



**Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada**

**Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada**

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Position Paper #17

Pregnancy Options and Abortion Counselling

Thanks to the 1988 Supreme Court decision known as *R v Morgentaler*, every woman in Canada who becomes pregnant has the right to decide whether it is feasible or in the best interests of herself or her family to carry her pregnancy to term. This paper is for women looking for information and help on how to make a decision.

If you are pregnant and uncertain about how to proceed, you can consult various agencies and clinics in your community. This may be easier said than done, especially outside Canada's largest cities, where resources are limited and hard to access.

Resources

In most cities, you can consult a public health nurse, a sexual health clinic, women's centre, or the Yellow Pages Directory, which lists abortion clinics under the heading "Abortion Services". Many cities have a separate listing for anti-choice organizations (often listed as "Abortion Alternatives") that – although their names might suggest the full range of options for pregnant women – do not include abortion or birth control in their "counselling".

The following resources can provide non-biased information on sexual health issues and referrals to services.

- Canadians for Choice runs a national hotline that provides information on pregnancy options and services: Call 1-888-642-2725 or email your questions to: info@canadiansforchoice.ca.
- If you have access to the Internet, Canadians for Choice has a Directory of Sexual Health Services including abortion providers – click on the map of Canada at the bottom of their home page: <http://www.canadiansforchoice.ca/index2.html>.
- All abortion clinics offer pregnancy options counseling (not just for abortion).
- The Canadian Federation for Sexual Health (formerly Planned Parenthood) has affiliates across the country that can help with sexual health issues, pregnancy options, birth control, and referrals: <http://www.cfsh.ca> (click on "Find a Member").

- The National Abortion Federation runs a hotline out of the U.S. that serves Canadian women. NAF can refer you to one of their member clinics and can sometimes help with funding: 1-888-557-7306 ext. 6.
- For women in BC, the Pregnancy Options Line can help with information and referrals to various services: 1-888-875-3163. Also try the “Sex Sense” line run by Options for Sexual Health in BC: 1-800-739-7367 or e-mail: fol@optbc.org.
- To help you in decision-making, you may want to consult *The Pregnancy Options Workbook*: <http://www.pregnancyoptions.info/pregnant.htm>. This is an American publication, but you might find it helpful.

Pregnancy Options

There are a number of options open to you, which you should explore thoroughly. If you decide to carry to term you will need proper pre-natal care, a very important factor in the health of your baby.

If you decide to carry to term and place the child for adoption, you need to get in touch with the nearest Children’s Aid Society or, if you choose private adoption, a lawyer who works in that field. Adoption has changed greatly since the 1960s when the expectation was that the birth mother would disappear from the child’s life forever. For example, there are “open adoptions” in which the mother gets to choose the adoptive couple (the couple undergoes CAS investigation to ensure that they are capable of raising the baby.)

If you decide to terminate the pregnancy, you must move decisively if possible, because most abortions in Canada take place before twelve weeks (counted from the first day of the last period), which is when they are the safest and easiest to perform. Moreover, some provinces have limited access or barriers to overcome that take up time, such as New Brunswick where you need to obtain the permission of two doctors to have a funded abortion at a hospital. In Prince Edward Island, where there are no abortion services, you will have to allow for the time and expenses for travel to a neighbouring province.

You may wish to discuss your decision with your family doctor or pastor or other counsellor, provided that he or she will be helpful and supportive. You should be aware that in Canada, the father has no legal say in the abortion decision.

Abortion Counselling

Information about services available in abortion clinics can be found on their individual websites. Most abortion care facilities offer or provide counselling services. At the Morgentaler Clinics, for example, counselling prior to the procedure is mandatory. You and your companion, should you choose to have someone else present, will be seen in order to ensure that a) any questions you may have are answered b) your decision is clear and your own, rather than the result of coercion c) you fully understand the procedure and its attendant risks. Information about available methods of birth control will be discussed with you and you will be referred for any type of ongoing counselling you may need.

If you have not yet made a decision, other options will be explored, and emotional and practical concerns will be discussed with you. The goal of counselling is to inform you of the full range of possibilities ahead. In fact, the willingness to explore all options is one way you can be sure you're in an ethical clinic. The anti-abortion movement operates disguised agencies with names like "Crisis Pregnancy Centre" or "Birthright" or deceptive names that imply they are pro-choice and feminist and provide unbiased help on all options. However, these centres are religious ministries that will push you to have a baby in any and all circumstances.

At an ethical clinic, you may change your mind at any point during the process without the fear of any pressure. Your decision is always respected. Counselling is not therapy; although most counsellors at abortion clinics are highly qualified social workers, therapists, and sexual health educators. They understand that you must be confident and secure in your choice. As a counselor at the Morgentaler Clinic put it: "Everyone is counselled before she continues but not everyone will necessarily continue." You will probably find your decision clarified and validated during the counselling session, or you may realize you are psychologically and emotionally unprepared to go ahead.

For many women, making the decision – whatever it is – is empowering and comes with a sense of control and maturity.