



A Parent's Guide to
**TALKING ABOUT
ABORTION**

axis

"If America accepts abortion... in the process it will absorb the worldview that justifies those practices—a two-story fragmentation of the human being that denigrates the body and biological bonds such as the family. And the dehumanizing consequences will reach into every aspect of our communal life."

— **Nancy Pearcey**, *Love Thy Body*

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This guide will help you discuss the following questions:

- ✓ What is the landscape of teen pregnancy and abortion today?
- ✓ How does the history of abortion in America affect our views today?
- ✓ What are the pro-abortion arguments I need to know?
- ✓ How do I navigate the abortion conversation with a teen?
- ✓ What should I do if my child has an unplanned pregnancy?
- ✓ How should I respond if my child confesses to having had an abortion?
- ✓ How do I confront the current pro-abortion messaging with biblical truth?

Anything is Possible

When *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision which protected the right of American women to have an abortion, was overturned in June of 2022, it sparked outrage. Among the millions of videos and posts that flooded social media were celebrities using their platforms to talk about the abortions they'd had. Actress [Uma Thurman](#) and singer Phoebe Bridgers both emphasized that without their abortions, they wouldn't have been able to achieve the heights of success they've enjoyed. Anne Hathaway, in an [interview](#) discussing *The Devil Wears Prada*, said that women have a right to their "reproductive destiny" and that "abortion can be another word for mercy." On Saturday Night Live, comedian Cecily Strong [gave a sardonic monologue](#) as "Goober the Clown," expressing her outrage at the decision and discussing how without legal abortion access, women were more likely to die trying to get them. She replaced many words with the word "clown," implying that laws against across-the-board abortion access might be as ridiculous as laws against being a clown. She also revealed that she'd had an abortion herself, and that without one she would never have gotten a chance to be on the show.

This is the narrative our teens are presented with today. Slogans like "my body my choice" can seem compelling because they frame the issue in terms of plain and simple female empowerment; euphemisms like "reproductive health care" and references to "emptying the contents of the uterus" can make it easy to gloss over the fact that abortion is the intentional destruction of a human baby. But generic phrases like these fail to do justice to real women's actual experiences with unexpected pregnancy.

No one imagines a day when their teenager will sit them down to say they are pregnant. During those first moments a parent holds their baby girl or boy in their arms, we daydream of when they'll take their first steps, have their first day of school, make their first friend, graduate high school, go off to college, start a career, get married, and have children of their own when they are grown up and ready. These are all pivotal milestones a parent anticipates being able to cherish during their child's lifetime; teenage or unwed pregnancy is not.

But anything is possible, even for the best-intentioned parent or well-behaved kid. Even if you are an attentive, supportive, and loving parent, your kid can find themselves in a situation you never imagined.

Our goal in this guide is to help you talk to the children in your care about abortion, the start of life, and how you would walk through it together if they ever found themselves with an unplanned pregnancy. In a time when it's extremely normalized to consider abortion the obvious choice for an unplanned pregnancy, it's essential to have a gameplan for how we will meet a teen in crisis with love, care, and God's hope for a scary situation.

What do teen pregnancy and abortion trends look like today?

There is often a disparity between cultural rhetoric and actual fact. The narrative in our society is often aimed at making abortion appear like a quick fix without side effects that practically everyone has done at least once, but that's far from true. Though the presence of abortion in our culture is heartbreaking and teenage pregnancy is still an issue, there are also some encouraging trends we can observe as we dive into this topic.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in their [2021 Overview and Methods for Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Report](#), Generation Z is having less sex than preceding generations. Three decades ago, more than half of teens were sexually active. As of 2021, the percentage of teens who are sexually active has dropped to thirty percent, an eight percent drop from the CDC's 2019 report.

Naturally, this drop in teenage sexual activity, along with an increase in education and access to contraception, has resulted in a decline in teenage pregnancy. The [Pew Research Center](#) reports, "In 2013, the [estimated teen pregnancy rate](#)—which reflects not only live births but also miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortions—was 43.4 pregnancies per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. This marks a steep decline, especially since 1990 when the [pregnancy rate among teens peaked at 117.6.](#)"

Unfortunately, these are the latest numbers we can provide regarding teen pregnancy rates. Over the past decade, researchers have shifted their focus from observing teen pregnancy rates to primarily researching the teen birth rate. This shift is important to note for two reasons:

- 1 Unlike teen pregnancy rates that account for birth, miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortion; teen birth rates only account for live births, which means numbers about babies who don't survive are absent from the statistics.
- 2 This shift in what is recorded reveals the way our cultural worldview has changed; the statistics about birth no longer include the babies who don't live, which tells us that the focus of data reporting is on the mother's experience rather than the baby's life.

