



GUIDELINES FOR LIFE ADVOCATES

10 THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN A WOMAN TELLS YOU SHE WANTS AN ABORTION



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INTRODUCTION

You may have heard of the TV show *What Not to Wear*. While no longer on the air, the show's fashion experts gave valuable tips on how "fashion-challenged" women could improve their overall presentation. Advice and suggestions were given to each participant, but in the end, the fashion-inept subject had to decide whether she would accept the recommendations or continue with her own fashion plan.

The experts' challenge was to prove themselves trustworthy, and then gently escort the client to a new way of thinking. They were generally successful in giving the woman a new perspective, but occasionally someone felt uncomfortable with the suggestions and stuck with their poor fashion choices.

A key lesson from the show was the importance of establishing trust in a relationship... any relationship, even one that would only last a few days. If trust could not be established between the fashionistas and the subject, the session was less likely to produce a positive outcome and both parties would lose out. The woman lost out by

rejecting a makeover, which could have boosted her overall emotional, physical, and mental outlook. The fashion experts lost out on an opportunity to positively impact a person's life.

Interestingly, a similar dynamic occurs when a woman, thinking that abortion is her only option, tells someone she is pregnant. The important takeaway for people who want to help a woman with her pregnancy decision — let's call them Life Advocates — is to remember that unless trust is first established, the woman may not be mentally, emotionally, or spiritually open to the compassion, hope, and help that is offered.

In the spirit of *What Not to Wear*, let's explore 10 things a Life Advocate should NOT do when a woman confides that she is thinking about having an abortion. This conversation is going to require dedicated time, patience, and prayer. Follow the guidelines below to help connect with her in a meaningful way as she is making one of the most important decisions of her life.

WHAT NOT TO DO

1 DO NOT RESPOND WITH NEGATIVITY

It is likely that you've heard the adage, "*if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.*" It will be helpful to keep this saying in mind when a family member or friend says the words, "***I think I'm pregnant and want an abortion.***"

Hearing this news can be shocking and sometimes even devastating. Consider how your response can affect her. If you are full of negative emotions during this time, take a deep breath and say nothing at all. A hug or another gesture to let her know that you love her unconditionally will suffice. If you do not have anything encouraging to say, it's okay. Sometimes this is reality.

If you do want to say something positive and encouraging, let her know that:

1. you are glad she decided to tell you,
2. you are here for her,
3. she's not alone, and
4. you will walk through the situation with her.

As Theodore Roosevelt would said,

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

— Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

2 DO NOT ELEVATE YOUR VOICE

Managing the volume, tone, and pace of your voice is wise.

Avoid raising your voice or speaking in stern tones. If you are a parent, keep in mind that this is not a situation in which you should scold your child or degrade her. In later discussions, there may be an opportunity to lovingly point out any discrepancies in her thinking. You do not want pregnant women to feel shamed or guilty for considering an abortion. Your job as a Life Advocate is not to bring the conviction of sin — that only comes through the

power of the Holy Spirit. The advocate's role is to show compassion while speaking truth, reminding her that there is always help and hope for her situation.

Be careful not to talk in a fast pace or talk over the pregnant woman while she is trying to express herself. While it can be tempting to try to get a point across, we have to remember that this is not about us; **it's about her**. It's important not to listen with an agenda to change her, but to make her feel important, loved, and accepted *before* you share your insights.

3 DO NOT LOSE EYE CONTACT WITH HER

When she tells you her news, soften your face and voice; be aware of your facial expressions.

Body language, including eye contact and posture, represents a major component of our communication with others.

Observe how she uses eye contact and then try mirroring her. If she is looking at you, meet her eyes with yours. If she is looking away as she talks, it may be a good idea to adjust yourself in your chair so that when you begin to respond, you are

not looking her square in the face. This might seem intimidating to her if she is feeling ashamed. Like some people, she may need physical space to process her thoughts and feelings.

Our facial expressions can send several messages. For example, if you are talking to a pregnant woman and she is experiencing fear because of the situation, it's important to relax your face and focus on the fact that she is telling you very personal information. Show your concern by listening attentively to what she is saying and how she is feeling.

4 DO NOT USE MANIPULATION

A good Life Advocate recognizes that the pregnant woman is in a challenging situation and may be emotionally vulnerable. Manipulation is never an option. However, all of us benefit from being aware of the distinction between speaking persuasively and being manipulative.

