

I'm Keeping My Baby

A tale for and about teen parents

By Christeen Thornton

I'm Keeping My Baby

A Tale For & About Teen Parents

C Thornton

This book is for sale at

<http://leanpub.com/Imkeepingmybaby>

This version was published on 2014-02-23

ISBN 978-1495995781



This is a [Leanpub](#) book. Leanpub empowers authors and publishers with the Lean Publishing process. [Lean Publishing](#) is the act of publishing an in-progress ebook using lightweight tools and many iterations to get reader feedback, pivot until you have the right book and build traction once you do.

©2013 - 2014 C Thornton

To my husband, thanks for keeping me sane. To my children, thanks for teaching me how to love myself. To the ladies in this book, thanks for being an inspiration.

Contents

Introduction	1
Part One: No Nonsense Information for Teens . .	5
How Do You Get Pregnant?	7
I'm Pregnant, Now What?	10
How Do I Tell My Parents?	13
What Will Happen at the First Doctor's Appoint- ment?	18
And the statistics?	29
What's the Difference Between a Midwife and an Obstetrician?	34

Introduction

Cases [in which teen pregnancy] was a positive step, are rarely mentioned because they do not send the “appropriate message” to teens about teen pregnancy. However, it is wrong to misrepresent the effects of teens from parenthood. Although pregnancy is certainly not the best choice for most teens, it is also not the tragedy that it is made out to be, Society should stop demonizing teen parents and instead recognize them as human beings struggling to meet the challenges life brings them—and often doing so successfully and happily

I was asked a few times why I was writing this book. It took me awhile to figure out the real answer to that question. I think I thought that it would be nice, and maybe help people to understand that teen mothers are not dirty, and that we are not negligent. But after much introspective thought, I realized the real reason why.

You see, I was seventeen when I became pregnant. I remember going to the library to find a book about pregnancy. I found many of them, but not a single one pertained to my specific situation. The one book I found about teenage pregnancy was a statistics book that told me that I was

at risk for developing gestational diabetes, eclampsia, and post-partum depression. The book also told me that I was at risk for committing infanticide, and suicide. At the time I didn't know what most of this even meant, so I had to refer to an obviously very well-read copy of *Our Bodies Ourselves*. I was honestly terrified by what I read. I might kill myself or my baby? Why!?

Now as great as the book was, there was nothing in there that really helped me. And all the other pregnancy books I read talked about things that didn't really apply, like having your "loving and supporting partner breathe with you through contractions". (What loving and supporting partner?) They also talked a lot about taking time off work, and how to navigate the maternity leave system. Where was the information about taking time off high school? How to tell my parents? How about navigating the Ontario Welfare system? What about going back to university or college?

With every book I read, my anxieties only grew. While I learnt a lot about breastfeeding, the process of birth, and what to expect from my newborn in his first few months of life, I was left with more questions than I had answers. Why was I kicked out of school? Why did my boyfriend leave me when he found out I was pregnant? Why aren't my friends calling me back? Am I going to make it through this? Does it hurt as bad as everyone says it does?

The problem is that people don't seem to want to talk about teen pregnancy, even though we feel totally comfortable

watching shows like *16 and Pregnant* on TV. It's as if it's this thing that exists only in the world of "reality television". Something that would never happen to a decent girl. It's this weird view that leaves young women with feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and shame as soon as they see the little pink plus-sign on the pregnancy test, when in many countries worldwide women have children young and it's seen as totally normal.

I personally was eighteen when I gave birth. Some of my friends were fifteen, and I knew a woman who had her first child at fourteen. Some of my friends lost their children to family services, and some of them didn't. Many of them were told they had failed. They had failed their families, failed themselves, and failed society. Some of them were lucky enough to have loving and supportive families who held their hands through all ten centimeters, and told them they would succeed, no matter the obstacle. Most of them were not so lucky.

So for those who didn't have the love and support, these are our stories. This is what we learned, how we cried, and how our hearts were mended by tiny little hands and sleepy smiles. We are not the girls that your mother warned you about. We are just the truth. Not magical, but definitely incredible. There is information in this book to guide and help those young ladies we wish we could meet and hug. We have walked in your shoes and I am writing this book to tell you that you will be okay.

Please note that some names and specific details may have

been changed to protect the identities of the ladies and the children mentioned in this book.

