

# Unplanned Pregnancy: Why People Choose Each of the Options

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Discussing pregnancy options in the classroom can elicit a range of student responses, such as confusion, anger, fear, etc. This appendix is designed to help teachers understand why people choose each of the pregnancy options and express them in a balanced and accurate way.

Please remember, as a teacher, you should NEVER advise a student as to what decision to make. It is unethical to do so and only further complicates the decision-making process.

## Pregnancy Options:

- Parenting
- Abortion
- Adoption
- Family Member Raising the Child
- Temporary Foster Care
- Illegal Options\*

\* Illegal alternatives are discussed, not to imply that they are acceptable, but in recognition that there are individuals who may resort to them. The illegal alternatives will be discussed at the end of Section III.

## I. Making a Decision

### Do most people struggle when faced with an unplanned pregnancy?

No. For the majority of individuals faced with an unplanned pregnancy, the decision is clear and made relatively quickly (often the instant the pregnancy is discovered). There is little or no struggle making the decision or second thoughts afterwards. However, some people do go through more of a process.

### Why do some people struggle?

- **Pressure:** Some individuals are pressured by friends or family to make a certain decision. The more people telling someone what to do, the less sure they may be about what *they* feel is the right decision.
- **Internal conflict:** When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, some individuals find that an option they are strongly opposed to is actually the best decision for them. This internal conflict may lead to difficulty making a decision. *For example:* someone may feel that abortion is morally wrong, but determine that it is the best option for their particular circumstance.
- **No option seems like the right one:** An individual may believe if they think hard enough, the right decision will come to them. After much thought, some people come to the conclusion that they must choose the “*least bad*” option, as no good option exists for them.
- **External conflict:** There can be disagreement and conflict between the woman and her partner or family about the options, making it difficult to settle on a decision.

## II. Same Reasons ... Different Conclusions

With unplanned pregnancy, different options are often chosen (or not chosen) for the very same reasons. The following is an overview of reasons that could apply to **each** option.

- **Pressure:** Some people are pressured by their family, friends or partner to make a certain decisions. *For example:* a woman may choose abortion or parenting, even though she doesn't want to, because she's afraid her partner will leave her otherwise.
- **Moral objections:** Some people are morally opposed to a certain option, and therefore choose against it. These moral objections apply to **all** the options, be it believing life begins at fertilization and therefore abortion is killing a life, or that it is wrong to bring a child into the world if the parents cannot provide for it or if they already have responsibility to as many children as they can provide for, or that it's wrong not to raise the baby one's self.
- **Unaware of all the options:** Some people choose one of the options because they are unaware of, or do not know how to arrange, the other options. *For example:* Parenting is sometimes chosen because a woman may not be aware of (or have accurate information) about abortion or adoption.
- **Self-criticism:** Sometimes people feel that making a certain decision would mean that they were weak, immature or had failed.
- **To avoid sadness:** Some people realize that they would feel sad over what-might-have-been, be it seeing a child, being loved by a child, completing school, or being a teenager and enjoying their youth.
- **Fear of pain:** Just as with avoiding sadness, some people decide against a certain option because they fear it will hurt (physically or emotionally). *For example:* A woman may be afraid that having an abortion or giving birth will hurt too much, or that adoption will be too painful emotionally.
- **Fear of health risks:** Some women are afraid of the physical dangers of abortion and childbirth (real and otherwise).
- **Concern about costs:** A woman may not choose a certain option because she fears it will cost too much, and is unaware of the financial support available for all options (in WA State).

## III. The Specifics

The reasons discussed so far could apply to any of the options. This section discusses reasons unique to the specific pregnancy options.

### Adoption

- **Not ready to parent:** Most women who choose adoption do so because they do not feel ready to parent.
- **Too far pregnant:** Some people choose adoption because they are too far pregnant to have an abortion.

- **Open adoption:** Some people choose open adoption because they want to choose the adoptive parents. They may want to be involved with or see the child as it grows, but feel they cannot provide the type of life their child deserves.
- **Closed adoption:**
  - Many people choose closed adoption because they are *unaware* that there is any other type of adoption.
  - Others feel that closed adoption is the “right” choice for a birth parent to make, and that choosing open adoption would be selfish.
  - Some people choose closed adoption because they feel it would be too painful to continue being involved with the child and adoptive parents. Although these feelings are a real fear for some birth parents, such feelings do not accurately represent the experience of most people who choose open adoption.
- **Fear of “bad” parents:** Some people choose *not* to place their child for adoption because they are afraid the child might get “bad” parents. They might not be aware of how carefully potential adoptive parents are screened, and that the birth parents can be in charge of choosing the adoptive parents. They may have seen news coverage of one of the rare instances of abuse by an adoptive parent.

