

A CARE NET INITIATIVE

*Caring* for those considering  
**ABORTION**

SESSION 6:

Involving Fathers

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TAKEN FROM

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*making* **LIFE**  
**DISCIPLES**<sup>TM</sup>

*Equipping the Church to offer compassion, hope, help,  
and discipleship to women and men considering abortion.*

## SECTION 2.8: THE FATHER OF THE BABY: WHY HE IS IMPORTANT

The baby's father has the potential to greatly influence his partner's pregnancy decision.<sup>10</sup> According to research, a majority of women who choose abortion do so because they do not want to be a single mother or they are having relationship problems with their partner.<sup>11</sup> Men have a significant influence on whether or not their pregnant partners choose to give birth or abort their children. One study revealed that more than one third (38%) of women indicated the father of the baby was the most influential person on their abortion decision.<sup>12</sup> For these reasons, priority should be given to learning about the relationship between the pregnant woman and the father of her baby.

Consider the following:

- **The father's involvement during pregnancy raises the chance of a healthy pregnancy and lowers the risk of a poor birth outcome.**<sup>13</sup> When a father is involved during the mother's pregnancy, regardless of their living situation or marital status, she is more likely to attend prenatal visits, is less likely to smoke or drink alcohol during the pregnancy, and is less likely to have a low-birth-weight infant.
- **After the baby is born, an involved father lowers the risk of a host of poor outcomes for the child.**<sup>14</sup> An involved father lowers the risk that his child will grow up in poverty, have emotional and behavioral problems, perform poorly in school, use and abuse alcohol and drugs, engage in early sexual activity, become or get someone pregnant as a teen, and commit a crime.<sup>15</sup>

If we want what is best for the baby and the mother, the father should be involved, unless there is a very specific reason to not have him involved—one that would place the baby and mother in harm's way (e.g., domestic violence, drug addiction, etc.).

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## SECTION 2.9: FATHER OF THE BABY: GETTING HIM INVOLVED

The first step in involving the father in the pregnancy decision is to start a conversation about him—even if the mother has already made a negative comment about his character or their relationship. A Life Disciple can ask questions about the father and gently challenge her to consider his potential as a father.

It may be helpful for her to consider his best qualities and how he could positively influence his child if he embraced being a dad. A Life Disciple can point out that having a baby often changes priorities for both men and women and that, even though the change sometimes happens more quickly for the woman because of her intimate connection with her child, many men do step up to the responsibilities of parenthood and become excellent fathers.

Ultimately, the mother will decide if she wants to involve the father in her pregnancy decision. A mother often acts as a gatekeeper in a father's relationship with their child after the child's birth. She can either be open to his involvement in their child's life or closed to it. If she is hopeful about his ability to grow into fatherhood, she is more likely to be open to involving him in the pregnancy decision and, if she decides not to abort, to encourage his involvement in the life of their child.

The quality of the relationship between the mother and father can exist anywhere on a continuum from very poor to very good. While you will encounter some couples who have a good relationship and may even be married, most of the couples facing a pregnancy decision are not married, and many may have been struggling relationally.<sup>16</sup> As a result, a mother will likely be aware of concerns related to the father and his involvement in the pregnancy decision, even if she wants his feedback.

Many mothers may want the fathers to be involved during the pregnancy and in the child's life, especially if they're in a romantic relationship. In general, there are four common mother-father relationship scenarios that Life Disciples might encounter:

- **They are in an exclusive relationship, and it is generally healthy.** This scenario is relatively rare. This couple may be dating, living together but not married, engaged, or maybe even married. A couple in this scenario is less likely to consider abortion.
- **They are in a relationship, and it is not healthy.** In this fairly common situation, the couple's relationship involves a high level of conflict, physical or emotional distance, physical or emotional abuse, cheating, etc.
- **They were in a relationship but aren't anymore.** This couple has a history with each other. They may have dated or been married at one point, but they are currently separated, divorced, or have just drifted apart. The pregnancy may

have happened while they were together or as a result of a more spontaneous encounter.

- **They were never in a relationship.** Their contact was a “hook-up” (casual sexual encounter or “one-night stand”) or sexual assault.

Your role as a Life Disciple will not be to engage in relationship counseling or to tell the woman whether or not she should involve the father of the baby. Instead it will be to help the woman explore the potential of having him involved, while ultimately respecting her decision concerning his involvement.

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## SECTION 2.10: ENGAGING THE FATHER OF THE BABY

The first person in a difficult pregnancy that a Life Disciple will encounter is almost always the pregnant woman. So it can be a challenge simply to gain access to the father of the baby. You may never have the opportunity to meet him. Nevertheless, as the woman shares her story, keep the baby's father in mind, even if he is not with her.

Our “my body, my choice” culture reinforces to a man that the woman is in control of the pregnancy decision. He knows that she has the legal right to decide whether or not to abort, and whether or not to tell him that she is pregnant. Yet, the fact remains that the baby came from both of them. The pregnancy decision she makes will affect not only her and the baby, but also him.

While not all men will be open to discussing a pregnancy decision with a Life Disciple, an opportunity should nonetheless be offered. The invitation can come from the woman herself, or with her knowledge and permission, a Life Disciple can reach out, inviting him to join the pregnancy decision process.

If the father of the baby accepts an invitation, it is always best that he never meet alone with a female Life Disciple. Likewise, the mother should never meet alone with a male Life Disciple. Any one-on-one meetings within the context of the *Making Life Disciples* ministry should always be with a Life Disciple of the same sex of the person being served.