Though this shift of priorities in data research and reporting can be disheartening for those seeking to protect babies by creating awareness about actual abortion rates, we can still get

close to knowing the teen pregnancy rate based on the teen birth rate. As of June 2023, the CDC reports a [3% decrease in the teen birth rate from 2021](#), bringing the teen birth rate among 15- to 19-year-olds down to 13.5 per 1,000 teenage girls. It's safe to say this decline reflects a decrease in teen pregnancy overall, especially since the Pew Research Center reported that [teens ages 13 to 19 accounted for only 8% of those who had an abortion in 2020](#).

Though trying to piece these trends and statistics together to find the reality of teen pregnancy and abortion rates may be frustrating and confusing, we can actually take encouragement from the larger picture. Fewer teens are having sex, which means even fewer are getting pregnant and having abortions. We pray that these downward trends will persist and that we may someday live in a world where, as the CEO of [Save the Storks](#) Diana Ferraro says, "abortion is unimaginable." In addition to prayer, we as parents play a significant role in making that happen by intentionally including the topic of abortion in the conversations we have with our children as they navigate the various milestones of their life.

Reflection Questions: How do these trends in teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates make you feel? What do you think are some of the contributing factors to these trends?

What is the history of abortion in America?

Before we discuss how to have a discipling conversation with our kids about abortion, it's important to understand its history. Many abortion advocates use historical arguments, often alluding to particular events or cultural attitudes to garner support for their position while not being completely accurate about what actually happened. Because these are the kind of arguments our kids are likely to hear online, at school, or from TV and movies, it's essential that we as parents understand the reality of the history of abortion so we can discuss the things our teens hear with them, from a place of education and understanding.

Depending on the storyteller, you will get a different history of abortion in America. For example, in their article "[Historical Abortion Law Timeline](#)," [Planned Parenthood](#) interprets the first wave of abortion legislation in the mid to late 1800s as "doctors banding together" to "scrutinize reproductive health care workers, like midwives and nurses" and to "launch a full-fledged criminalization campaign against abortion and female abortion providers." However, as historian [Dr. James C. Mohr](#) explains in his book, [Abortion in America: The Origins of Evolution of National Policy](#), the circumstances surrounding abortion legislation in the mid to late 1800s were more complex than male doctors "believing they should have the power to decide when an abortion could be legally performed." Here are a few of the historical circumstances that Mohr asserts led to abortion legislation in America:

- 1 In the early 1800s, people had limited access to healthcare due to a shortage of doctors and the cost of medical care. To help fill in the gap, doctors, who were mostly male, published home medical guides to help people remedy their ailments themselves. These guides provided instructions for women to perform at-home abortions with tinctures that included poisons, excessive exercise, or violent blows to the abdomen. These practices were referred to as "removing a blockage" to restore one's menstrual cycle and were discouraged once a woman's womb was "quickenened." More on that later, but for now, as you can imagine, as a result of these at-home abortions, a significant amount of women did irreversible damage to their bodies and even died.
- 2 In an effort to grow the medical profession, shortcuts to becoming a doctor were created. According to Mohr, "As early as 1800...two-thirds of the people who made their livings as physicians in the city of Philadelphia were neither members of the local College of Physicians

nor graduates of any medical school of any kind.” With this influx of untrained doctors in the profession, trained doctors, often referred to as “the regulars,” banded together to bring legitimacy back to their profession and to protect citizens from the harmful practices of untrained doctors.

- 3 One of the practices the regulars found harmful was abortion. The regulars found abortion harmful for two reasons: (1) Their interpretation of the Hippocratic oath that called them to “do no harm.” The regulars understood doctors as instruments meant to preserve life, not end it; (2) The instances of death among women due to surgical or poison-induced abortions. For them, this was not necessarily a moral issue, but a public safety issue.
- 4 The regulars also found the rhetoric and practices of abortion misleading. Part of this was because of the “quickening doctrine.” During the 1800s, there was no way to confirm pregnancy before a woman’s womb was “quickened,” or when she felt her baby moving. For this reason, many believed it was permissible for a woman to “remove a blockage” before quickening because they didn’t believe the blockage to be a baby. The regulars opposed this belief on scientific grounds, arguing that “conception inaugurated a more or less continuous process of development, which would produce a new human being if uninterrupted” and “that quickening was a step neither more nor less crucial in the process of gestation than any other.”
- 5 Abortion practices in the 1800s were also gravely misleading in regard to their efficacy. The home medical guides and abortionists often over-promised what their tinctures and pills could do. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, physician-pharmacologist Ely Van de Walker purchased eleven of the leading brands of abortifacients to assess their efficacy. He concluded that two of the eleven were “perfectly inert,” three were merely mild laxatives that could give the impression of an abortion, and that the remaining six could be highly dangerous in the hands of a woman desperate for an abortion.

