



Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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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 Canadian who becomes pregnant has the right to decide whether it is feasible or in the best interests of themselves or their family to carry the pregnancy to term. This paper provides 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

Only larger cities have an abortion clinic, but in most cities, you can consult a sexual health clinic or women's centre. Some provinces have a sexual health or abortion helpline, including Nova Scotia, Ontario, and two in BC – [here](#) and [here](#). You may also try calling the 8-1-1 Health Link in most provinces. In addition, all abortion clinics offer unbiased pregnancy options counselling, and will refer you to appropriate agencies if you want to consider adoption or decide to give birth.

If you Google for abortion information, beware of anti-choice organizations (such as "pregnancy care centres") that may be at the top of your search results and appear to offer services or information – however, they will not refer for abortion or birth control, and may have a biased perspective. Double check our [list of anti-choice centres](#) to ensure you don't get fooled.

Here's resources that provide non-biased information on sexual health issues and referrals to services:

- 24-hour Options Hotline run by Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights: 1-888-642-2725. Or check their *Find a Service Provider* page: <https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/services>
- National Abortion Federation Canada toll-free hotline: 1-877-257-0012
- Choice Connect, a national website that helps you find a provider near you

- Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada's list of abortion clinics and support services across Canada: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/list-abortion-clinics-canada.pdf>
- To help your decision-making, you can consult *The Pregnancy Options Workbook*: <http://www.pregnancyoptions.info/pregnant.htm> (an American publication, but helpful)

Pregnancy Options

You have the options of carrying to term and either keeping the baby or placing it for adoption, or terminating the pregnancy. If you decide to carry to term you will need proper pre-natal care, a very important factor in the health of your baby.

For more information on the adoption option, you should 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 parent would disappear from the child's life forever. For example, there are "open adoptions" in which the birth parent gets to choose the adoptive couple. Be aware this does not always mean that you would have a continuing role in the child's life. Further, some adoption agencies are religiously-affiliated or even anti-choice, so look for a secular agency offering unbiased help.

If you decide to terminate the pregnancy, you should move decisively if possible, as abortions are easiest and extremely safe if they take place before twelve weeks (counted from the first day of your last period). Moreover, some provinces and territories have limited access, which may require you to travel and make necessary arrangements after 12 weeks of pregnancy.

You may wish to discuss your decision with your family doctor or pastor or other counsellor, provided they will be helpful and supportive. You should be aware that in Canada, the biological father has no legal say in the abortion decision. Neither do your parents if you are a minor, but if feasible it's important to talk to your family and ask for their support.

Abortion Counselling

Information about services available in abortion clinics can be found on their websites. All abortion clinics offer or provide counselling services. You and your companion, if you want 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; and c) you fully understand the procedure and its potential 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 runs disguised agencies with names like

“Pregnancy Care Centre” or “Birthright” or “Pregnancy Options” – deceptive names that imply they are pro-choice and feminist and provide unbiased help on all options. However, these centres are religious ministries that may push you to have a baby regardless of your 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 [they] continue 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 people, making the decision – whatever it is – is empowering and comes with a sense of control and maturity.