



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

*Your
Voice for Choice*

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

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 woman and transgender person in Canada 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

In most cities, you can consult a public health nurse, a sexual health clinic, women's centre, or the Yellow Pages: <https://www.yellowpages.ca/>, which lists abortion clinics under the heading "Abortion Services". Many cities have a separate listing for anti-choice organizations (often listed as "Abortion Alternatives"). These are not medical clinics, and they **do not** refer for abortion or birth control, and may have a biased perspective.

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.

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

- Call the 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: <http://www.sexualhealthandrights.ca/find-service-provider/>
- Check the Abortion Right Coalition of Canada's list of resources and contacts for abortion clinics across Canada: <http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/list-abortion-clinics-canada.pdf>. You can also email us at: info@arcc-cdac.ca.
- Call the National Abortion Federation toll-free hotline: 1-877-257-0012, or use their provider search tool: <http://www.nafcanada.org/provider-search.html>.
- Shout your Abortion: A collection of stories from women and families who have experienced an abortion. <https://shoutyourabortion.com/shout/>
- 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

A number of options are 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 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 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.) Be aware that many adoption agencies are religiously-affiliated or even anti-choice, so you may want to find a secular agency that will offer unbiased help.

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, which may require you to travel and make necessary arrangements.

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 (<http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/list-abortion-clinics-canada.pdf>). All abortion clinics offer or provide counselling services, and at some clinics 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; and 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 "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 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.