These historical circumstances reveal that the first wave of abortion laws in America was not a power play to control women, but instead was a series of decisive actions meant to protect women from endangering themselves or being taken advantage of by untrained doctors who would charge women up to \$1000 (close to \$25,000 in today’s money) for an abortion or abortionists who over-promised what their abortifacients could do.

Additionally, despite the narrative Planned Parenthood proposes, establishing abortion laws was far from a gender war bent on putting midwives, nurses, or female practitioners out of business. The majority of doctors performing abortions and prescribing abortifacients were men. In fact,

many of the home medical guides mentioned above were written by men. If this was a war of any kind, it was a war for the protection of women and the protection of human life.

There is, of course, much more to the history of abortion since the 19th century, but we must get this early history about the origins and evolution of abortion laws in America straight because many pro-abortion advocates, like Planned Parenthood, frame this history as an invasion of women's rights. It's this persisting narrative of abortion laws that gave way to the 1973 Roe vs. Wade verdict and is likely shaping your child's view on abortion. This brief history of abortion in America will help you round out the narrative they've received and teach them how to investigate the messages put before them.

Reflection Questions: Is the information presented here new to you? Have you talked with your child about the need to challenge and investigate the trustworthiness of the messages they encounter at school? How could the ability to challenge and investigate the reliability of the messages they encounter serve them well throughout life?

What does the Bible say about abortion?

While it's important to have historical context for abortion, our convictions as Christians regarding life and its meaning come not from historical arguments but from a deep rooting in the truth of Scripture. As we mentioned above, the regulars' primary concern in regulating abortion was public safety, not respect of God's design for life and obedience to His command that we protect and defend the innocent. As people who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ and are intent on living as his disciples, however, it is exactly this respect and obedience which should drive us as we navigate these issues.

The ways we as humans commit our sins may be novel, but the sins themselves are not new. Medical abortion as we experience it today did not exist in the Biblical context, but the innocent—and children especially—are still spoken for by God's word. Let's look at a few passages from Scripture that reveal God's heart in a way that should shape the way we think and talk about abortion.

[Psalm 139:13-16](#): Many base their stance for abortion on “fetal viability,” or the idea that until the fetus can live independently apart from the mother's womb, it is not fully human. However, Psalm 139:13-16 suggests that fetal viability is not the proper marker for humanness by stating that God, through divine action, was creating and knitting together babies in their mother's womb. God doesn't deem those babies a “formless clump of cells” but an image-bearer—so much so that He writes out all of their days before “a single one of them begins” (Psalm 139:16).

[Leviticus 20:1-5](#): This section of Leviticus is establishing certain rules about what behavior is and is not lawful for the Israelites. In these verses specifically, God commands that anyone who sacrifices children to Molek be stoned immediately, and that anyone who shows that person mercy be killed as well. Leviticus is not known for phrasing things gently, but the intensity with which the practice of child sacrifice is spoken about reveals how intensely God Himself feels about it. To end a child's life was sin in and of itself, and a deity which demanded that sacrifice indicated a perversion so deep and horrific it polluted anyone who justified it in any way. In other words, if Molech is the opposite of God, then the extent to which it required children's deaths also shows the extent to which God demands their protection.

[Exodus 21:22-25](#): These verses reveal God's view of babies in the womb: that they are of immense value and worth. Although some theologians have [debated](#) about whether the “life for life”

punishment refers only to the mother or also to a child lost in miscarriage, the entirety of the scriptural witness affirms that God consistently cares for and is a champion of the most vulnerable in our society. Given this, we can conclude that in the wake of an unwanted pregnancy, the life of the baby and the mother are of equal value, and we should seek the thriving of them both.

Proverbs 6:16-19: The word “hate” used in these verses does not denote a preferential dislike. God doesn't just prefer people to be humble and trustworthy life preservers. Instead, He utterly opposes arrogance, lying, and the shedding of innocent blood because they are unethical. Ethics, as a field of discipline, can be defined as discerning what behavior promotes or disrupts human flourishing. With this definition in mind, when God says He hates arrogance, lying, and the shedding of innocent blood, He's saying He fundamentally opposes it because these behaviors do not bring about human flourishing.

