

## **H. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: PASTORAL RESPONSE GUIDELINES**

### **H.2 TEEN PREGNANCY**

#### **PRAYER | For Expectant Mothers**

*All loving God,  
You created the human family  
As a reflection of Your own divine life  
So that Your creation might share in Your happiness.*

*Hear our prayer for Your daughter  
Who awaits the birth of her child.  
She has cooperated with You in giving life.  
Assist her now as she prepares to give birth  
To the child in her womb.  
May Mary be her guide and support,  
Calming her fears and strengthening her love.*

*May Your daughter be filled with Your peace and blessing  
So that she may bring her child into this world safely and in good health  
To the praise and glory of Your name.*

*Amen.*

### **GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS**

*Note: A review of sections G.1, G.2 and G.3 helps support appropriate communication.*

**1. Students who come to talk to you about pregnancy may include those who:**

- Are, or think they are, pregnant.
- Know, or think that their friend (real or pseudo) is pregnant.
- Are contemplating, or whose friend is contemplating, having an abortion.
- Are sexually active and are worried about getting pregnant.
- Are using contraception and are confused about Church teaching.

*(Refer to Section H.1 Chastity Challenges and H.4 Abortion)*

2. Before any dialogue with the student proceeds, staff should be familiar with any school policies regarding disclosure of pregnancy. Understand your obligations and responsibilities.
3. While confidentiality is important for the student, do not guarantee confidentiality in all circumstances. See Communication Guidelines, Protocols and Considerations G.2.

Confidentiality must be respected at all times unless disclosure is required for reasons of:

- Student safety;
  - Parental or professional intervention and guidance; and/or
  - Legal obligations.
4. Determine if the student is feeling pressured, harassed, or bullied.
  5. Listen. Let the student tell her story. Listen for indications there may be more to the story. At this stage, listening is primary; try to refrain from commenting on any details or offering suggestions as to what you think she should do.
  6. Do not take over responsibility; this is not your child. Respect the parents as the primary educators of their child.
  7. Listen with care for indications of a student contemplating abortion. (See section H.3)
  8. Follow-up with a discussion with the school counselor and/or administrator.

## CHURCH TEACHING

The Church teaches that nothing is asked of us that there is not sufficient grace to do it. "By grace we mean God's free, loving gift to us, his helping goodness, the vitality that comes from him." (*Youcat* 338)

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you." "My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth" (CCC 2270).

A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The "supreme gift of marriage" is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged "right to a child" would

*"Grace," Says Pope Benedict XVI, "is being looked upon by God, our being touched by his love." Grace is not a thing, but rather God's communication of himself to men. God never gives less than himself. In grace we are in God."*

*Youcat # 338*

lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right "to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents," and "the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception" (CCC 2378).

Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being. *Prenatal diagnosis* is morally licit, "if it respects the life and integrity of the embryo and the human fetus and is directed toward its safeguarding or healing as an individual... It is gravely opposed to the moral law when this is done with the thought of possibly inducing an abortion, depending upon the results: a diagnosis must not be the equivalent of a death sentence" (CCC 2274).

## CASE STUDIES

*Note: The following Case Studies and Personal Story could be discussed during a staff in-service.*

## PREGNANCY

### SITUATION #1

Sarah is a student in grade 12. She feels comfortable with her Socials teacher because that teacher is her track team coach. After practice one morning, Mrs. Doe asked Sarah if something was wrong; she seemed a bit off in practice. Sarah replied that she wasn't sure, but she thought that she might be pregnant. Mrs. Doe asked her if she had taken a pregnancy test. She replied that she didn't want to take a pregnancy test, she just wanted to go to the clinic and "take care of it." Mrs. Doe asked her if her parents knew. Sarah looked really startled and replied that was probably nothing and she didn't want her parents to worry. She said that her period hadn't been normal lately and it was silly for her to talk about it before she even knew what was happening.

### SITUATION #2

Pablo is a student in grade 12. One day his PE teacher overheard him tell another student that Jim thought his girlfriend (who is in grade 10 at the school) was pregnant and they didn't know how to tell their parents. The PE teacher pulled him aside after class to let him know that he overheard the discussion. Jim looked relieved and said that he need the teacher's help.