Part One: No Nonsense Information for Teens

Although most of the data regarding teen pregnancy is (frankly!) scary, several studies have shown that with lots of financial, emotional, and family support, teen parents will reach a very high degree of self-sufficiency and will succeed in raising their families. It will take a lot of hard work, but it is absolutely possible.

It is worth nothing that speaking strictly statistically, teen pregnancy rates have been steadily declining since the 1960's. The decade with the highest teen pregnancy rate was the 1950's. I believe this is due to increased awareness of sexual health, and less abstinence-based sexual health programming in school.

But anyway, the data *is* scary. Most often it is presented in an intimidating and severe fashion, leaving teens seeking the information distressed and confused. If you've read anything about teen pregnancy in the news, you might think that teen pregnancy is something akin to perdition. It is my aim to take some of the fear out of those who are young and pregnant, and dose them with a lot of confidence and a broader understanding of what it means to be a teenage parent, from adoption consideration to self-care during pregnancy.

This book will discuss abortion, birth control, pregnancy, pre-natal care, birth, and how this pertains to you as a teen. If you have picked up this book to be a support to a teen in need, thank-you! They are starting in the right place.

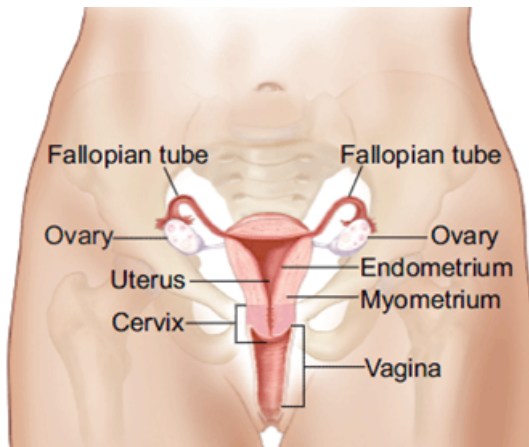
Please keep in mind that nothing in this book is intended to replace a doctor. If you are a teen who is pregnant, you will have very special pregnancy needs, and they need to be taken care of by a professional.

How Do You Get Pregnant?

Conception happens when a man ejaculates inside a woman's vagina without using any sort of protection, while the woman is in her fertile period of the month.

Once a month, a fertile female will release an egg (ovum) from her ovary. The egg will travel down her fallopian tube where it will meet up with one of the male's sperm. There the sperm penetrates the lining of the egg, and deposits its genetic material (DNA). When the fertilized egg travels out of the fallopian tube, and into the uterus, it will implant itself into the lining (endometrium). At this precise moment, a female can be considered pregnant. If the egg is not fertilized, the female will shed it, and the lining of her uterus, in her monthly period.

A female is most likely to get pregnant during the middle of her cycle. An egg can survive for twenty-four hours, and it is in that window that she can become pregnant. Some researchers believe that a male's sperm can live for up to fourteen days! Using barrier protection such as condoms or diaphragms can help to reduce the risk of pregnancy if used correctly.



The Female Reproductive System

It is also possible for a female to become pregnant through other sorts of sexual activities. If a male ejaculates onto her vagina, and not inside of it, she may still get pregnant. The sperm may be able to reach her egg via her vaginal fluids. This is why using two methods of contraception is best. I personally like to use the birth control pill in conjunction with spermicides. I have an alarm on my phone that I've set so I take my pill at the same time every night. We will discuss birth control more later in this chapter, so if you don't know what spermicides are, don't worry!

How Do I Know if I'm Pregnant?

The most common and talked about symptom of pregnancy is a missed period. It is possible, however, to mistake a

common pregnancy symptom called *implantation bleeding* for a period. This is the bleeding caused by the fertilized egg implanting itself into your uterus.

Sometimes it manifests as very light bleeding, called *spotting*, and in some women it can manifest as slightly heavier bleeding easily mistaken for a light period. This is why it is very helpful to keep track of your monthly cycle.

Some other common signs of pregnancy are sore breasts, darkening of the area around your nipple (your *areola*), nausea (*morning sickness*), feeling tired all the time (*fatigue*), dizziness, mood swings, constipation, heartburn, a milky-white vaginal discharge, headaches, lower back pain, and frequent urination.

These symptoms do not necessarily mean you're pregnant, but if you suspect that you are, you should take a pregnancy test right away. If you go to a drug store, you can bring your test to the pharmacist to cash out, so you don't have to walk around carrying the thing. You do not need a prescription to purchase a pregnancy test. Some dollar stores are also starting to carry them now.

