



Illustration by Jason Stood/TheKoback

## How to Identify Fake Clinics

This resource is designed to help you figure out whether a pregnancy centre is anti-choice – i.e., a “fake clinic”.

Often, the websites or promotional literature of these unregulated pregnancy centres (UPCs)<sup>1</sup> make it appear they offer all options in an unbiased manner. Many are Christian ministries operating from a traditional moral perspective on sex and pregnancy, but they may give no indication of that.

*(Here are [ARCC’s lists of anti-choice groups including UPCs.](#))*

It can be hard to identify a fake clinic when browsing its website or social media. We’ll list terminology and other typical red flags to watch out for, and also what you probably *won’t* find on a fake clinic’s website.

### Lack of Comprehensive Information

Almost all UPC websites have few details about their services beyond a paragraph or two. Some have a Q&A section but again without much detail. The language strives to be reassuring and empathetic rather than informative. You may see frequent entreaties – often on every page – to make an appointment or call the centre. This is designed to get clients in the door or on the phone, without first being able to discern the centre’s agenda.

UPC websites generally do not have any of the following:

- Contraception information
- Downsides of adoption or parenting
- Health risks of full-term pregnancy
- Use of the words fetus or embryo
- Links to abortion or contraception providers
- Gender identity and orientation information
- Supports for 2S/LGBTQQIPAA people
- Safer sex information
- Sex positive language
- Resources to help you decide without coming into the centre

---

<sup>1</sup> UPCs have traditionally been called “crisis pregnancy centres,” including by ARCC, but this term is biased towards the UPC agenda. We now use the more accurate term “unregulated pregnancy centres.”

If you're unsure, compare the UPC site to a genuine sexual health centre or abortion clinic, which tend to have the following on their websites and literature:

- Professional, complete information about procedures and policies
- Links and resources to help you decide for yourself
- Resources from a variety of mainstream services, including government supports and LGBT resources
- Inclusive information on gender identity or orientation
- Fun, sex-positive messaging

## Centre Names

Fake clinics often have names similar to abortion clinics. They may also locate themselves very near real reproductive health clinics, hoping to misdirect potential clients to themselves. Some words in the names of organizations to watch for:

- Beginnings
- Birthright
- Choice, choices
- Crisis
- Hope
- Life
- Options
- Pregnancy care
- Pregnancy resources
- Pregnancy support

Of course, legitimate clinics use some of the same terms (which is the point), so the presence of one or two of these is not a definite indicator of an anti-choice stance.

## Language and Bias

In general, anti-choice language tries to mimic feminist and human rights language. Fake clinics claim to be unbiased, value- or judgment-free, and non-discriminatory. Some centres claim to be pro-women. They offer help, support, services, and counselling – often on “all options”. They also tend to use subtle methods of manipulation to invoke fear or worry. For example, they may stress that the targeted person is “not alone”, or mention that abortion is “life-changing.”

Fake clinics often have biases and misinformation related to abortion, contraception, and sexuality. A few examples:

- Most focus on negative aspects of abortion, such as “post-abortion distress” or other alleged side effects, but never mention the risks of full-term pregnancy and childbirth.
- They may claim that condoms have very limited efficacy, that other contraception doesn't protect against STIs, and that some contraceptives work as abortifacients. A typical statement for emergency contraception is: “These medications can work by

stopping ovulation, blocking sperm from joining with an egg, or preventing a fertilized egg from implanting (some may consider this an early abortion).”

- A small number of UPCs offer medical services, usually just STI testing, which feeds into their agenda about the dangers of sex outside marriage. A few fake clinic websites even have a section about sex trafficking.

Check the Resources or Activities pages of the website. They may link to religious groups, or include information and links to sites about parenting and adoption (not sexual health or abortion), or links to sites that make false claims about the risks of abortion. Their donation pages may give clues on who funds them.

Below are lists of things to look for. A multiple presence likely indicates an anti-choice stance.

### **Words and Phrases**

- Abortifacient
- Abortion loss
- Abstinence
- Accurate information
- Adoption “the loving option”
- All options
- Baby
- Birth parent
- Child, children
- Choice
- Christ, Christian-centred
- Compassionate
- Emotional
- Faith-based
- Father, dad, men
- Grief
- Healthy relationships
- Mother, mum, mom
- Non-judgmental
- Post-abortion, with the word support, stress, distress, trauma, syndrome, grief, recovery, or healing
- Post-abortive
- Pre-born
- Pregnant? Alone? Afraid?
- Peer counsellors
- Recovery
- Religious words
- Sexual integrity
- Unborn
- Values

## **Imagery**

- Babies
- Mothers and babies
- Pregnant bellies, usually near term
- Pregnant women near term
- Young teens
- Sad people
- Heteronormative depictions

## **Services**

- Abortion pill reversal (an experimental and potentially dangerous regimen)
- Adoption
- Appeals to men, “Dads” programs
- Baby boutiques with clothing and maternity supplies (a few operate food banks or offer food baskets)
- “Earn while you learn” or “Baby Bucks” programs
- Parenting programs
- Post-abortion support
- Pregnancy tests
- Sex education for communities or schools (some program names: “Sexual Integrity”, “WAIT training” “Take Charge” “S.H.A.R.E.”, “STAND program”)
- STI testing (but cannot offer follow-up with contraception, condoms, or treatment)
- Ultrasounds (a few UPCs offer recreational ultrasounds but medical bodies in Canada warn against these)

## **Disclaimers (examples)**

- “We are not a medical service. We do not provide or assist in arranging abortions or contraceptives.”
- “We are not a medical clinic and do not provide, refer or assist in arranging abortions.”
- “We do not refer for abortion or contraception.”
- “We provide accurate information on all options but do not provide abortion referrals.”