According to the Oxford Dictionary online, *manipulate* is defined as "to control or influence (a person or situation) cleverly, unfairly, or unscrupulously." Effective Life Advocates avoid potentially manipulative tactics like over-emphasizing abortion procedure terms, exaggerating

abortion risks, or introducing words like *kill* or *murder*. Instead, remember how Christ reached out toward us in love before we knew we needed Him.

It is always best to pray before it's your turn to talk, even if it's a quick silent prayer. Ask God what He wants her to hear from you. Ask Him to reveal the root cause of her decision to abort and trust that He will empower you to present the truth in the most loving and compelling way possible. Remember, according to Romans 2:4b, it is God's kindness that leads people to repentance.

5 DO NOT USE CONFRONTATION NEGATIVELY

Life Advocates understand that positive confrontation is a normal part of effective communication, especially when building trusting relationships. It is important for the pregnant woman to be fully informed about the ultimate impact abortion has on the mother, father, and her baby.

If your goal is to speak truth in love, negative confrontation represents a failure to love her, breaking trust, and potentially leaving her feeling like she is in an argument rather than a caring discussion with someone who loves her and has her best interest in mind.

Similarly, avoiding positive confrontation represents a failure to be honest with the pregnant woman.

Instead of confrontation, think of "care-frontation," and remember to listen attentively to what she is saying, being careful not to talk over her. Allow time for *thoughtful silences* so you can focus the conversation on her needs. Soften your voice. Empathize with her, communicating that you can understand her desperation to get out of this situation. Lovingly, and with sensitivity, share any discrepancies between the reason for her abortion choice and her morals and values.

Finally, trust that God guided her to share this news with you and He will bring her to all truth (Isaiah 55:11).

6 DO NOT INVALIDATE HER FEELINGS

“Normalizing” what the pregnant woman says is wise. This lets her know that she is not alone in how she is feeling. *There are many women whose first thought is that abortion is best for them.* Don’t worry that saying “It’s normal to think about abortion” sends the message that “abortion is ok.” Instead, what it says to the woman is, “your feelings are important.” Validating these feelings opens the door to discuss them.

Conversely, invalidating her emotions can happen when she states that she feels one way and you tell her she shouldn’t feel that way. When this happens, she may feel isolated, unheard, or uncared for. Instead, remember how alone and disconnected *you* have felt in moments of crisis. Although we may not agree with her choice, we can compassionately respond to her and meet her where she is at the moment.

7 DO NOT PLAY THE BLAME GAME

If you are a parent, you might be tempted to blame yourself for the untimely pregnancy of your daughter. If this is how you feel, take time to explore these emotions but don’t blame yourself — and don’t allow your daughter to play the blame game either.

In *The Search for Significance* by Richard S. McGee, he shared this example of a mother blaming herself for her daughter’s unplanned pregnancy:

When Ellen discovered that her 15 year old daughter was pregnant, she went a week without

sleep, tossing and turning, trying to determine who was at fault. Was it her daughter, who had brought this reproach on the family, or was she to blame for failing as a mother? All Ellen knew was that someone had to take responsibility for the crisis.

While there may be many reasons why a woman got pregnant, this is not the time to discuss the matter of who is at fault. When pregnant, women tend to be unusually emotional and in need of their support system more than ever. Trying to figure out how and why the pregnancy happened may be a discussion for later but not for the initial conversation.

8 DO NOT COMPARE HER WITH OTHERS WHO DID NOT GET PREGNANT

When a woman tells you she is pregnant, she is looking for unconditional acceptance. Comparing her with other family members or friends will likely make her feel insecure and judged. Remind her that she is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 39:13), she is loved by God (John 3:16), and He has plans to prosper her, not to harm her, and plans for a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). We were all designed uniquely and God knows our beginning and our end.

Although the pregnant woman's circumstances may not have been God's perfect will, the life she now carries is His perfect creation. Cherish both of them and let her know that because she was worth dying for, her life — and the life of her unborn child — have immense value.

9

DO NOT TELL THE PREGNANT WOMAN WHAT SHE SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T DO

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

— 2 Corinthians 3:18

You know that friend or co-worker — the one who is always on his smartphone, even when he is talking to others? You watch as someone is telling him a compelling story and he is checking text messages. You can tell he is oblivious that people are annoyed with this behavior and you want to help him out. You could blurt out, “You are the rudest person I have ever met. You need to put that phone away — NOW!”

But what would that accomplish? Yes, you may have gotten your point across, but will it make him more sensitive? Not necessarily. But it will most likely ruin any sort of relationship you might have already established.

