



“Mom, Dad, I’m Pregnant...”

FOR PARENTS

How do I respond?



STOP! What you say at this point can influence the outcome positively or negatively. Your first reaction can shut down further discussion or can open the door to trust and cooperation. Take some time. It’s OK to say “I’m in shock. Give me some time to absorb this news.” “I love you. We will figure this out together.” Then set a time to talk soon, within 24 hours. Take the time to talk to someone you trust—your partner, family member, or good friend, taking care to ensure the privacy of the information. Get some information: On the internet, a good place to start is www.choicelinkup.com. Call a local clinic or family planning clinic or free talk line such as Backline (1-888-493-0092).



If you have already blurted out something you wish you hadn’t, acknowledge that you spoke without thinking. Apologize and start over with a positive message that you feel better about. “When I said, ‘___’ I was in shock and just reacting. I’m sorry. I really want to be there for you now. I hope you will let me help.” Be prepared for more anger or hurt, and give your child time to recover. Apologies can do wonders for communication.



RESPECT. LISTEN. Listening to what your daughter has to say will NEVER have more impact than right now. Have these conversations when you are relatively calm and centered. Your daughter—or son—may say things that anger you, or seem naïve or wrong. Remember, they are still growing up and ‘trying on’ various beliefs and possible futures. They may not “know” everything, but understanding how they feel and what they believe is essential in helping them make a plan. You both may need the help of a counselor to hear each other and to sort through the feelings you each have. Even if you have had a rocky road with your kid previously, this is a critical time to be helpful and positive, and most importantly, LISTEN.

SPEAK FROM THE HEART. Sometimes parents are so used to being “in charge” that they—and especially their children—forget that they are people who have made mistakes and were, in fact, once teenagers themselves. Speaking from your heart makes you human. Your experiences, and your feelings about your life are credible and relevant to the current situation.

Telling your own experiences can be good. Sometimes it’s the first time a parent speaks honestly or openly about their personal experience and their feelings about parenting, abortion, or adoption. Stories about first love, mistakes made, and wisdom learned may open minds. Telling a child what to do may close them.

Your “baby” is growing up. Although you still remember her first step, your daughter is sexually active and pregnant. Parents’ natural urge is to protect her and her future, but it is not as simple as when she was little. Grounding her, forbidding her from seeing her boyfriend, and calling her names will not help her learn how to protect herself in the future. She needs to learn how to plan for her future, make judgments about partners and friends, and care for herself. Remember, as adults we are not always so good at these things! She most needs you to listen to her and help her to see what is in her own best interests. Treat her with respect and let her know that you want her to make good decisions for her life.



Keep it positive. “I want the best future for you.” vs. “You can’t even pick up your own room!” Think about what you are saying and how it will be heard.

LOVE. Even if you don’t easily say “I love you” this is a great time to let your child know that the bond between parent and child is strong. “Whatever you tell me I will love you and we can work it out.” “You are my daughter and you always will be, no matter what.”

Take it back. Parents can make extravagant statements as a way to discourage teen sex, such as “I’ll throw you out of the house if you come home pregnant.” Unfortunately, kids actually remember this particular thing that you tell them and therefore fear telling you just when they most need your help. Undoing your attempts at “prevention” may seem awkward but it is worth it. “I know I have said that _____, and it’s true I would be upset. But, we would work it out. I want you to come to me if you are ever in trouble.” With the risk of unprotected sex at an all time high, do not push your child away from you by making vague threats.

Blaming the boyfriend. The “boy involved” may seem like an easy target for your anger and frustration, especially if you have disapproved of him all along. However, it would be wise to avoid putting your daughter in the position of choosing between her “lover” and her parents. During the teenage years, the peer group has a strong pull. Frequently young men and women get together but have different backgrounds, lifestyles, values etc. This is a normal part of exploration and growing up. She will not want to hear criticism of her choice in partner. Let her see this at her own pace.

You’re Both “Doing Your Jobs.” Your child is growing up and her/his job is to figure out who s/he is. As we will recall from our own adolescence, young people need to try things out, make mistakes, and take risks. That is a normal part of development and should be encouraged, but with enough communication to discuss the consequences of behavior. Although it may seem that your daughter is moving away from you, she still needs to know that you care what happens to her and are willing to support her.

Resources

www.MomDadImpregnant.com

Even more information about improving communication between parents and teens during a pregnancy crisis.

www.ChoiceLinkup.com

One site gives you fast accurate information on reproductive health and pregnancy options.

www.pregnancyoptions.info

A guide to making difficult decisions about pregnancy. Special sections for male partners and parents.

www.yourBackline.org

1-888-493-0092 A national toll free talk line to discuss all aspects of pregnancy decisions and options, for women, partners, and parents.