



DEALING WITH THE STRESS OF PREGNANCY OPTIONS AND THE DECISION

21 Belmore Terrace

Woodville Park SA 5011

Phone: (08) 8243 3999

Fax: (08) 8243 3998

SA Country FREECALL 1800 672 966

www.pregnancyadvisorycentre.com.au

Facing an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy and the decision making that goes with this can be a stressful experience. Just when you need to be able to think clearly your hormones, emotions, fatigue or nausea associated with being pregnant can contribute to you feeling overwhelmed, unwell and confused. Just when you need the people who are most important to you to be here for you, some find that they cannot handle the situation and are panicking or backing away. Or you may feel that this is too private and personal to even let others know about. Just when you thought you knew what was going on in your life- wham! A major fork in the road appears, leaving you feeling alone.

You have 3 options available to you.

- Continue the pregnancy and parent,
- Terminate the pregnancy,
or
- Continue and choose to pursue adoption.

Some unplanned pregnancies are eventually quite happily continued it may just take some time to sort through your feelings and consider the possibilities. If this is the choice you have decided upon it will be important to consider the following as soon as possible.

- Booking antenatal care through a public or private hospital, or Midwife, or Obstetrician or even your own GP. You can explore what options are available for antenatal care and choose what suits you.
- Ultrasound scans and initial blood and screening tests occur around 10-12 weeks. Don't worry if your pregnancy is further than this but booking in for antenatal care should be a consideration once a decision has been made to continue.
- Giving up or reducing smoking cigarettes.
- Giving up alcohol and drugs.
- Taking folic acid.
- Pregnancy is a time in a woman's life that can take time to adjust to, whether it was unplanned or planned. The need for emotional, and practical support may be important and for some ongoing anxiety may also play a role.

If you are considering adoption the following information may be useful:

- Adoption is very different to how it was many years ago and how it gets portrayed sometimes in the media. Adoption is no longer 'secretive.'
- Adoption can be a very open process with the biological parent(s) being fully involved in the choosing of potential adoptive parents from a specially approved selection of people

- Open adoption can mean that the biological parent has some ongoing contact with the child(if they want) and the child can grow up knowing both its biological and adoptive parents. Adopted children must be told they are adopted.
- Adoption is never legally formalised until after the birth of the child and a mandatory period of waiting before final consent can be given.
- People can go through the process of adoption and still change their mind before the waiting period of consent.
- Counselling and support are compulsory throughout the adoptive process.

If you are considering termination of pregnancy the following might be useful:

- Abortion is the most commonly performed and one of the safest medical procedures in Australia.
- 1 in 3 women choose to have a termination at some point in their lives.
- Women of all ages, cultures, religions, marital status, with or without children choose to have terminations for many varied and similar reasons.
- For women who ultimately decide that terminating their pregnancy is the best decision given their circumstances, it does not necessarily mean this was an easy choice.
- Once a decision has been made a sense of relief from the crisis or pressure is common.

A decision to terminate can be tough

There is no other decision like an unplanned pregnancy decision. Even if this is not your first pregnancy or abortion your feelings and circumstances may be completely different. It may raise issues and feelings you never thought about before, and may invite you to start having ideas that you have never had before and you may start doubting your ability to make a good decision for yourself and to trust yourself. A pregnancy decision is not one which you can pass to someone else, make a quick spur of the moment decision about, hide from until something happens to solve it, or pretend it doesn't exist. The time limits and the profoundly personal experience of an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy may mean you experience challenging feelings and emotions through your decision. Even though a termination of pregnancy is one of the safest, quickest and most frequently performed procedures, it is still a surgical procedure. A decision to have a termination therefore can also involve a certain degree of anticipation and worry about undergoing surgery.

Feeling under pressure?

No wonder then that the physical, emotional, intellectual social and spiritual aspects of yourself may need some attention before you are able to work out what you want to do and then act on that decision.

Being pregnant can mask or alter the usual signs of stress. You may not know whether some of what you are experiencing is related to the symptoms of the pregnancy or to your emotional state, or to both. Even your confusion about the cause of the different emotions might add to the discomfort. Below are some basic strategies to ease the stress and distress you may be experiencing.

Basic Stress Management Tips

Choose carefully those friends, family and organisations you talk to.

You have a right to privacy, but you may benefit from talking to other people about your situation. Sometimes fear of people's reactions can mean that you avoid telling those who may in fact be most supportive.

Partners or parents can sometimes react with anger or panic initially, but can at times prove to be very helpful once they have had time to absorb the information.

Finding out the answers to questions you may have about available resources such as, financial worries, the termination procedure, the process of adoption etc can be crucial to you making a decision you can accept and trust in.

Expressing and discussing your fears or concerns- even if you think they are silly or trivial is important. Some people find a discussion with a counsellor at places like the Pregnancy Advisory Centre, Shine SA, your local community health centre helps.

If in the past or currently you have consulted a helping professional, (eg social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist) and have benefited from that contact, it might be in your best interests to consider consulting that particular person about your current situation.

It is very important that you are able to have your experience validated and understood. Sometimes other people will want to 'solve the problem' as quickly as possible. They may not feel comfortable, or know how to deal with emotional situations, which arise. Try to ask for what you want and need. For example, tell your partner or family how they can best support you. This may be by giving you a hug, just being there to listen to you, having them share their own feelings about this situation or something similar but not telling you what you should do. They may also be helpful in practical ways like transporting or going with you to places where

you can get information.

Allow yourself some pleasant time out activities. It is hard to think clearly about your situation if you dwell on it all the time.