Once the father of the baby has accepted the invitation, it is good to follow these guidelines:

1. **Give him an opportunity to meet privately with a male Life Disciple.** He may prefer to meet with the mother and her female Life Disciple, but the father of the baby should know that there are men on the *Making Life Disciples* ministry team who will gladly meet with him one-on-one.
2. **Identify his intent regarding the pregnancy decision.** When meeting with the father of the baby, identify his intent as soon as possible. Tell him that what he shares is confidential; not even the mother of his baby will know unless he wants to tell her. What he shares will guide your future interactions with him. If the father says he is unsure about what to do, probe to determine whether his ambivalence masks a preference for abortion or for having the baby. Keep in mind that men generally process a difficult pregnancy decision in one of the three following ways:<sup>17</sup>
  - ***Desire to abort.*** Like the mother of the baby, the father may feel trapped by a surprise pregnancy. He may feel like a baby threatens his dreams and future plans. Depending on the nature of his relationship with the baby's mother, he

may fear financial responsibility for a child he doesn't have the opportunity to know or love. Abortion may seem like a quick way to avoid these fears coming true, especially if he is unaware of the reality of his child's humanity from the earliest stages of pregnancy. He may tell the mother she should abort the baby and offer to pay all or part of the cost of an abortion. In some cases, he might insist she abort or use financial or relational leverage to convince her.

- Desire to carry to term. He might be excited about having a child and encourage the mother to have the baby. He may promise to be with her through the pregnancy and help her with their child. Depending on their relationship status, he might offer to move in with her or have her move in with him. If his perspective of marriage is positive, he may suggest marriage. The mother may or may not welcome his encouragement to have the baby, depending on her own perspective on their relationship, on his potential to be a good father, and on her own reaction to the pregnancy.
  - **Ambivalence.** Alternatively, the father might tell the mother he will support whatever she decides. While this may be an attempt to demonstrate his care for her, she may feel abandoned by this response. She may think the decision is her responsibility alone. She may think he is refusing to tell her what he thinks and feels, leading to increased conflict between them. To many women in this situation, this response implies the father wants her to have an abortion or he doesn't trust her enough to honestly share his feelings and desires.
3. **Emphasize his importance in the pregnancy decision and the tools the church can give him to succeed.** Provide fathers with a value proposition—a clear reason—to be involved, one that speaks to his desire to be involved. Ask yourself, how will the church attempt to meet his needs? Ensure your reasons and ideas avoid positioning the church's help as an implication that the father is somehow inadequate and in need of help. Instead, seek to understand his goals and connect him with the tools and programs the church has in order to help him achieve those goals.
  4. **Identify barriers to a life-affirming decision.** When a man agrees to meet with a male Life Disciple, identify his struggles that have direct bearing on the pregnancy decision. Perhaps he struggles to find a job and to finish his education. He may also have children with other women and face difficulties being involved in their lives. Refer him to resources in your church or community that can help him address those needs. When you help him meet his other needs, you will build trust with him and empower him to be the best man he can be for himself and his family.
  5. **Deliver on your promises, and do not make promises you can't keep.** In general, men respond more to what you do rather than what you say. If you are

not sure whether you or the church can do something for him, don't mention it. When you tell the father he will receive help and specific services, programs and other resources, deliver them. Otherwise, you might not see him again.

6. **Affirm his/men's unique role in the healthy development of children.**<sup>18</sup> God created men and women in his image. Men and women need each other, and both are vital to the healthy development of their children. Men who grow up without a positive relationship with their own father, and who have seen male contributions under attack socially, may lack awareness of their importance. However, men who have a healthy, respectful, and supportive relationship with their children's mother, and who are providers with a positive, nurturing, presence in their family, will have a lifelong positive impact on their children.
7. **Follow-up regularly.** Just because the father meets with a male Life Disciple once does not mean he will return for future meetings. To engage him about the importance of his involvement and remind him that you are there to support him, call, text, or email him between meetings, always with permission.

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Even though a man involved in the pregnancy decision is likely to have some of the same thoughts, feelings, and pressures as a woman does, he is likely to experience unique challenges surrounding pregnancy and fatherhood. For example, awareness that a baby is coming may leave a man feeling inadequate and fearful, emotions that can challenge his sense of masculinity.<sup>19,20</sup> As a consequence, he might not want to face them.

If a man grew up in a father-absent home or had a very poor relationship with his own father, he may be thinking he is unprepared to be a good dad while also deeply desiring to give his own child the kind of positive relationship he lacked. While you learned that fear is an emotion common to both women and men, it often manifests differently in a man. He might not say anything about these fears or show fear, but that doesn't mean he isn't intimidated and overwhelmed by the idea of becoming a dad.

Increasing the father's knowledge of pregnancy and parenting could help alleviate the fear factor. He most likely lacks knowledge of pre- or postnatal issues or of how to care for and parent a child.<sup>21</sup> Women, on the other hand, often acquire knowledge and experience about pregnancy through their female friends and relatives. Men often lack exposure to pregnancy-related conversations and information.

A man may feel a little squeamish about the topic of pregnancy, but he may also be intensely interested in the scientific facts about what is happening inside his partner's body. Your role as a Life Disciple will be to affirm him in his role as a father and assure him that his fears can be addressed and overcome with the right support.



NOTES:

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