9521 5666
 - Barwon South Western Region Tel. (03) 5226 4540
 - Northern Metropolitan Region Tel. (03) 9479 0558
 - Western Region Tel. (03) 9396 7400
 - Gippsland Region Tel. (03) 5133 9998
 - Grampians Region Tel. (03) 5332 1434
 - Loddon Mallee Region Tel. (03) 5440 1199
 - Hume Region Tel. (03) 5832 1500
- Parentline Tel. 13 22 89

Things to remember

- Pregnancy options include parenting, abortion and adoption.
- A doctor can provide more information about pregnancy options and referral to support services that can help.
- It's important that the woman makes her own decision about which pregnancy option is best for her.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Family Planning Victoria

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