Another way to find out for sure is to go to resource centre such as a local sexual health clinic or Planned Parenthood. They may be able to give you a tester, or put you in touch with a physician who can order a blood test to confirm the pregnancy, which would also determine how far along you are.

I'm Pregnant, Now What?

It is absolutely vital to your health that you find a competent medical practitioner. Many teens will try to avoid seeing a doctor out of shame, embarrassment, or financial concerns. Perhaps you don't want your parents to know, and perhaps you are scared. You need to know though, that a doctor is meant to be a person you can trust. If you feel that you cannot trust your doctor for any reason, it is okay to find a new one. Some ladies feel more comfortable with a female doctor. There is no reason not to ask for one, as it is part of a doctor's code of ethics that they do whatever they can to help you to feel comfortable.

You should make an appointment right away. If money is an issue, there is a list of resources at the back of this book that you should take a look at. In some states the doctor may be required to tell your parents if you are under fourteen. Generally though, doctors aren't supposed to tell your parents anything without your consent. You may feel stressed by this possibility, but please know that you are making a good and mature decision about your future, your baby, and your reproductive health.

Many young women also feel uncomfortable with their bodies, and uncomfortable with the idea of going to the doctor to talk about such a private topic. In this chapter we will talk about what will probably happen at your first doctor's appointment. Remember that no one is allowed to touch your private parts if you don't want them to. It

is, however, necessary for them to do routine STD testing as part of your pre-natal care and to ensure the health of your baby. Make sure when you get yourself a health practitioner, that you're comfortable with them. This will help to make the exams a little less awful. I've always hated getting PAP smears, and sexual health checkups, but I go every year because I'd rather deal with five minutes of discomfort than go through something *really* awful, like undiagnosed cervical cancer.



It is possible to get a false positive. Certain medications and medical conditions can cause this, so if you get a positive result, don't wait to see your doctor.

How Do I Tell My Parents?

There are many possible reactions you could have from your parents when you tell them that you're pregnant. They may feel scared for you, excited, angry, disappointed, happy, humbled, or even totally neutral. In terms of yourself, you may feel anxious to tell them, excited, or totally terrified. You may be feeling ten different emotions, and that's okay. These are all normal responses for a person in your position.

You are probably wondering what sort of reaction you're going to get, and I don't blame you. It's one thing if you and your parents are open with each other, and they know that you're sexually active, but it can be a completely different thing if your parents are very against premarital sex, or if you've been forbidden to date anyone. If you have conceived through sexual assault, it may be even more stressful to talk about. You will need as much help as you can get though, so let's get talking about how to broach the subject.

There are many ways you can go about telling your parents that you're pregnant. You don't necessarily have to do it face-to-face, and if you are genuinely scared of possible their reaction, you may want to write them a letter. I think that most parents would be worried that their daughter wouldn't be able to finish high school, or that their future grandchild will end up in dire poverty. These are the images of teen parents that are perpetrated by the media. That

being said, they are possible outcomes.

Other possible outcomes are that you will finish high school, and maybe go on to college or university. You and your child will likely live happy, full, and normal lives, and speaking honestly, your financial situation doesn't determine that. You can explain this to your parents, and that you are preparing yourself for life with a child, and that you are ready to tackle the obstacles that you will face being a young parent head-on.

You may want to show them this book, and explain that you are already taking steps to learn about how to have a safe pregnancy and childbirth, which shows a great deal of maturity on your part.

If you choose not to write a letter, but still don't want to tell them face-to-face, you could perhaps call from a friend's house, and leave a message for them on their voicemail. You could also invite your parents out for coffee, and tell them there. It is less likely that there will be an angry outburst if they are in a public place.

If your parents are extremely angry, you may want to stay at a supportive friend or family member's house until they have calmed down. It can be an even bigger shock to your parents than you would think. Make sure that if you do leave, that you tell them where you are going, or they may think you are missing and file a police report.

Your parents may ask you if you have considered abortion or adoption. These are important considerations, but it is

important that you do what you feel is the right thing to do. It is your life, and only you alone can make that decision. Your parents love you, and although they may take some time to come around, they probably will at some point. A friend of mine's parents literally didn't speak to her for six months, but when her baby was born, they came to the hospital and cried together. It was like something out of a movie.

Just make sure that you tell your parents how you feel. If you get emotional, that's okay. Let them know that it's difficult for you to tell them this. Share your fears and concerns, like that you may not be able to finish high school, or what your friends may think. You're their baby, and they love you. Always remember that.