### SITUATION #3

Athena is a student in grade 10. After Religion class she told her teacher, Mr. Black, that there was something she wanted to talk to him about. He asked her if it was a discussion for the break time or during lunch. She said that during lunch would be better and they agreed to meet in his classroom. The door (with a window) was closed, the two of them sat down. Athena told him that it was something that was really difficult for her to talk about. He told her to take her time. After speaking about a few other things, Athena finally told him that she thought that she was pregnant. She had taken a home pregnancy test and it was positive.

## PERSONAL STORY

### AMBER'S STORY



*When I was 16 I moved into my dad's house, and started living the life of a wild child, and got in with the "freak" crowd at school. Despite my Catholic upbringing, I began to smoke marijuana and have sex. My boyfriend was a burnout slacker. And even though we were careful when we had sex, I got pregnant. So there I was, a 16 year-old grade 11 in high school with a future dream of being a famous fashion designer and my world was crashing down around me.*

*Because of my Catholic upbringing, abortion was not an option to me although my boyfriend and his family were pushing me to have one.*

*I personally feel that is murder. You screwed up, so you murder a tiny baby?*

*I don't think so. And it is a baby; they say it's a blob of tissue and nothing more...bull. Do the research. That baby's heart starts beating before you even know you are pregnant. My family was pushing for me to give the baby up for adoption so I could go on with my life. I couldn't bear the thought of bonding with my baby during pregnancy, feeling all of its little movements and going through labor and then having someone else raise my child and me not be its mommy and not be involved. So I decided to keep my baby.*

*I finished up my grade 11 year, and just didn't go back the following September. I got my GED about a year later. My son Blake was born on November 1, 2011. He is the best thing that has ever happened to me! He changed my life. I was headed down a bad path before I got pregnant. Who knows where I would have ended up? I don't think it would have been a good place, though. He straightened me out, and forced me to grow up. He has been such a blessing in my life.*

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS - RESPONDING IN FAITH

1. The following are some basic questions you may initiate or listen for answers to:

- How does the student know that she/her friend is pregnant?
- How far along is she?
- Does the father know?
- Does she have a friend that she is able to talk to about this? (Mary went to her cousin Elizabeth.)
- Is she feeling harassed or bullied in any way? (Act immediately; see policy # 408)
- Do her parents know?
- Is there anything she is worried about?
- Has she seen a doctor? Does she have any specific health concerns?

2. Suggested language might include:

- Smile – evoke an atmosphere of personal warmth; avoid fear – support and encourage them.
- How are you feeling?
- What can I do? What do you need?
- What do you need from me right now?
- You won't have to do this alone; there is a lot of support available.
- It's going to be OK. This is something that we can handle.
- Encourage prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mother.

3. The student needs to know that regardless of the circumstances of her pregnancy, the pregnancy itself is still good. The unborn baby is a tiny miracle and she, the mother, is a part of that miracle.
4. The student needs to feel welcome and cared for if she is to welcome and care for the baby.
5. Ask if she wants to see a picture of an ultrasound as a way of giving some identity to the baby.
6. Try to be as normal and positive as possible regarding concerns she has about being a mother or parenting.
7. If the student is considering an abortion, encourage her to seek support to continue her pregnancy. See support list Appendix C and the Crisis Pregnancy Centre. Make every effort to persuade her not to do something right now; not to act in haste.
8. The father of the child should be acknowledged and encouraged to take responsibility. Without the support of the father, the girl will feel even more isolated and vulnerable.
9. If the student indicates that she is considering giving up the baby for adoption, affirm her in this and suggest she discuss it with significant others (parents, pastor, counselor, Crisis Pregnancy worker, etc.)
10. Offer to set up, or refer to school counselor who can set-up, an appointment for her. See Appendix C for support list. This may be a time-sensitive situation.
11. Ask them if you can pray with them and for their baby.

**CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTRES – LOWER MAINLAND**

Vancouver and Richmond: 604 731 1122 <http://www.optionscentre.ca>

Burnaby: 604 525 0999 <http://www.optionscentre.ca>

Surrey: 604 584 4490 <http://www.pregnancyoptionscentre.com>

Fraser Valley: 604 858 9151 <http://www.fvpc.ca>