Try and find something in which you can get so involved that you forget about it for a while. (eg movies, gardening, sport) Pamper yourself a bit. Try to give your own needs a higher priority for a while. Say 'No' if you are feeling overburdened. Ask others for help. Do things that are good for you.

Try to eat sensibly and regularly, if you are feeling nauseated try to find something you can eat (fruit, toast, dry biscuits, nuts, dried fruit).

Lack of sufficient fuel can aggravate brain drain and irritability.

Try to do some regular exercise (eg walking, swimming, cycling). Having someone to exercise with can make sure that you get out and do it. Exercise is an excellent way to improve your overall emotional and mental wellbeing and ease symptoms of depression, anxiety, anger or sleep deprivation. Exercise can release body tension, gives your body and mind time out from tension, oxygenates the blood and helps 'defuzz' the brain, improves fitness and metabolic rate and therefore your mood, helps you take and regain control.

Take 4 or 5 deep breaths consciously a few times throughout the day. People who are tense often frequently breathe in a shallow way. Deep breathing assists physical and mental relaxation and can ease panic attacks and assist sleep.

Facts about Abortion

Understandably some people often feel better just knowing they are not alone in this experience and that their thoughts, feelings and other aspects of their situation are not 'abnormal'. Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy and abortion has a long history that includes 'the bad old days' where it was unsafe to have an abortion because it was illegal. There still are small but loud sections of the community who do not believe a woman has the right to make choices about her own body and this can often be upsetting and greatly distort the way things are today. It is natural to have question about how your situation compares with others. You can feel better by being aware of the range of women who have had to face a similar situation.

For example:

- If you are a woman over 30yrs with one or more children and have always associated abortion with teenage sex, you might feel better knowing that of the women attending abortion clinics around Australia more than 1 in 5 are over 30 yrs of age, over half the women fall into the 20-30yr age bracket and more than 1 in 3 have at least one child, and 1 in 5 are younger than 20 yrs of age.
- If you are of were raised Roman Catholic and are having some difficulty with values or beliefs in relation to this, you may feel better knowing that Catholic women have abortions at the same

rate as non Catholic women.

- If you are feeling embarrassed or scared because you have had a previous termination or terminations in your life, you may feel more comfortable knowing that 1 in 3 women attending the clinic will have had a previous termination at some stage in her life. Issues of controlling fertility are not so simple! We do not have the perfect 100% reliable, comfortable, easy to use contraceptives or 100% reliable human beings! Women on average spend 75% of their lives trying to avoid pregnancy and it is generally women who take the most responsibility for fertility control.

Misleading Information

We do not suggest that you contact 'counselling services' run by Pro Life or Anti Choice organisations. You might find these types of organisations advertised in the emergency pages in the front of the phone book. Unfortunately these organisations advertise and run phone and face to face counselling purporting to offer pregnancy or abortion advice but they are not always up front about being pro life. The ulterior agenda of these organisations means that their aim is to prevent women from having abortions and they generally will do so by giving inaccurate information about abortion. Therefore you will not receive accurate or unbiased information about all 3 options.

If you have unwittingly contacted one of these services you may like to speak to a social worker at the Pregnancy Advisory Centre for accurate information or support.

We would also encourage you if you are unhappy or worried about the information you were given to complain to the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner on 8226 8666.

We can offer you assistance and support in making a complaint.

If you decide to have an Abortion

It is natural to feel some apprehension about undergoing a surgical procedure, no matter how safe and quick it maybe. If you are particularly anxious about anything remotely surgical (injections, anaesthetic etc) please discuss this with the health worker.

We are happy to show women through the clinic so they know what to expect and the social worker's are happy to accompany you in to see the doctor or into the operating theatre if you feel this would be of assistance.

Finding out as much as possible beforehand can result in positive outcomes and lessen the anxiety of the 'unexpected'. The Pregnancy Advisory Centre has a website that may be useful in answering your questions about the process and the operation. Alternatively any of the staff at PAC are happy to answer any questions. The website address is at the top of this handout.

If you decide to have a termination of pregnancy it may be helpful for some to write down your current feelings and circumstances so that if at some stage in the future you start questioning your decision (which we can be prone to do) you will be able to clearly remind yourself of the thoughtful, legitimate reasons for making the decision you did.

If you decide to have a termination, look ahead to the day of the procedure and the few days afterwards and plan how to make this time as comfortable and reassuring as possible. Although most women experience relief and rapid physical improvement after a termination, aim to make the whole experience as easy as possible on yourself. Make sure you have someone you can rely on to bring you to your appointment and drive you home. If transport is an issue please speak to one of the centre staff. You may want certain people around but not others.

Maybe facing this decision and terminating the pregnancy could provide you with an opportunity to make new goals, make decisions about other aspects of your life etc. Some women have spoken about the positive decisions and changes that have flowed out of an experience of unplanned pregnancy.

The Chinese use 2 characters for the word 'crisis'. One means danger and the other means opportunity. Facing a decision about a pregnancy, whether you ultimately decide to continue or to terminate the pregnancy can be a catalyst for you to take more control of your life and recognise what you want to work towards. It may help you find strength in yourself and in your relationships, which you did not know were there. Although it may not feel like it at the moment, finding courage to face your situation may provide you with an opportunity to see your life and what you want your future to look like more clearly.

Adapted with permission from Susie Allanson, Clinical Psychologist, Fertility Control Clinic Victoria, 1993, 2003.



For further information contact:

Pregnancy Advisory Centre
21 Belmore Terrace
Woodville Park SA 5011

Office Hours:
Monday to Friday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Phone: (08) 8243 3999
Fax: (08) 8243 3998

SA Country FREECALL 1800 672 966