And My Friends?

It might be easier to tell your friends than your parents. They are far more likely to be supportive and happy for you. They may start planning celebrations for you, and may give you gifts, hugs, and lots of encouragement. In my experience, however, this doesn't really last long. When you have a child your "you" time will become almost nonexistent. For older parents this is still an issue. As I write this, for example, my daughter sometimes tries to pull me off my chair, and hollers at me when I sit back down after getting her whatever it was that she needed.

Parents often seek out other parents because the children

can play, while the adults get some adult time. That being said, you must still be always supervising your children. Going back to you as a teen parent though, your friends may not have children, so you will not have that opportunity unless you seek out teen parent support centres. You may even lose a lot of your friends; it's not that they don't care about you, it's just that you are in a new stage of your life, and they are still living the life of a teen. You are now living the life of a parent.

While they are going to parties, going shopping for clothes, and doing homework, you will be feeding your baby, going shopping for diapers, and juggling your homework with your baby's needs. There will be little time left for you to do much else. That being said, the importance of you getting some time to yourself cannot be overstated.

You still need time to hang out with friends and be crazy, and silly and talk about the things you like. You still need time to paint your toenails if you want, and maybe go to the movies once in a while. And that is exactly why it's so important to get support. Even adults need to do this in order to maintain a healthy mindset.

Having a baby is not a death sentence, and it doesn't have to be. You can get a babysitter, or perhaps your parents can watch your little one for an hour or two. Just remember that you are probably going to need to bring your baby with you almost everywhere you go, so be careful of what company you keep.

Some people like to wait until they are at least three months

pregnant, because after that point, it's unlikely that you will miscarry. I personally wanted (and needed!) lots of support, so I told all my friends right away. I lost some friends, but from that I learned a lesson: not everyone will stick by you in life, but you don't need those sorts of people anyhow.

The one thing that people don't often realize is how isolating teen pregnancy can be. Because you'll be at home with your baby, you'll see a lot of stuff go by that you might've wanted to participate in. One of the things I remember from when I had my son was looking at Facebook photos of my friends graduating from High School and feeling *really* depressed. I can say with absolute honesty that I was angry at myself for getting into a situation where I was missing out on so much. I'd see pictures of my friends going sky-diving and travelling to Scotland and Peru and I'd think, *"How did I get here?"*

The thing you'll learn is that most people only talk about the positives in their lives. You're not the only person with problems. You probably just don't know about theirs. When you are feeling sad and alone, remember that your baby won't always be a baby. You will probably live for eighty wonderful years, in which you will do wonderful things. You **can** go back to school and graduate, and you **can** go on a girls trip to Cancun. It will just be delayed. And that's okay, because you're already busy doing something else that is wonderful: raising a happy and healthy child.

What Will Happen at the First Doctor's Appointment?

The doctor will likely order a blood test, and an ultrasound. They may also need to do what is called a pelvic exam. Every year after you become sexually active you should have a pelvic exam to check for sexually transmitted infections, and to have a PAP smear, which is to check for changes in the cells of your cervix that may indicate cancer. If you have not recently had a PAP smear, the doctor will likely do one at the visit. It doesn't hurt at all, but you will feel some pressure. Your cervix actually has very few nerve endings. You may have light bleeding called spotting after the procedure, and that is normal.

For the pelvic exam, you will be required to remove at least the lower half of your clothing. The doctor should provide you with either a gown, or drape, which is a sort of paper sheet. You will lie down on the examination table, and the doctor will first visually inspect your vulva (the outside of your vagina), and then will perform an internal exam. Using lubricant, the doctor will insert one-to-two fingers into your vagina, pressing on the top of your pelvis to check for lumps, the size of your ovaries, and the size of your uterus.

The final part of the pelvic exam includes the use of a medical tool called a speculum. It honestly looks like the beak of a duck. You can ask the doctor to warm it up using water if you like. The doctor will gently insert the speculum

into your vagina, and carefully open it up. This is done so they can take a look inside to check for sores, other signs of infection, and so that they can do a swab of your cervix. If you are having a PAP done this is when they will do it.

The blood test is to check the level of hormone in your blood, to get an accurate idea of how far along you are. The hormone they are looking for is called hcG. The fetus produces this hormone, and the further along you are, the more hcG will be in your blood. The blood test is almost painless. The nurse will wrap a tight strap around your arm called a tourniquet. You will need to clench your fist to help the vein in the crook of your arm swell with blood. The nurse will use a small needle to collect the blood sample.

