

YOU DON'T NEED TO HAVE AN ABORTION

This is a practical guide for that time of fear which sometimes follows confirmation that you are pregnant. There are many agencies available to help you and the new life within you. This booklet is written to show how many different kinds of help there are, and where to turn to find it.

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by

DILYS BARRELL

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Pregnancy brings its problems for almost every mother-to-be. Sometimes these are relatively simple, such as having to cope with morning sickness or having to go out and buy maternity clothes. Sometimes, however, the problems are very much more serious. You may be unmarried, or living in difficult conditions unsupported by family and friends. You may be worried about your own health or that of the baby. Perhaps you already have a large family, or perhaps you are nearing the menopause and were expecting to settle down to a quieter family life, possibly taking up work outside the home. You may just feel so weighed down with other problems such as finance or housing that you cannot face the prospect of having a baby at the moment.

If you do find yourself in difficulties there may be pressures from people around you – people you love and respect. Husband, boyfriend, parents, neighbours, teachers, social workers, doctors, may urge you that abortion is the “only” solution to your problems. They may claim that you would be silly and irresponsible to carry on with your pregnancy, and may even threaten to withdraw their support if you choose to give birth to your baby.

Whatever the problem, at times you may feel lonely and even desperate. In such circumstances it can be very difficult to stand against something you know to be wrong – the killing of your unborn child. However, you are not alone. There are many people and organisations who are able to offer support, advice, and often practical help to anyone facing a difficult or unplanned pregnancy. The help is freely available – you only have to ask for it.

Lifeline and Life

Organisations such as Lifeline and Life offer non-abortion advice and care services, and can help you find a positive alternative to abortion. The telephone services run by these organisations can be particularly useful if you would like to talk to someone while you sort things out in your own mind. The telephone numbers are advertised in the local press, and the telephone adviser will be willing to help as much as possible.

You may just want a little moral support, or may need more specific advice and practical help. The organisations can give you information about such things as financial benefits, homes for unmarried mothers, housing schemes, adoption agencies, or marriage counselling. They will be able to tell you about facilities in your area, and direct you to the right place.

Practical help can take many forms. If you are unmarried you may need to find accommodation, either in your own area, or further away if you prefer to keep your pregnancy secret. Lifeline and Life can arrange for you to stay with a private family. You could then find work, or carry on with your education while you plan the future. Support and help will also be given after baby's birth. Some Life groups now have houses which have been converted into bedsitters where you can stay with your baby. If you decide to offer baby for adoption the groups will support you in this – the choice is yours.

If you already have children you may welcome help with such things as babysitting or housework. Maternity clothes, baby clothes, and equipment can be provided if needed. Help is available for as long as necessary.

Diocesan Welfare or Rescue Societies

Each diocese has its own Welfare or Rescue Society. Some societies run family advice centres open to anyone with a problem, or you can arrange to meet a social worker at her office or at some other rendezvous convenient to you both. You will be able to discuss any personal problems thoroughly, and plan the future with someone used to dealing with difficulties similar to your own, and aware of the possible courses of action open to you.

If finance is a problem advice may be given about benefits, grants, and how to apply for them. You may need help with accommodation. Many societies have mother and baby homes where you can stay before baby's birth and sometimes for a while afterwards as well. Some societies also run flatlet schemes where you can live if you decide to keep your baby. There you will find the support and friendship of other mothers. The social workers also have contact with private families who offer accommodation, and with organisations such as housing associations and council housing departments.

All the practicalities of having and caring for a baby can be discussed – whether or not to carry on working, arrangements for looking after older children during your confinement, day nursery and daily minder provision, and the hundred and one details involved in bringing up a child. You may also want to consider the possibility of adoption and to know more about what is involved. The diocesan societies are also adoption agencies. If you do decide to offer baby for adoption they will be responsible for finding a suitable family and ensuring that baby is happy and well cared for.

