

# Teenager or mother?

## Wondering if you are pregnant . . . ?

You are possibly pregnant if:

- you no longer have your periods;
- you feel sick and nauseous;
- you have to go to the toilet more often;
- your breasts are feeling sore.

Home pregnancy tests are available at most chain stores and pharmacies. You can also visit a clinic or see a doctor.



## If I am pregnant, what do I do?

- **Speak** to someone that you trust: your parents, a family member, a friend, a teacher, someone from your church.
- **Visit the nearest clinic** as soon as possible and ask advice.
- Let the clinic **do tests** to determine your HIV status and let them test for other sexually transmitted diseases too.
- **Work out** what you are going to do together with your family – all is not lost!
- **Don't make final decisions** in the first three days.
- Discover where your support is and **listen to good advice**.
- It is not impossible to **return to school**. Speak to your school principal or a teacher you trust.
- **Take care of your health**. Follow a healthy diet and don't smoke or drink alcohol.
- **Speak to someone** at an organisation that helps pregnant teens. A social worker can help a lot.
- **Try to involve the father** as much as possible. If he has good intentions, it will be good to go through this together.
- **Ask the Lord** to be with you to make the right choices.

## Is my life ruined?

You have become part of the adult life at a very early age. It is going to be difficult and means making sacrifices. You have a big responsibility and will have to take decisions that will influence your life. But it doesn't mean the end of your life or your dreams! With the support of your parents or family it is still possible to lead a fulfilling life. You can be happy and enjoy your baby. Life can continue...

## What are the big challenges?

- In many communities and families there are often still prejudice, blaming and even rejection. Speak about this openly.
- There are often a lot of questions, anger, mixed emotions, feelings about the father of the child in a teenage girl's heart. Speak about them to someone you trust.
- It is not easy for a young mother to stay in school or to get a job.
- There is often not enough money for even necessities, such as food, clothes, diapers, milk, medicine and transport to take your child to the clinic or the doctor.
- The decisions you face now of whether to stay in school, whether to put your baby up for adoption, whether to keep it or to abort are big and life-changing.

## What are my choices?



It won't be the best thing to think over your choices and to make final decisions alone. There are many organisations and trained people that can help you in this. Listen to the advice of your parents, caregivers and family during this time. Weigh up the options that fit your circumstances the best.

Let us look at the following: **You can keep your baby, consider foster care, adoption or abortion.**

## (1) I can keep my baby

- Do I have the support I need to give my baby the best? Will my parents or other relatives help me?
- Will the dad help, also financially?
- Do I see myself taking up the responsibility? Can I really carry all the responsibility now?
- How do I feel about the baby? Will I accept and care for the baby?
- What about the dreams and ideals I had for my life? Are they still possible?
- Sometimes a teenage couple who are expecting a baby decide to get married or to move in together as soon as possible and they try to cope on their own. Sometimes it is better to take time to think over the situation before they make big decisions.
- In some communities it is commonly accepted that the grandmother of the baby or other relatives raise it. Then they carry most of the responsibility. This can be very good, because the baby then grows up within the extended family.

## (2) Foster care

Foster care is when children in need are placed out with screened foster parents. It can also be with someone who gives home-based care and looks after a couple of children. The Commissioner of Child Welfare determines how this must be done. Single parents can apply for this themselves at welfare organisations. The advantage of the process is that foster care is not permanent. The child can be returned to the care of the biological (real) parents on the recommendation of the supervisory social worker. The biological parents must ensure that they establish a bond with the child. The child may feel confused between biological and foster parents, especially if the biological parents' situation does not improve.

## (3) Adoption

Adoption is the legal way of finding other, permanent parents for your child. In this way you can ensure a better future for the baby with a parent or parents that may be in a better position than you to take care of a child. In such processes a social worker must take the lead. Strict screening is done by recognised organisations to find suitable parents. Both biological parents

have to consent to adoption. If the biological mother is younger than 18 years of age, her guardian (mother, father or caregiver) must also give his/her consent. The application will then be considered by the Commissioner of Child Welfare in the parent's area.

The question that is constantly asked is what is in the baby's best interests. The biological parents' own wishes are also very important. After the biological parents have consented to the adoption, there are 60 days in which they can still change their minds. The biological parents can keep contact with the child through the social worker. They can send photos and letters to the child or adoptive parents and vice versa. Most of the time, the details of the adoptive parents cannot be made known to the biological parents. The biological parents have the choice of saying goodbye to the baby during the process of preparation, to be part of the selection of parents from a list that the social worker makes available on approval, or can ask to meet the parents. There is the choice of deciding beforehand on an open or a closed (confidential) adoption. In the case of a closed adoption the details by which the adoptive parents can be identified are not released.

#### (4) Abortion

Abortion was previously limited to extreme circumstances, but since 2005 any pregnant person has access to a legal abortion [if she is less than 20 weeks



pregnant. After 20 weeks, abortion is legal under certain conditions]. According to statistics most abortions take place under the age of 18. Despite the legality, there are strong religious and other objections. It is a big choice to make – remember: it is about ending the life of an unborn child! The life of a mother who takes such a decision is hugely affected by it. Christian organisations such as Pro-Life and churches campaign against abortions done without good reasons. This is also our advice. If you nevertheless want to take this big decision, it should rather be done in the first 12 weeks of

pregnancy. It is done through medication or operation. The earlier it is done, the less risky it will be. It should be done at a hospital or clinic and not by anyone who wants to make money. Think about it again! If you think about abortion, speak about it with your family, a doctor or medical staff at a family planning clinic. Remember: there are emotional, spiritual and physical consequences that may take a very long time to heal. Sometimes they do not ever really heal. Counselling before and afterwards is essential in order to limit long-term spiritual and emotional scarring.

### Will the Lord reject me?

The Lord never rejects us, especially when we are in need. He says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

### Where can I go for help?

Dial the head offices of these organisations or look for the contact details of the branch nearest to you on their websites:

- FAMSA [www.famsa.org.za](http://www.famsa.org.za) (011) 975 7106/7
- Planned Parents Association – [www.hst.org.za](http://www.hst.org.za); (031) 266 9090
- Badisa (021) 957 7130
- Bloemfontein Pregnancy Crisis Centre: (051) 5226914 / 082 202 4306
- Other organisations (A social worker or doctor can also advise you about organisations near you.)
- ACVV – Cape Town: (021) 461 7437
- Child Welfare Adoption Centre: (021) 638 31 21
- ‘Adoption’ – 0800 864 658. ([www.adoption.org.za](http://www.adoption.org.za))