This last point is especially significant. Many abortion advocates argue that ethics are based on people's rights to feel comfortable and happy, however they define that. However, as Christians who have surrendered to the lordship of Christ, we sacrifice our view of ethics for God's definition. We don't create our own.

This is easier to say than it is to live out. Something your child may have heard from abortion advocates, people who are on the fence about their beliefs, and even from those who largely oppose abortion, is the idea that it's unethical to refuse someone abortion in the case of rape. Rape is sinful, and it's listed as one of the things God hates. It is a desecration of His design, and He opposes it unequivocally. However, the life of the baby produced by this egregious sin is innocent and deserving of life. For many, this is a hard truth to accept and live by, but as Christians, we have chosen to submit ourselves to God's ethics, not our own. In these cases, though we know it will be incredibly difficult, we believe the scriptural witness would encourage the mom and her community to bear the emotional and physical burden of carrying the child to term, and choosing adoption if they are unable to parent the child themselves.

There are many passages throughout Scripture in addition to the ones we mentioned above which reveal God's heart towards the lives of the innocent in a way that speaks to abortion. We encourage you to note them while you are reading your Bible so you can find meaningful ways to share what you are learning from your time in Scripture with your children.

Reflection Questions: What other passages of Scripture speak against abortion? How can you spend time discussing these passages with your children?

Why do people choose abortion?

Having a theological conversation with our children about abortion and teaching them how to sift through its political message is important, but someone actually wrestling with an unplanned pregnancy or abortion isn't likely to be reached with arguments or discussions. Our teens need to understand the narratives about abortion and know what God's ethics are regarding it so they can have informed discussions when the topic arises, and they also need to understand the intense emotions that come along with it so they can speak with love and clarity on a topic that runs all the way to the heart.

We interviewed Diana Ferraro in an episode of Axis' [One Conversation Podcast](#), and asked her why women typically choose abortion. She told us that "a woman in an unplanned pregnancy is scared to death. All they can do is worry about 'what will my parents do, am I going to be kicked out of the house, [and] will my boyfriend hate me'." She later added, "An abortion is an act of desperation. It's the enemy whispering in their ear, 'You can't do this. You've made a huge mistake. You're a sinner. Now, you need to take care of this and get an abortion to [cover this up].'"

These responses aren't that of someone wrestling with theology or what is politically and ethically correct. These are the thoughts of someone grappling with shame and fear. They are concerned with how people will respond to the news that they are pregnant, and they don't believe they can handle the responsibility of raising a baby. For this reason, it's essential that we as parents have a candid conversation with our children not only about how they can speak with empathy on the topic of abortion, but about what we want them to do if they or the person they had sex with becomes unexpectedly pregnant and share in detail what kind of support we will offer them. Having this conversation will give them the confidence and assurance they need to come to us when they're in trouble.

In addition to sharing with them how you'll be there for them if they are facing an unplanned pregnancy, if you have any personal experiences with abortion, we encourage you to share with them your children when the time is right. Though it may be difficult to share those stories with your kids, your vulnerability will bear much fruit, and let them know they can come to you no matter what happens. Having these preemptive conversations with your children will help combat the enemy's voice telling them to hide and cover up their sin if they face an unplanned pregnancy.

Reflection Question: What do you want your child (male or female) to do if they face an unplanned pregnancy? What support are you prepared to offer them and their co-parent? Do you have a personal story of abortion or almost abortion? If so, what reservations do you have about sharing that story with your child? Do you think it could be helpful for them to hear it?

How do I create a space where my teen feels safe?

In [Luke 15](#), Jesus is criticized for welcoming sinners. In response to this critique, Jesus shares three stories. The first is about a shepherd who owns one hundred sheep, the second is about a woman with ten coins, and the third is about a father with two sons. Each of them—the shepherd, woman, and father—loses one of their most precious possessions, and each of them searches until they find it. The shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep in an open field to search for the sole lost sheep. The woman lights a lamp and diligently sweeps and cleans her house until she finds her lost coin. And the father is seemingly waiting on his front porch for years for his lost son to come home.

In each of these stories, Jesus is not seeking to draw our attention to what or who was lost. Instead, He is seeking to draw attention to the character of a shepherd who patiently goes after a lost sheep, a woman who diligently seeks after a dropped coin, and a father who lovingly and compassionately receives a wayward son who returns home. It's their character, their willingness to do whatever it takes to return something precious to where it belongs, that is the focus of the stories.