Facilities vary from diocese to diocese, but if a social worker is unable to offer the type of help needed she can usually put you in touch with someone else who can. The address of your local society can be obtained from your church or by writing to the Commission for Social Welfare.¹

Social work help can also be obtained from the social services department, or the medical social worker at the hospital you visit for your ante-natal care. The district midwife or health visitor will be able to tell you where to find help locally.

The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council

If you, or your husband are worried about problems concerning your marriage or family you may well find yourself unable to turn to friends or relatives for help. The Catholic Marriage Advisory Council has branches all over the country. There trained coun-

¹ See 'Useful Addresses' at the end of this pamphlet for the addresses of all organisations mentioned.

sellors, all married lay people, are available to discuss such problems away from the pressures of home.

The counsellors are backed by lawyers who can give advice about legal matters. Any worries about possible medical difficulties during pregnancy can be discussed with a doctor.

After discussion you may feel in a better position to sort things out and come to your own decision about the future. Whatever you decide the counsellor will continue to offer support for as long as it is needed.

The address of the local C.M.A.C. branch is available from your local church or by writing to C.M.A.C. headquarters.

Citizens' Advice Bureau

Almost every town in Britain has a Citizens' Advice Bureau. Each bureau is staffed by trained workers who can give information about practically any subject. These include housing, financial and legal difficulties, personal problems, pensions, and benefits. The staff often have contact with official departments and voluntary organisations, and if necessary may even be prepared to approach these on your behalf. The services are confidential and free.

Specific Problems

Three of the commonest problems which concern women during pregnancy are financial, housing, and medical difficulties. These are worth looking at in a little more detail.

Finance

In these days of high prices there must be few women who are not a little daunted at the prospect of having another mouth to feed. The situation is even more difficult if you are unmarried, or if you and your husband have been relying on your wages in order to make ends meet.

Whatever the financial situation you may be pleasantly surprised to learn about all the benefits available to you. For example,

if you have been working you may be entitled to maternity benefit, sickness pay, maternity allowance, and even to some income tax refund. If the family income is low it may be possible to claim a family income supplement. These and many more financial benefits are yours as a right, and they may be a great help in the months ahead.

Of course benefits, pensions and the qualifications necessary to receive them change from time to time, but the Citizens' Advice Bureau or local Department of Health and Social Security Office will have up to date information.

If you do find yourself unable to pay hire purchase or mortgage repayments, or fuel and other bills then do obtain expert advice as quickly as possible. It may be possible, for example, to make alternative arrangements for repayment and the earlier this is done the better. Here again the CAB and DHSS are often able to help and advise.

Housing

The arrival of a new baby often puts strain on the accommodation situation, but much can be done if you know where to go. Many district councils now have a Housing Advice Centre, and the Citizens' Advice Bureau may also be able to advise.

The Catholic Housing Aid Society offers help and support to anyone with a housing problem whatever their race or creed. CHAS groups are particularly concerned with caring for and rehousing one-parent families. Several branches of CHAS have Housing Aid Centres either run by full time workers or by volunteers who provide weekly interview sessions. Smaller branches offer a useful information service. You may want advice about subjects such as landlord and tenant law, eviction, house purchase or improvement, slum clearance, council housing, and new-town job-and-home placement. Various housing associations are sponsored by CHAS.

Housing associations are non-profit-making organisations which provide housing to help people who are unable to buy their own homes, and may find it difficult to obtain council housing or accommodation from a private landlord. Sometimes the associa-

tions build their own houses and flats, or they may buy older properties and modernise them.

Most associations offer accommodation to let at a fair rent fixed by the local Rent Officer. Others run on a co-ownership basis in which you have a share in the value of the house. There are also associations who run self-build schemes in which members build their own homes, and co-operative schemes in which residents act as both landlords and tenants. Some associations specialise in a certain type of housing, for example, those for low income, or one-parent families, for the handicapped, or for the larger family.

Housing Aid Centres, the Housing Corporation, or the National Federation of Housing Associations will be able to give you details of associations in your area.

