

Guidelines for Supporting Expectant Parents

	Establish expectant parents' WILLINGNESS to talk about their situation.	Find out what OPTIONS they are considering and why.	Acknowledge that the DECISION is theirs and you believe in their ability to make a good choice	Offer OBJECTIVE information & options. Suggest alternative points of view without judgment.	ACCEPT the outcome of the situation and move on. Access support for yourself if necessary.
WHY IS THIS HELPFUL?	Let the expectant parents know you are willing to listen, when they are ready to talk. Look for cues that they want to proceed. Be patient.	Asking questions shows you care and are interested in what they think. Focus on just listening to their ideas, saving any input for later.	If they sense you want to take over the decision or don't respect their decision-making, it is unlikely they will include you in their process.	Staying neutral establishes your role as support person, not advisor. If they come to the decision on their own, they are less likely to regret it later.	Regardless of what emotions the decision brings up for you, your acceptance of it will demonstrate your support for the expectant parents and will help them move on.
EXAMPLES	<p>"I would really like to be here for you."</p> <p>"Do you have people to support you through this?"</p> <p>"I'm available to talk anytime."</p>	<p>"You've probably thought a lot about this already."</p> <p>"Is any solution standing out to you right now?"</p>	<p>"I know you have it in you to make the best decision."</p> <p>"Only you know what is right for you."</p>	<p>"I can't tell you what to do, but I can help you talk through some different options."</p> <p>"Have you thought about this...?"</p>	<p>"You made the best decision you could."</p> <p>"It doesn't seem like it now, but this will get easier in time."</p>
ROADBLOCKS	The expectant parents appear to be avoiding talking or doing anything about their situation.	You feel the expectant parents are not considering all of their options.	You don't have confidence in the expectant parents' ability to make a good decision.	You feel strongly that one particular option is best for them.	You can't move on when you see how much pain the expectant parents are in.
SUGGESTIONS	It's fine to express concern, but keep statements brief and to the point. "I am really worried about you." "It makes me sad you won't talk to anyone about this."	Ask if they have considered various options, but respect their decision if they have already ruled out a choice you think would be good for them.	If you absolutely cannot be objective, tell them you are not the best person to support them in this decision. Help them find a more neutral listener.	Be honest about your bias. Encourage them to seek information from other sources, including counselors, doctors, or others who have explored their pregnancy options.	They must deal with their own reactions to the outcome. Be there to listen, but lean on a friend or counselor to process <i>your</i> feelings about the decision.

Strategies to Avoid When Supporting Expectant Parents

	Lecturing	Advising/Persuading	Judging/Moralizing	Diagnosing
WHY IS THIS NOT HELPFUL?	Lecturing tends to make people feel defensive and is likely to break down the lines of communication between you and the expectant parents.	Advocating a specific solution to the expectant parents may communicate a lack of confidence in their ability to make a decision that feels right for them. It also sets them up for regret later, if they make a decision based on someone else's opinions.	Feeling guilty can undermine an individual's ability to make decisions based on their instincts, needs, and beliefs.	It's likely that individuals facing an unintended pregnancy are already being hard on themselves. Pointing out perceived weaknesses or 'mistakes' will likely lead to them feeling inadequate and bad about themselves. This does not set the stage for empowered decision making.
NEGATIVE EXAMPLES	<p>"How could you have..."</p> <p>"Don't you know..."</p> <p>"I can't believe you..."</p>	<p>"If I were you..."</p> <p>"It would be best if..."</p> <p>"I know from experience you should ..."</p>	<p>"It is your responsibility to..."</p> <p>"_____ is the right thing to do."</p>	<p>"What's wrong with you is..."</p> <p>"You've always been like this..."</p> <p>"What you need is..."</p>
ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES	Accept that neither you nor the expectant parents can change the past. Acknowledge that they may be feeling self-blame and offer a space where they can be honest without inviting more blame.	Maintain a neutral position. Allow the expectant parents to make their decisions from a place of empowerment. This will ultimately give them the greatest chance for resolution.	While the expectant parents' priorities and values may differ from your own, express your confidence in their ability to make a solid decision that is right for them.	Remind the expectant parents of positive decisions they have made in the past. Suggest engaging a professional counselor to assist in the decision-making process.
POSITIVE EXAMPLES	<p>"You must be going through a lot of 'what-if's' right now."</p> <p>"I can see why you're so upset."</p>	<p>"There is no easy solution, but I trust you'll make a decision that feels right to you."</p> <p>"I wish I had the answers."</p> <p>"I would be happy to listen to your ideas."</p>	<p>"I'm available for advice if you request it, but even so, it is your opinion that matters most."</p>	<p>"This is a difficult decision. Would talking to a counselor would help?"</p>