No matter how much we love someone, we cannot *force* anyone to do what we think is best for them. How does that transformation come about? Only through the power of the Spirit.

As we behold something greater than ourselves (see the bigger picture), we are renewed. As a Life Advocate and a person she trusts, you are uniquely

positioned to help her see the bigger picture. Don’t break that trust by short-circuiting the transformation process by telling her what to do. True transformation can only come from within her as God works on her heart.

Below are ways you can guide her:

- Listen well and often. If you are not a person that can listen without really hearing, guide her to someone who she trusts, and who does listens well. *Remember: listening is the cornerstone of connection.*
- Encourage her to make a pro/con list for the options she is considering.
- Give her space to reflect on that list.
- After listening attentively, reflect her thoughts back to her to help her hear her logic. Point out inconsistencies in which her logic does not make sense.
- Refer her to [Pregnancy Decision Line](http://pregnancydecisionline.org) (pregnancydecisionline.org) or a [local pregnancy center](http://www.care-net.org/find-a-pregnancy-center) (www.care-net.org/find-a-pregnancy-center).

10 DO NOT SAY “I TOLD YOU SO”

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

— Ephesians 4:15–16

It’s so satisfying at times to be able to say that four word phrase: “I told you so.” However true it may be — is it loving?

By speaking the truth in love, we show the love of our Heavenly Father, preserving the bond of trust,

and respecting the woman as an autonomous, capable individual. By saying “I told you so,” rather than displaying love, it shows that being right is more important to you in that moment than your relationship with this woman. So ultimately, she may view this as a selfish phrase, not a loving one.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

G.L.I.I.D.E.

Now that we've gone over what not to do, let's talk about what we should do when a woman tells us she is thinking about abortion.

Think of the acronym **G.L.I.I.D.E.** — a way to ease, or *glide*, into a conversation in order to first build rapport and trust before offering discussing solutions.

G = GRACE

Remember to *extend GRACE*—make it about her not about you.

For example, you may say “*You are obviously upset. I can't imagine the feelings and thoughts that must be running through your head right now. Can you tell me more?*”

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the news, ask permission to pray with her if you know she is a person of faith. Stop and say a short prayer: “*God, thank you for the courage it took Jane to share this news with me. Fill our conversation with wisdom and grace and let her feel your great love toward her even now. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*”

L = LISTEN

Focus on what your friend is saying. Ask a few questions along the way:

- How far along are you?
- How long have you known?
- Who else have you told?

Tune out all distractions. Summarize what she says in order to ensure you understand what she is saying. The goal is for her to feel accepted and understood.

I = INQUIRE

You can prompt her by asking open-ended questions

- Thank you for trusting me with this information. How are you doing with everything that's going on?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing more about what's going on?
- How do you feel about the pregnancy?

- How does the father of the child feel about the pregnancy?
- What options are you considering at this point?
- Can you tell me what you know about those options?

Again, if there is no pregnancy center in your area, consider purchasing Care Net's *Before You Decide* resource to share with her. This magazine designed specifically to help a woman understand the risks of abortion, empowering her to make an informed choice. Copies of this powerful resource are available in the [Care Net bookstore](http://store.care-net.org) (store.care-net.org).

I = INFORM

Encourage your friend to gather as much information as possible. Volunteering to go with her to your local pregnancy center is a great first step. It is a place to feel free to explore all of your options without any pressure to purchase anything, since all of the services are free. You can find the center closest to you by using Care Net's [Find a Center](http://www.care-net.org/find-a-pregnancy-center) tool (www.care-net.org/find-a-pregnancy-center).

If there are no pregnancy centers in your immediate area, you can always encourage her to call Care Net's Pregnancy Decision Line to talk to a pregnancy decision coach at 877-791-5475.

D = DIG DEEP AND DIGEST

Take time with the pregnant woman to dig into the material given to her at the pregnancy center. Help her think of the positives and negatives of each option. Then, encourage her to take some time to digest the information, praying with her (if given permission) and for her throughout the process. If she is a spiritual person, encourage her to read through scripture and pray about it. Gently challenge her to think through the long-term aspects, including her emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

BEFORE YOU
DECIDE

E = EMPOWER

Help her to know and understand that she does have options. Encourage her by saying that you are there to support her through her pregnancy decision process. Help her make a plan of action of what she will do next.

While these tips are not all inclusive, they are a good start to supporting the pregnant woman.