District councils are responsible for providing council housing. Whether they are able to help in a particular case, however, depends on local conditions and their method of allocating housing. You should certainly approach your housing department to obtain accurate information about the situation, and put your name on the housing list even if it seems unlikely you will be offered a house in the near future.

If you are not married you may find it useful to consult your diocesan Welfare Society about mother and baby homes, and flatlet schemes. Life groups will provide accommodation in private homes before baby is born and will help you find accommodation later. There are now some Life houses where you can live if you decide to keep your baby.

Medical

If you are concerned about your own health or that of the baby then the first thing to do is to consult your doctor or midwife. You should overcome any reluctance and discuss your worries thoroughly. Most doctors are only too anxious to put your mind at ease or to explain exactly why your or the baby's health is giving cause for concern.

Sometimes it is suggested that an abortion should be performed on health grounds. If this should happen then it is particularly

important to obtain accurate, detailed information about the reasons for the suggestion and the alternatives. The practice of obstetrics has improved enormously over the past few years, and the classic life or death case of mother versus baby is now virtually eliminated. Most of the medical conditions which the ordinary person may consider as possible reasons for abortion are no longer considered such by the experts. You may find it helpful to consult a specialist, and if you would like the opportunity to discuss your problem with a Catholic doctor then the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council can arrange this. Nowadays abortion is almost never necessary for medical reasons. Factual information about what an abortion involves in terms that the lay person can understand is given in *What is Abortion?* by Dr. C. J. Wheatley, published by Life.

Occasionally the doctor may tell you that it is possible baby could be born handicapped in some way, and you are bound to feel anxious about the future. However, it is extremely difficult to predict exactly whether or not, and to what extent a baby will be handicapped. For example, in most cases of German Measles affecting the mother in early pregnancy the baby is at least as likely to be perfectly normal as it is to be affected in some way. The chances of a genetic defect appearing in baby can often be calculated and are usually in favour of baby being normal. Surgery is able to correct certain defects.

Some children are born handicapped, and surely it is our duty to protect and help those less fortunate than ourselves. We have no right to say that someone who is not physically or mentally perfect is inferior and would be better off dead. The unborn child may bring great joy into the family, and may even be a genius who will help the world solve its problems. As Catholics we must show the world how false its values are becoming. God has given life to the unborn child, and that life is valuable.

The Catholic Handicapped Children's Fellowship offers practical and moral support and encouragement to any family with a handicapped child. Most dioceses have their own independent diocesan fellowships and activities include such things as family care, meetings and various activities for parents and the handicapped, and advice and help with spiritual matters. Social

services departments, several voluntary organisations, and your health visitor can also help and advise.

Conclusion

This pamphlet has mentioned many of the organisations which offer help during and after a difficult pregnancy. The account would not be complete, however, without mentioning the comfort, help, and guidance which Almighty God can provide. He has willed that a new life be conceived and He is fully aware of the problems which face you. We may not always be able to understand His ways, but we can be sure that, however dark the future seems in human terms, God will not desert us. He is ready and able to help.

You are expecting a baby. This is an important time in your life, as well as the baby's. Others are ready to share this time and help in any way possible. You do not need to have an abortion.

Useful Addresses

Catholic Commission for Social Welfare, 1a Stert Street,
ABINGDON, Berks.

Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, 15 Lansdowne Road,
LONDON W11 3AJ.

Lifeline UK (London Office), 39 Victoria Street, LONDON SW1.

Life (Central Office), 35 Kenilworth Road, LEAMINGTON
SPA, Warks.

The Secretary, Catholic Handicapped Children's Fellowship,
2 The Villas, Hare Law, STANLEY, Co. Durham DH9 8DQ.

Catholic Housing Aid Society, 189a Old Brompton Road,
LONDON SW5 0AR.

The Housing Corporation, Sloane Square House, LONDON
SW1W 8NT.

National Federation of Housing Associations, 86 Strand,
LONDON WC2R 0EG.