



**Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada**

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

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Position Paper #75

Anti-Abortion "Counselling" Agencies

Beware of "Crisis Pregnancy Centres"

Many agencies that counsel pregnant women are actually anti-abortion Christian ministries. Their main goal is to stop women from having abortions. Most of these centres are not medical facilities, and most of their "counsellors" are volunteers who are not medical professionals and have no recognized training in counselling.

Some of these centres are called Crisis Pregnancy Centres or "CPCs" – although many of them have different names. This paper refers to all of them as CPCs.

Studies have shown that most CPCs misinform and try to intimidate women out of having abortions. Women describe being harassed, bullied, and given blatantly false information. Many women say their confidentiality has been violated, and that mistreatment by CPCs has threatened their health.

How Do CPCs mislead women?

CPCs have a long history of deception. Listed below are common tactics that centres have been known to use (not every centre may use all of these tactics):

- Give the impression they are medical clinics or professional counselling centres.
- Give themselves names that sound pro-choice and secular, or imply they are abortion clinics.
- Tell women they will provide information on all options, but then refuse to refer for abortion care or birth control.
- Do not say upfront that they are anti-abortion or religiously affiliated.
- Locate themselves near abortion clinics to attract clients looking for abortion services.
- Make exaggerated promises of help, such as financial assistance, medical treatment, and prenatal and postpartum care. In reality, those services are often very limited.

How do CPCs Mistreat Women?

CPCs often provide misinformation or withhold information, or even mistreat women. Listed below are common tactics that centres have been known to use (not every centre may use all of these tactics):

- Provide misinformation about abortion and exaggerate its risks. Abortions may be described as painful and life-threatening, causing long-term emotional, physical, and psychological damage. Women are often told that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer, future miscarriage, post-traumatic stress disorder, infertility, and other serious medical conditions. (All such claims are scientifically false.)
- Counsel against contraception, and refuse to provide information, except for misinformation about its efficacy (such as saying that condoms don't help to prevent sexually transmitted infections.
- State that birth control methods, such as emergency contraception, IUDs, and the birth control pill, are actually abortifacients.
- Use methods and language that are designed to scare, horrify, and confuse women considering abortion, which can induce guilt, anxiety, and emotional trauma.
- Persuade women against abortion even in the most desperate or compelling circumstances, such as a lethal defect in the fetus, in cases of rape, or where the woman's health is at risk.
- Delay the pregnancy test results, and use the time to expose women to anti-choice or religious propaganda, such as showing graphic videos and pictures about abortion.
- Present the pregnancy results in ways that are ambiguous or even false, in order to delay or prevent an abortion.
- If the woman turns out not to be pregnant, detain her at the CPC to give her an abstinence lecture, and present premarital sex as wrong and dangerous.
- Promote abstinence except within marriage, regardless of the woman's situation or moral values. For example, CPCs may counsel women to withhold sex from their boyfriends.
- Disrespect women's own spiritual values by trying to impose fundamentalist Christian and patriarchal values.
- Abuse a woman's trust by breaking confidentiality, such as by making unwanted phone calls at home urging her not to abort, or calling her parents or other family members.
- Provide limited services. For example, CPCs provide no pregnancy prevention services, except sometimes Natural Family Planning for married women.
- Perform an ultrasound to dissuade women from abortions, even though non-clinical use should be avoided.
- Conduct unprofessional post-abortion counselling, using a religiously based model of guilt, forgiveness, and redemption.

Where can you get accurate information and referrals?

You can call the Options Hotline run by a national pro-choice group in Ottawa, Canadians for Choice. Call toll-free anywhere in Canada, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - **1-888-642-2725** for unbiased information about abortion services or counselling centres.

The National Abortion Federation (NAF) in Washington DC, also has a toll-free Hotline. Call **1-800-772-9100** for information and referrals to NAF abortion providers in the United States and Canada.

How can you counter CPCs?

If you've had a first-hand experience with CPCs, we encourage you to report and document your encounter. You can remain anonymous, but stories of actual encounters help tell the truth about CPCs, and can be effective in educating the media and policy makers. Please send your story to info@arcc-cdac.ca.

You can check local Yellow Pages or other advertising venues to see if CPCs in your area are using false or deceptive advertising, such as listing themselves under "abortion services" or "abortion," presenting themselves as pro-choice, or offering "accurate" or "unbiased" information on "all options." If so, contact the Yellow Pages or advertiser to request they change or stop the ad.

You can also help educate the public by submitting opinion pieces or letters to the editor, making a poster, distributing brochures, or speaking to others informally or formally. If you are interested in finding out more about any of these activities, please contact us (info@arcc-cdac.ca).

References

National Abortion Federation. 2006. *Crisis Pregnancy Centers: An Affront to Choice*. www.prochoice.org/pubs_research/publications/downloads/public_policy/cpc_report.pdf

Waxman, Henry A. July 2006. United States House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform – Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division. *False and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers*. www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20060717101140-30092.pdf

Marcotte, Amanda. May 1, 2006. Exposing Anti-Choice Abortion Clinics. www.alternet.org/story/35545

This Position Paper is available in brochure form: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/action/CPC-brochure.pdf>
(please print double-sided and tri-fold)