If you are frightened, don't worry. Lots of people are totally stressed out by needles. In fact, it's one of the most common fears in the world. You can ask the nurse to use a smaller needle called a butterfly needle, which hurts less, although it will take a bit longer to collect the blood. You can also request to lie down as the nurse draws the sample if you are worried you may faint.

The ultrasound is totally painless, but is admittedly a bit of a bother. You will be asked to drink a seemingly ridiculous amount of water beforehand, and then likely have to sit in a waiting room while needing to urinate. The technician will call you in, and you'll probably have to change into a gown. You will lay down on a table similar to the one in your doctor's office, and the technician will squirt a glob of ultrasound gel onto your pelvic area.

They will then use a device called an ultrasound wand to visualize the fetus, and your reproductive organs. The ultrasound works by sending waves of sound into your body which bounce off your organs and the fetus and back to the wand. The machine interprets this information and makes a picture that the technician (and you!) can look at. The reason they need you to drink all that water is because it will fill up your bladder, and it will push your uterus up to where the technician can see it.

The technician will measure the length of the fetus to determine its gestational age (how old the fetus is), and will check to make sure the fetus isn't growing outside the uterus. You can usually ask for a picture, but if you're very early, you may only see a little ball. That little ball is the egg sac. The fetus is in there, but is too small to see.

Depending on your age, the doctor may talk to you about concerns regarding your health, and the health of your baby that wouldn't apply to older women. The fact of the matter is that you are probably still growing. Your pelvis may not yet be wide enough for you to birth a baby. Your body may also be competing with the fetus for nutrients because you still may be growing. If you are still going through puberty, the hormones released by your placenta may affect your own growth.

Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. It is important for your mental health that you seek out help during this time. No woman should be left to her own defences while pregnant, regardless of age. You are probably not the first

pregnant teenager your doctor has seen, and definitely not the last.

After your pregnancy has been confirmed, your doctor will probably refer you to a special sort of doctor called an obstetrician-gynecologist, or ob-gyn for short. If you choose to have an abortion, you can have it done by the ob-gyn, or you can go to an abortion clinic. If you choose to continue the pregnancy, you should know that there is another type of medical practitioner you can have. They are called midwives. You will likely need a referral to see a midwife, so you if you want to see one, ask your doctor who they can recommend.

What Happens During an Abortion?

Choosing to have an abortion is a decision that is very personal. In many states you do not need parental consent to have an abortion. Once your pregnancy has been confirmed by a medical practitioner, you are free to make the choice whether to continue with the pregnancy, or to not. Only you can make this choice. Always remember that your body is your own, and your life is your own. Some people may try to force their own opinions on you, and some of those opinions may be unfounded.

The person who would perform the abortion would be a gynecologist. If you choose to have the procedure done in a hospital, you will likely be put to sleep for the procedure. They will put an IV in your arm, and give you some

medicine that will make you very sleepy. They will also give you some pain medicine so that the procedure doesn't hurt. The procedure only takes about ten minutes from start to finish, barring any complications.

If you choose to have the procedure done in an abortion clinic you may be able to choose to be awake for the procedure. They will still probably put an IV in, to give you pain medication, and some more medication to relax you. The doctor will insert a speculum into your vagina so they can see your cervix. They will then insert an instrument called a cannula through your cervix, into your uterus. The cannula is attached to a vacuum pump, and will be used to remove the fetus from your uterus. You can expect minor bleeding and cramping during the procedure and for some time afterward. It is comparable to when you have your period.

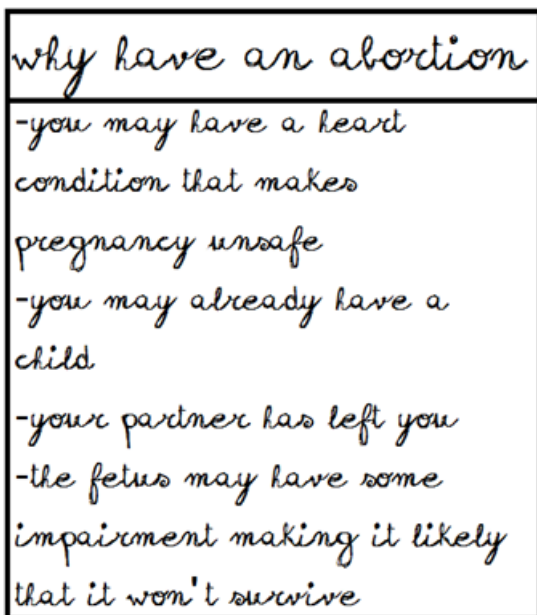
That type of abortion is called a D&C. There is another type of abortion available which is called a medical abortion. A medical abortion is only for persons who are very early in their pregnancy. They will give you an injection of medication that will stop the cells of the fetus from growing. It essentially stops the development of the fetus. They may give you tablets to insert into your vagina, which will bring on bleeding, much like a period. Some women feel this is a more natural way to abort, as your body will expel the fetus itself, in the privacy of your own home. It is almost like a miscarriage.

