

Advice and resources for parents who have their own concerns when their child is pregnant.

This is tough work and you are doing a great job by trying to understand your child and work through this with them.

STOP!

What you say at this point can influence the outcome positively or negatively. Your first reaction can either shut down further discussion or can open the door to trust and cooperation. Take some time. It's OK to say "I'm in shock. Give me some time to absorb this news." "I love you. We will figure this out together." Then set a time to talk soon, within 24 hours. Take the time to talk to someone you trust—your partner, family member, good friend, taking care to ensure the privacy of the information. Get some information - on the internet is a good place to start. Our website could be useful: www.know4sure.org.au / www.childrenbychoice.org.au. Or, call Children by Choice (07) 3357 5377 or 1800 177 725, local Family Planning Queensland clinic or a counselling service.

If you have already blurted out something you wish you hadn't, acknowledge that you spoke without thinking. Apologize and start over with a positive message that you feel better about. "When I said, '_____' I was in shock and just reacting. I'm sorry. I really want to be there for you now. I hope you will let me help." Be prepared for more anger or hurt, and give your child time to recover. Apologies can do wonders for communication.

RESPECT. LISTEN.

Listening to what your daughter has to say will NEVER have more impact than right now. Have these conversations when you are relatively calm and centered. Your daughter –or son—may say things that anger you, or seem naïve or wrong. Remember, they are still growing up and 'trying on' various beliefs and possible futures. They may not "know" everything, but understanding how they feel and what they believe is essential in helping them make a plan. You both may need the help of a counsellor to hear each other and to sort through the feelings you each have. Even if you have had a rocky road with your child previously, this is a critical time to be helpful and positive, and most importantly, LISTEN.

SPEAK FROM THE HEART.

Sometimes parents are so often playing the role of parents that they—and especially their children—forget that they are people who have made mistakes and were, in fact, once teenagers themselves. Speaking from your heart makes you human. Sharing your experiences and your feelings about your life are credible and relevant to the current situation.

Telling your own experiences can be good. Sometimes it's the first time a parent speaks honestly or openly about their personal experience or their feelings about either parenting, abortion, or adoption. Stories about first love, mistakes made, or wisdom learned may open minds. Telling a child what to do may close them.

Your baby is growing up.

Although you still remember her first step, your daughter is sexually active and pregnant. A parent's natural urge is to protect their child and her future, but it is not as simple as when she was little. Grounding her, forbidding her from seeing her boyfriend, and calling her names will not help her learn how to protect herself in the future. She needs to learn how to plan for her future, make judgments about partners and friends, and care for herself. Remember, as adults we are not always so good at these things! She needs you to listen to her and help her see what is in her own best interests. Treat her with respect and let her know that you want her to make good decisions for her life.

Keep it positive.

“I want the best future for you.” vs. “You can’t even pick up your own room!”

LOVE.

Even if you don’t easily say “I love you” this is a great time to let your child know that the bond between parent and child is strong. “Whatever you tell me I will love you and we can work it out.” “You are my daughter and you always will be, no matter what.”

Take it back.

Parents can make extravagant statements as a way to discourage teen sex, such as “I’ll throw you out of the house if you come home pregnant.” Unfortunately, kids actually remember this particular thing that you tell them and therefore fear telling you just when they most need your help. Undoing your attempts at “prevention” may seem awkward but it is worth it. “I know I have said that _____, and it’s true I would be upset. But, we would work it out. I want you to come to me if you are ever in trouble.” With the risk of unprotected sex at an all time high, do not push your child away from you by making vague threats.

Blaming the boyfriend

The “boy involved” may seem like an easy target for your anger and frustration, especially if you have disapproved of him all along. However, it would be wise to avoid putting your daughter in the position of choosing between her “lover” and her parents. During the teenage years, the peer group has a strong pull. Frequently young men and women get together but have different backgrounds, lifestyles, values etc. This is a normal part of exploration and growing up. She will not want to hear criticism of her choice in partner, but she may also be thinking about his suitability for the rest of her life.

You’re Both “Doing Your Jobs”:

Your job as a parent is to protect your child and your child’s future. Unfortunately as your child grows up and becomes more independent, you cannot be with her/him every minute. There is an instinct to ground her or keep tabs on her, which is understandable. But the goal really is to help her learn to protect herself, problem solve, and stand up for herself.

Your child is growing up and her/his job is to figure out who s/he is. As we will recall from our own adolescence, young people need to try things out, make mistakes, and take risks. That is a normal part of development and should be encouraged but with enough communication to discuss the consequences of behaviour. Although it may seem that your daughter is moving away from you, she still needs to know that you care what happens to her and are willing to support her.

A big thanks to the Abortion Care Network for this great resource.

For more information, check them out

www.abortioncarenetwork.org

