

Exploring All Options: Pregnancy Counseling Without Bias

Introduction

This video series with a discussion guide is designed to help health care professionals increase their knowledge and develop skills related to pregnancy options counseling. The intended audience includes licensed and non-licensed staff that provide pregnancy test results and options counseling in a clinical setting. These tools can be used by a trainer to facilitate a discussion among a group of staff, or with an individual who would like to view these videotaped counseling demonstrations.

While useful as a standalone resource, these video demonstrations work best within the context of a comprehensive training. For additional training resources visit www.fpntc.org and search for “pregnancy testing and counseling.”

Using the Video

This video series presents three scenarios that illustrate the decision-making process when a client receives positive pregnancy test results. The counselor in each scenario is either a clinician, a counselor or a patient educator, as any level of staff can provide this counseling with adequate training. Following each scenario, experts analyze the counseling and offer commentary. The scenarios address the following options:

- Continuing a pregnancy and deciding to be a parent,
- Continuing the pregnancy and considering adoption, or
- Considering a pregnancy termination.

We recommend that trainers using this video view these scenarios in advance and look for specific counseling skills to identify and discuss with participants.

Quality Pregnancy Options Counseling

The goal of client-centered pregnancy options counseling is to provide non-directive, neutral, unbiased counseling to aid a client in exploring all possible pregnancy options and making the best decision at this time in the client’s life. Pregnancy counselors should be knowledgeable about the different pregnancy options and relevant terms, resources and available health care, and be trained in the use of unbiased and effective counseling qualities and skills. Quality counseling principles¹ include the following elements:

- Establish and maintain rapport with the client
- Assess the client’s needs and personalize discussions accordingly
- Work with the client interactively to establish a plan
- Provide information that can be understood and retained by the client
- Confirm the client’s understanding and access to appropriate resources

¹Gavin, L., Moskosky, S., Carter, M., et al. Providing Quality Family Planning Services: Recommendations of CDC and the U. S. Office of Population Affairs. MMWR Recomm Rep. 2014; 63: 1-54, Appendix C.

There is no single style of pregnancy options counseling. Each professional will find an individual style and approach. However, it is important for the counselor to be able to demonstrate genuine caring and empathy for each client's situation. Building a professional relationship, through this brief interaction, can help the client move forward in making an informed decision about her pregnancy — one that will be the best decision for her (and, if relevant, for her partner and family) at this time in her life.

Balancing Personal Values and Your Professional Role

Our personal values are important to each of us and often change over time. Staff providing counseling must demonstrate a consistent ability to discuss all options and resources in an unbiased, neutral and supportive manner. Remember:

- You do not need to change your personal values to be an effective pregnancy options counselor.
- You do need to be able to clearly separate your personal values from your professional role.
- When you are able to identify your personal feelings, biases or “hot button” issues related to each of the pregnancy options, you are better able to provide client-centered, unbiased and supportive counseling.
- When you separate your personal feelings and values from the client's situation, you provide a comfortable environment for the client to explore all options. This separation of your personal values from your professional role is also helpful in preventing burnout by allowing the counselor to “let go” of responsibility for the client's choice.

OARS Model

OARS is a skills-based, client-centered model of interactive techniques. These skills include verbal and non-verbal responses and behaviors that need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. The experts in the video reference these skills in their analyses of the three scenarios.

Open-ended questions

Using open-ended questions appropriately can save time and keep the focus on the client. Asking open-ended questions helps you elicit information to learn about the client's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, behaviors, and the general circumstance surrounding her pregnancy. This conversation will help you better understand the context of your client's options, support system and personal goals.

Affirmations

A skill that is often forgotten is the simple affirmation offered to a client to acknowledge the client's personal strengths and abilities that the client has disclosed. An affirmation takes very little time, but it can acknowledge the positive aspects of a person's life. Genuine affirmations help build rapport with a client and can demonstrate empathy and understanding.

Reflective Listening

The most challenging and important skill is listening and reflecting back to your client what you hear and see. This skill requires that you listen to your client's words as well as observe body language that can indicate how the client is feeling. The purpose of reflective listening is to demonstrate to your client that you are listening and trying to understand the situation and the client's feelings and beliefs about a pregnancy.

Summarizing

Summarizing is the skill that can help move the conversation from the beginning through the middle of the session. This skill helps keep you and the client "on the same page" by recapping briefly what has been discussed and then helps move the encounter toward closure as you help the client clarify a plan that reflects their personal goals.

Sample Open-ended Questions

For all options

- *How are you feeling about being pregnant?*
- *Who can you talk to about your decision?*
- *How might you feel about this decision in 1 year? ... in 5 years?*

Exploring Parenting

- *How would becoming a parent affect you? ... your partner? ... your family? ... your child?*
- *How would becoming a parent change your future plans?*
- *What support would you have as a parent?*

Exploring Adoption

- *What do you know about adoption? ... about open adoption? ... about closed adoption?*
- *What role would your partner play in making an adoption plan? ... What role for your family?*
- *While you are pregnant, what might change in your life?*

Exploring Pregnancy Termination

- *What do you know about abortion?... medication abortion? ... surgical abortion?*
- *What role does your partner play in this decision? ... role of other family members?*
- *What support do you have as you make this decision?*



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Facilitating a Discussion

Discussion Questions for Scene 1: Anna

- *How well did the counselor build trust and rapport with Anna?*
- *What skills did the counselor use to help Anna explore her options? What did she do well? Would you have done anything differently?*
- *How would you have responded to Anna stating “I have really mixed feelings about staying pregnant?” How could you encourage her to explore this ambivalence in more depth?*
- *How could including friends, partners or family members affect the counseling session?*

Discussion Questions for Scene 2: Kate

- *How well did the counselor handle the patient’s question “Can my boyfriend come in – I want him to hear it from you?”*
- *What counseling qualities and skills did the counselor demonstrate that you thought were effective? What did she do well? Would you have done anything differently, and if so, what?*

Discussion Questions for Scene 3: Jessica

- *How would you have responded to Jessica’s various emotions? What would you have said?*
- *What skills did the counselor use to help Jessica explore her options? What did she do well? Would you have done anything differently, and if so, what?*
- *How would you have responded to Jessica’s session if her mother had accompanied her to this visit and had requested to join the counseling session?*
- *What would you have done differently if Jessica were 14 years old and choosing to be a parent?*



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Resources

ADOPTION

Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption, February 2014

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_pregna.pdf

Adoption Options: Where Do I Start? August 2015

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_adoption.pdf

ABORTION

ACOG – Abortion: Resources Overview

<http://www.acog.org/Womens-Health/Abortion>

PRECONCEPTION

Preconception Health and Health Care – Information for Health Professionals

<http://www.cdc.gov/preconception/hcp>

PRENATAL

Pregnancy and Prenatal Care

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/EntertainmentEd/Tips/PregnancyPrenatalCare.html>

Credits

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This project was supported by the Office of Population Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grant #FPTPA090026-30-00

The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Office of Population Affairs, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Family Planning National Training Centers member organizations.

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