While abortion is very safe, there are some minor risks

involved. When doctors say the term, minor risks it means that there is a very low probability of anything bad happening. You will be required to sign a form stating that you are aware of the risks involved. Some women feel very scared when reading these risks, and if you feel scared please know that you are not alone. It is important to remember though, that pregnancy itself carries a lot of risk, especially if you are very young.

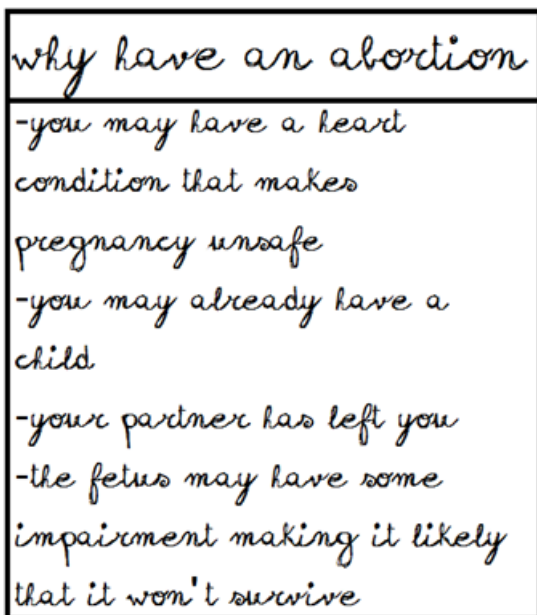
It's also worth mentioning that if you do decide to go through with an abortion, no one will know about it unless you tell them. Your medical history and information are kept confidential. While you may want to talk to someone about, you don't have to if you don't want to. It's your body, your life, and your choice what you do with it.

Some of the potential complications during and after an abortion are as follows:



You may feel a range of emotions while making this choice, and afterward you may angry, sad, or even relieved. All of these emotions are okay. If you start to feel very sad, speak up and tell someone. There are counsellors out there who work with women who have had abortions. Sometimes it can feel like you are grieving the loss of a child, and that's okay. There is no "right" way to feel about abortion.

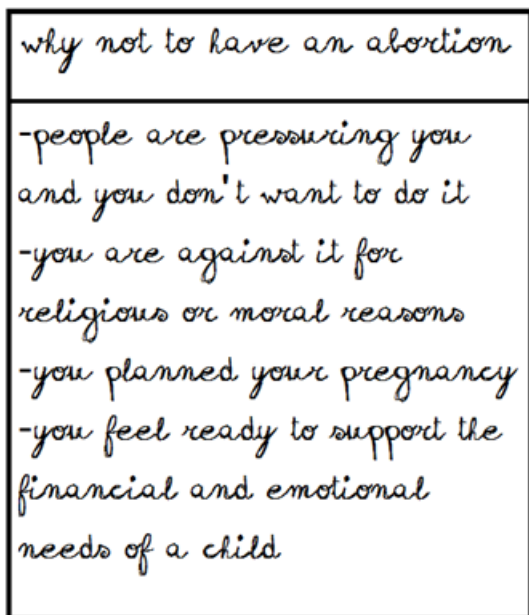
You can talk to a trusted friend, a counsellor, your pastor, a teacher, your boyfriend, or your parents if you need support. Some reasons to have an abortion are:



This list is not complete, and there are hundreds of reasons why you might want to discontinue your pregnancy. If you are being pressured to have an abortion, and you feel like you really don't want to, remember that this is your life, your body, and your choice. Many abortion clinics will talk to you about this as well, and if you've been brought in by someone who has it in their mind that you are not leaving until it's been done, you should talk to the counselor. They may be able to help you.

