

What to Do When a Friend Is Considering Abortion

More women and girls consider abortion than we may realize. They are our relatives and friends, our babysitters, teammates, people who work with us or for us, married or unmarried. Even if someone identifies as being pro-life, the shock of an unexpected pregnancy, the devastation of a difficult prenatal diagnosis, shame, pressures, or fears may influence her to consider abortion.

If someone shared with you she was pregnant and hadn't ruled out having an abortion, would you know how to respond? The answer can be summed up in an old adage: We have two ears and one mouth, and should use them in that proportion.

Although the first instinct may be to convince her that abortion ends a baby's life, hearing facts is not the first thing she needs. Research shows that many women in a pregnancy crisis think, "This is the end of my life as I know it." To face the challenges before her, your friend needs to know you care about her for her own sake and she is not alone.

First listening to your friend will help build trust and facilitate openness. Eventually, when she knows you truly care about her and she trusts you, you can share the truth in love. You can share facts about abortion, her own intrinsic worth, and the practical help and support available so she can choose life for herself and her baby.

A truly loving approach reflects St. Paul's description of love in his first letter to the Corinthians: "If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. ... Love is patient, love is kind" (1 Cor. 13:1,4).

When a woman is facing a difficult pregnancy, the reaction of the first person she tells tends to set the tone for her decision-making. How do we respond to our friend in a loving way that is life-affirming for both her and her baby?

Consider the four steps of the L.O.V.E. Approach™*: Listen and Learn, Open Options, Vision and Value, and Extend and Empower.

L Listen and Learn

First, prioritize listening over speaking. You don't have to worry about whether you may say something "wrong," and you don't need to have all the answers. Start by listening to her story.

Ask her about her feelings, thoughts, values, beliefs, and wants. Do not interrupt, except to ask her to expound, when appropriate. For example: How did you feel when you first found out? Did you feel abandoned when he said that? What are your feelings now? What did you think about that? What do you think your parents will say or do? What value does that have for you? How does this relate to your religious beliefs? How important is that for you? In your heart of hearts, what do you really want to do?

Ask open-ended questions and statements like, "Tell me more..."

Interpret and confirm what you think you are hearing: "Did I hear you say..."

Pay close attention to her body language. She may show from gestures of discomfort or a lack of eye contact that what she is saying does not actually reflect her innermost feelings, values, or wants.

Listen for clues to her needs so you can later bring up helpful ways to address those needs. Listen for her strengths and resources so you can later reflect them back to her, building up her confidence and courage.

O Open Options

When her story is fully shared, it is your turn to provide factual information, always in a loving and caring way. You might share about the reality of abortion and the wounds that typically result. You might share experiences about having a baby, adoption, marriage, and how such things might apply in her situation. It's most helpful to keep the focus on her.

At the same time, avoid using the framework of adoption versus abortion. Research indicates that a woman with an unexpected, unwanted pregnancy often views all the possible outcomes of her pregnancy negatively: keeping her child, abortion, and adoption (which she tends to see as the worst of three "evils"). Research also "suggests that in pitting adoption against abortion, adoption will be the hands-down loser."¹ It's better to first focus on encouraging her that she can carry this baby to term.

V Vision and Value

Awaken a vision in her for a healthier life (a vision she may never have had, or that may have dimmed). Help her value herself differently. She is a special creation, worthy of love. She is made in the image of God; as a woman, her maternity is a gift. Jesus loves her and even died for her.

Encourage her. Help her set and work towards goals that extend beyond her due date to help her see life beyond her pregnancy. Reassure her there is always hope and she is not alone. She can make positive, life-giving choices. She can do it.

E Extend and Empower

Provide practical help and support. Her local pregnancy help center² can offer consultation, lists of community resources, and ultrasound services. Consider keeping such lists of resources in your car, purse, or wallet. Help her plan next steps. What would help her? A call from you? How can you contact her?

Pray with her and for her and her baby. The L.O.V.E. Approach™ is a way to bring Christ's love at a crucial life-saving and life-defining moment. We are created to walk with and support one another; we don't need to fear reaching out in love. Help your friend experience the strength of God's message that resounds throughout time: "Do not fear: I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10).

¹ Swope, Paul F., "Abortion: A Failure to Communicate," *First Things*, April 1998.
<https://www.firstthings.com/article/1998/04/004-abortion-a-failure-to-communicate>.

² Heartbeat International provides a directory of pregnancy services, which is accessible at www.heartbeatinternational.org/worldwide-directory or at www.pregnancycenters.org. You can learn about setting up parish-based support for women who are pregnant and need assistance by visiting the websites for The Gabriel Project (www.gabrielproject.us) and Elizabeth Ministry (www.elizabethministry.com), which have chapters across the country. For more information about how you can help, or for information about help that may be available, such as pregnancy care centers, maternity homes, and other assistance, contact your local diocesan Respect Life office. A list of diocesan Respect Life Ministry offices can be found at www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/diocesan-pro-life-offices.cfm.

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