Consider the third story, the famous parable of the lost son: through his own choices, he found himself homeless and so hungry he was envying pigs' lunch. He was so desperate that even though he had gravely disrespected his father and squandered his inheritance, he decided to plead that his father might, at the very least, be gracious enough to let him work as a hired servant. The gracious and compassionate character of his father that he had observed through his formative years caused him to think the scenario might be possible, and to believe that he could go back home even if he could no longer be called a son. Then, when he does finally return to his father's house begging for mercy, his father greets him with joy and love and total forgiveness—grace abundant and overflowing.

As a parent, are you cultivating a home of grace? A home where your children know that if they come back home with the news of an unplanned pregnancy or a story of abortion, they will be received with support and love? Do they have a record of being met with your compassion and grace when they sin or make a mistake? And in moments when you don't meet them with

compassion and grace, have you provided them with a model of how to apologize and ask for forgiveness?

If your child comes to you confessing to sexual sin that has resulted in an unplanned pregnancy, or to the sin of committing abortion, we invite you to consider responding in the following ways:

- 1 Thank them for inviting you in and trusting you with what's happening in their life. They could have kept it hidden from you, but they didn't. Acknowledge that even though they have made some unwise choices, they are making a wise one at this moment.
- 2 Ask them how they feel about their decisions. It's likely they already feel guilt and shame. You don't need to add to it. Instead, use this as an opportunity to share with them the grace and freedom Jesus offers to sinners. Consider sharing biblical examples like David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah in [2 Samuel 11-12](#) and his prayer for forgiveness in [Psalm 51](#) or the story of the adulterous woman that Jesus did not condemn in [John 8:1-11](#).
- 3 Determine how you can best support them. A teenage girl with an unplanned pregnancy may need help telling her boyfriend (or the guy who got them pregnant), or your son may need help figuring out how to support the young woman he got pregnant. They also may need help seeking medical care or learning more about adoption. In the case of a child (male or female) confessing to an abortion, they may need counseling. They will require your help to determine the next right thing for them to do, which could include talking to a therapist or someone at a crisis pregnancy center or finding a specialized support group.
- 4 Speak corrective truth as needed, especially if your child is considering an abortion. But remember, they probably are scared. Ask God for the grace to, like Jesus, have a healthy balance of grace and truth. In grace, remind them of your love and the unyielding support you will provide for them. In truth, call them away from sin and into the light of Christ.

Reflection Question: In what ways are you cultivating a home of grace where your kids can confess their sins and mistakes?

...But Anything is Possible

The idea of our teens facing an unplanned pregnancy or abortion is especially scary as a parent. Speeding tickets can be paid, grades can be saved, even tattoos can be removed. But pregnancy marks a permanent change in someone's life. If they keep the baby, your teen now has to figure out what their life looks like as a parent. If the baby doesn't stay in their life either because of a choice to pursue adoption or the tragedy of abortion, that still impacts in a way that will last forever.

Part of what makes it all so hard is that teenage pregnancy is out of order. Pregnancy is a beautiful gift, a glorious piece of God's created design, but it's meant to be taken on by a husband and wife together within their marriage. When that doesn't happen, there are consequences to deal with that wouldn't be there otherwise.

But it's important to remember that while teenage pregnancy might bring with it pain and grief at the loss of a life your teen thought they would live, it is also the start of a new life, both for your teen and for their baby. An unplanned pregnancy calls to mind words like "mistake" or "accident," and that's absolutely how it might seem to us. But every life is precious to God before its inception. There is nothing that upsets His plan. He's never surprised, He never has to go back to the drawing board and make sure He's still in charge.

At the beginning of this guide we said something we want to bring back now: "Anything is possible." On one hand this is a cautionary statement; we shouldn't ever be so confident we've done everything right that we don't prepare for things we hope will never happen. We have conversations about abortion, we make a gameplan for an unplanned pregnancy, we make sure our kids know we're safe to come to because we know that anything can happen. But we also keep up hope, and daily praise God and thank Him, because *anything can happen*. There is nothing so devastating that He can't bring beauty from, be that the gift of a child from an unplanned pregnancy or even redemption from the pain and sin of abortion. Nothing has an inevitable outcome. God is faithful and God is good, and because of that we can trust Him no matter what happens.

Reflection Questions: Do you trust that God can bring beauty and redemption out of suffering? How have you seen Him do that in your own life?

Call to Generosity

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