Regardless, your particular reason may not be listed, but

it's still valid. That being said, some reasons not to have an abortion are:



Again, your reason may not be listed here, but again, it's still valid. As I said, abortion is a very personal thing, and only you can make the decision. Whatever you choose, you are making the right choice for your body and your life, and there is a lot of support out there for you.

After you have an abortion, a counsellor will talk to you about birth control. You can get pregnant almost imme-

diately after an abortion, so make sure you have a plan for yourself. They may be able to prescribe you the birth control pill after the procedure is done. Some clinics will also insert an IUD for you, at minimal cost, or even free of charge.

There are a lot of myths about abortion circulating. If you are concerned about anything regarding abortion, you will be able to talk to a counsellor beforehand. Please know that abortion doesn't cause cancer, it doesn't affect your future fertility, and it is not something that only promiscuous girls do.

What About Adoption?

As I'm sure you're aware, there are three options available to you upon discovering that you're pregnant. Adoption is one these three. In general terms, adoption is giving your baby up to another family, or perhaps even a member of your own family for them to raise. Some states and provinces have recently legislated new laws that allow for a type of adoption, called an open adoption to be done.

An open adoption is one where you may still have legal access to the child, and certain parental rights, perhaps getting the child for visits on weekends. A typical adoption, however, is considered closed. This means that you would have no access to the child, although when the child turns 18, they can go through court records to find you if they wish.

If you are looking at adoption as an option, there are many reputable agencies that are available to you, and will have had experience working with teen parents. Do be wary of persons offering large sums of money. Reputable agencies will advise you of your legal rights and obligations. You may be required to speak to a registered counsellor before you agree to anything.

It's a very tough decision, and you may find yourself not wanting to give up your baby after you give birth. This is perfectly normal. Make a list of the reasons why you want to give your baby to another family. Perhaps you feel like your baby would have a better shot at life with a better prepared family. Maybe you are against abortion, but don't feel ready to raise a child. These are valid reasons, and there is nothing to be ashamed of. Just make sure you're not doing this because you have money problems, or because you're afraid. You may find that you will regret your decision.

In the states, you may be required to have the father's consent when going through with an adoption. They may have to sign legal papers agreeing to the adoption (giving legal consent). Depending on where you live you may be required to actively search for the father before going through with the adoption. Check out http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes¹ if you need more information about the legal rights of the father.

¹http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes

And the statistics?

Speaking very frankly, having a child at any age is a huge responsibility. As a teen you are still learning a lot about your world, even though you may feel like you do. You are likely in high school, maybe working a part-time job, thinking about your future. It can be very difficult to juggle the needs of an infant with the needs of yourself, not to mention any other responsibilities. You may want to go out with your friends, but if your child is sick, you will have to sit out on the party. You may have to write an exam, but if you don't have anyone to watch your child, you may not be able to go. These are things that must be considered when choosing to accept the life of a parent. We will discuss safe sex methods later in this chapter than can help to prevent pregnancy, and the importance of delaying pregnancy is something you should consider if you are not already pregnant and are considering becoming so.

Not all babies are born healthy, and sadly, the studies done on the matter show that babies born to teenage mothers are at a higher risk for developmental delays such as speech, gross and fine motor development (gross motor skills are things like jumping or throwing a ball, fine motor skills are things like writing or using a fork). Babies born to teenage mothers also are more likely to suffer from certain health conditions like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

The reason I think we see a lot of these sorts of things are for two main reasons:

1. A lack of adequate pre-natal care, which includes regular pre-natal visits to the doctor, proper nutrition, and healthy lifestyle choices

2. A lack of adequate information about pregnancy, such as how to seek out said pre-natal care, and how to take care of oneself while pregnant

I spoke earlier in this book of the importance of seeking out pre-natal care, and I have to say it again: as soon as you think you are pregnant, get yourself to a doctor. He/she will be able to guide you during your pregnancy, and get you to supports if need be. They are also the gatekeepers for some government assistance programs for teen parents. It is also very important that you are honest with your doctor. There is probably nothing they haven't seen or heard of before.

If you have a drug or alcohol addiction it is very important that you mention this to your health care practitioner. The data collected from the 2004 US census shows that a large number of teenage parents suffer with this. Your health and the health of your baby depend on you taking care of yourself.

All that being said, so long as you are following your doctor's advice, your likelihood of having complications lowers dramatically. While there are always going to be some things that you can't control (like genetics, for example), you can prevent things like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome by consuming zero amounts of alcohol. You can prevent your baby from being born too small by not smoking cigarettes or marijuana.