### **Abortion**

- **Not ready to parent:** Most women choose abortion because they do not feel ready to parent.
- **Health concerns:** Some people choose to terminate a pregnancy because of personal health concerns or possible problems affecting the fetus.
- **Rape or incest:** If a woman is a victim of rape or incest, she may feel an abortion is her best option.
- **Fetal development:** Some people choose *not* to terminate a pregnancy because certain stages in fetal development carry personal importance and meaning to them, or because they erroneously believe that the fetus would feel pain.
- **Too far pregnant:** If a woman doesn’t discover she’s pregnant until 25 weeks or more, under Washington state law, she *cannot* get an abortion unless her life is in danger.

### **Why do some women wait until they are farther pregnant to terminate a pregnancy?**

- **Trouble making a decision:** Many women who wait to terminate a pregnancy are having trouble deciding what is the best option for them.
- **Unaware of pregnancy:** Many individuals do not realize they are pregnant until the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> month of pregnancy. If a woman’s period is typically irregular, a missed period may go unnoticed. Some women have bleeding during early pregnancy, which is often mistaken for a period. Women may experience light spotting or bleeding that resembles their normal period.

- **Financial constraints:** In many states financial assistance is not available for low-income women seeking abortions (this is not the case in Washington). Some women may not be able to afford an abortion right away, and must raise funds to obtain an abortion.
- **Travel arrangements:** In some rural areas there are few to no abortion providers, requiring a woman to make travel arrangements. Some decide to arrange travel for a time when their absence from school or work will not be noticed (such as over a holiday weekend or summer break). Finances can also play into travel arrangements, as it may take additional time to raise the money for their travel in addition to their procedure.

### Parenting

- **Wants a baby:** Although a pregnancy is unplanned, many women are happy to learn they're pregnant after they get over the shock and surprise, and therefore choose to parent.
- **Stability:** Many women feel stable enough in their lives (financially, professionally, in her relationship, etc) to become a parent. She may feel strong support from her family and/or partner, therefore believing she will be able to provide a healthy stable life for the baby.
- **Life circumstances:** Some people choose **not** to parent because they feel having a child is not possible given their current circumstances; be it their age, financial state, school or career goals, or current relationship with the father.
- **Illness or disability:** Some woman choose **not** to parent because they are too sick or disabled to go through pregnancy and birth, or to give the baby the care they feel it deserves.

### Family member raising the child

- **Guilt:** If a woman does not want to parent and is strongly considering other options, but someone has offered to raise the child, she may feel guilty going through with another option. She may feel she is betraying her family or partner by terminating the pregnancy or proceeding with adoption.
- **Wants to be involved:** Some women feel that this is the best or only way to be involved with the child as it grows, if they choose not to parent.
- **No volunteers:** Some people choose **not** to have a family member raise the child because there are no volunteers, or they feel nobody who offers is capable of raising the child.

### Temporary foster care

- **Needs more time:** Some women choose to place a child in foster care because they are not sure whether to parent or place their child for adoption, and would like more time to weigh their options.
- **Not ready:** Some people feel they are not quite ready to parent, but will be shortly (e.g. about to finish school, etc.). Although they feel they cannot parent immediately, they would like to parent the child eventually, and therefore do not seek adoption. In this situation, the child is usually cared for by a family member or may be placed in temporary foster care.

**Illegal options (such as abandonment, infanticide, selling the child or suicide)**

As mentioned above, illegal options are not discussed to imply, in any way, that they are acceptable, but in recognition that there are individuals who resort to them.

- **Inability to see past this moment:** Some people are unable to see past the pain and confusion they are currently experiencing, believing things will never change.
- **Feels trapped:** Some people feel trapped when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, and believe the only way to avoid this feeling is to take a drastic measure.
- **Lack of support & partner/family friction:** Some people feel they have no support from their family, friends, partner, or wider community, and turn to illegal options in desperation. Some *men* abandon their child because of difficult relationships with their ex-girlfriend and/or her family ... the child's mother and/or maternal grandparents may reject the father's involvement, belittle his parenting skills or otherwise make it difficult for him to stay in his child's life.
- **Doesn't want anyone to know:** Some people feel that an illegal option is the only way to avoid anyone finding out about the pregnancy.