

PREGNANCY OPTIONS COUNSELING APPROACH

1. **Affirm** that reproductive decision-making can be complex and that their needs and desires should drive this decision-making.
2. **Create** an open, inclusive, non-judgmental environment where the patient feels safe to express their feelings and ask questions, understands your willingness to discuss all options, and trusts you for accurate information and care.
3. **Validate and normalize** that people can have multiple and varied feelings about pregnancy and that there is no specific way they are supposed to feel. Whatever they are feeling is valid and should be normalized. Some patients may have many emotions, some may have few. Some patients may come to a decision quickly, others may not.
4. **Actively listen** to the patient. Offer silence for the patient to process and share. Ask open-ended questions. Be open to, interested in, and curious about the patient's process and feelings. Learn from the patient and reflect back your perception of what they are sharing.
5. **Clarify** the facts – the timing of the pregnancy, option to take their time before deciding, how to proceed with either option, and the accessibility of resources.
6. **Reassure** the patient that you will support them no matter what decision they make. Offer information and referrals.

TIPS

1. Frequently reflect on your **biases, assumptions, and values**. What scenarios are hard for you and why? Do you want patients to make certain decisions? Why and for whom do you feel that way? Work to mitigate those biases when you provide options counseling.
2. The **patient has “the answer,”** not you. Only the patient knows the right decision for themselves and their family. Research shows that people who decide to have an abortion are just as sure as those who choose to continue their pregnancy.
3. Seek to understand how the patient is doing, their feelings and beliefs. Ask **open-ended questions** in a non-directive manner to help the patient explore their feelings and preferences (i.e. “Can you say more about what you are feeling?”).
4. **Affirm** that the patient's choice not to be a parent now is not the same as choosing not to be a parent in the future.
5. Refer to the **pregnancy**, not the baby.
6. Ask about other **supports** in the patient's life.
7. Express your **gratitude** to the patient for sharing their feelings and coming to you for support.
8. The patient may not come to a decision at the end of the visit or be ready to discuss options at this time. Offer written information on all options for them to read on their own. Offer to schedule a timely **follow-up** appointment or phone call.
9. Remember, state restrictions on abortion will impact how much time the patient has to make a decision about whether or not to get abortion care, where they can go, and the types of care options available.

EXERCISES FOR UNCERTAIN OR AMBIVALENT PATIENTS

1. Some patients may find it helpful to consider **their personal pros and cons** of each choice, both in the short and long-term. Offer to support the patient in this by asking, "Would it be helpful to talk through what you think the pros and cons of each decision would be, both in the short and long term?"
2. **If uncertain**, consider encouraging your patient to do the following exercise over the course of several days before making a follow-up appointment. Often, one recurrent theme or feeling will emerge to help the patient to make a decision:
 - Spend one day writing a list of all positive and negative feelings about keeping the pregnancy.
 - Spend the day with ambivalent feelings, not making any decisions.
 - Spend one day writing a list of all positive and negative feelings about not keeping the pregnancy.

Tip: Keep this information handy if you are seeing a patient for options counseling. You can even turn it into a quicktext to include in the patient's after visit summaries.

Abortion Access in your State

Visit [Guttmacher](#) to understand abortion restrictions in your state

____ Abortion banned ____ Abortion available through ____ weeks
____ Waiting period/Multiple appointments required
____ Medicaid coverage ____ Private insurance coverage
____ Parental consent required

Resources for Abortion-Seeking Patients

Visit [National Network of Abortion Funds](#) and [ineedana.com](#) to build a resource list for patients.

- In-person MAB & Procedural Provider: _____ Contact Info: _____
- Telehealth Provider: _____ Contact Info: _____
- Abortion Fund: _____ Contact Info: _____
- [All-Options Talkline](#): 1-888-493-0092
- [Repro Legal Helpline](#) (For patients with legal questions, including judicial bypass): 844-868-2812

Prenatal Care Providers

- _____ Contact Info: _____
- _____ Contact Info: _____
- _____ Contact Info: _____