Now this is just one side of the stats. The other side indicates that teen parents are unlikely to finish high school, unlikely to pursue a secondary education, likely to live in extreme poverty, and likely to be in an abusive relationship. The only way you will not be a statistic is if you work very hard. Even with all the support in the world, it is up to you, and you alone, to juggle the needs of your child with your other responsibilities.

You will have to be your child's advocate, and that may mean leaving an abusive partner. There are a lot of shelters you can go to if you need to escape an abusive relationship. And remember that abuse is not always physical. It is sometimes emotional, mental, or even financial. No one deserves to be abused, and sometimes an abuser will turn on their own children. You will need to learn how to be objective about your life choices, how to do what is in the best interest of your child. Sometimes what is in the best interest of your child may not be or feel like it is the best thing for you, but you will need to do it anyway.

It might sound harsh, but it is true. It is also true that education is your key out of poverty. There are a lot of government grants out there that are meant to help young parents finish school. Honesty and integrity will take you far. A wonderful success story is Oprah Winfrey. She worked very hard to get to where she is now, and she was a teenage mother.

The point is, you can make your situation work, but it's just that: work. And there's a lot more at stake than grades.

Here's the data:

- Each year 900 000 teenagers in the USA become pregnant annually
- 4 out of 10 adolescent women will become pregnant and at least once before they turn twenty years old
- 51% of teen pregnancies end in live births, while 35% end in abortion, and the other 14% in miscarriage or stillbirth
- Less than 10% of teens will place their child for adoption
- 50-60% of pregnant teens have suffered some kind of childhood sexual abuse, neglect, or physical abuse
- Over 90% of pregnant teens report the pregnancy as being unintended
- The incidence of having a low birth weight baby as a teen is more than double the rate of adults, and the incidence of neonatal death (the child dying within the first 28 days of life) is also double that of an adult
- Around 14% of infants born to mother under the age of 17 are born prematurely
- Less than 1/3 of teens who begin their families before they turn 18 earn a high school diploma and only 1.5% earn a college degree before they turn 30
- Teen pregnancy is very closely linked with poverty and single parenthood. Almost 50% of teen mothers are receiving social assistance such as welfare.

- Children of teen parents are 50% more likely to repeat a grade, and are much less likely to finish high school had their parents delayed childbearing

This all being said, not all pregnancy ends in tragedy. This fact is not often mentioned, as society deems it necessary to demonize teen mothers, instead of supporting them as fellow human being trying to meet life's challenges. You can be a success, and remember that success is not always measured in wealth, but in quality of life.

What's the Difference Between a Midwife and an Obstetrician?

An obstetrician-gynecologist is a special sort of doctor who works strictly with pregnant mothers. They have gone to medical school, and have completed a four-year residency program post-medical school. They will provide gynecological care, pre-natal care, preventative care, and surgical care if necessary. Ob-gyns are trained to prevent and deal with any medical problems that might arise during your pregnancy, so if you have any pre-existing medical health issues that will need to be managed during your pregnancy, you might opt to have an obstetrician. Some midwives will work with an ob-gyn, however, regardless of health conditions.

That doesn't mean that they can't manage a pregnancy without health issues too. Most of them work out of hospitals or private practices. Their services are usually covered by insurance, and will work with your insurance company so you are not billed for anything unnecessarily. Generally speaking most young women end up seeing an obstetrician for the reason that their services are covered by insurance. It also might be a good idea for you to see one because your body is still growing and you'll have special pregnancy needs because of that.

Most ob-gyns will be there to deliver your baby, but will not likely be there during your labour. During that time your care would be managed by the nurses in the hospital.

Ob-gyns generally do not attend home births. They would also take care of your pre-natal care, referring you for ultrasounds, blood tests, or prescribing medicine if necessary.

Due in part to a difference in training, midwives view pregnancy, labour, and delivery differently. Midwives follow something that is called the *midwifery model*.

The idea is that pregnancy, labour and birth are natural things, and usually do not need any medical interventions. The model focuses on healthy practices, which include identifying medical problems early on, and attending to the mental, spiritual, and social aspects of her pregnancy and thereafter while treating her like a human being and overseeing the progression of her pregnancy.

If the midwife, however, determines that there is a serious need to have obstetric intervention, the midwife will likely refer you to someone who will reflect their ideals. It is worth noting that midwives are the primary caregivers for pregnant people the world over.