

A CARE NET INITIATIVE

Caring for those considering
ABORTION

SESSION 7:

Serving the Couple

TAKEN FROM

making **LIFE**
DISCIPLES[™]

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

PART B

SECTION 2.11: SERVING THE MOTHER AND FATHER AS A COUPLE

As addressed earlier, the first person to engage the *Making Life Disciples* ministry will most likely be the expectant mother. Even if the mother and father are a couple, as a Life Disciple, you will often have to communicate to the father through the mother. While more rare, there will be times when both the mother and the father of the baby, as a couple, seek help from the *Making Life Disciples* ministry together.

If a couple seeks help together, it is best to follow these guidelines:

- See her first
- See him second
- See them together

See her first: A female Life Disciple should begin by seeing the woman alone. If the father asks to accompany her, the *Making Life Disciples* ministry leader can explain that meeting with her alone has nothing to do with him—it is simply the ministry’s procedure. Note: if a male Life Disciple is available, both parties could be seen separately at the same time.

Meeting with her first allows the female Life Disciple to ask questions that the woman might not feel comfortable answering with the father in the room. The Life Disciple can learn about the woman’s perspective on the couple’s relationship and her openness to her partner’s involvement.

The female Life Disciple can also ask questions to determine if and when the woman wants her partner to join the discussion. She might want him with her during most of the meeting. Or she may be uncomfortable sharing this time with him.

Much can be learned about the woman’s perspective on the role of fatherhood during this first meeting. The questions below explore the quality of the relationship the woman had with her own father. If that relationship was healthy, you can help her draw from that as she decides what role the father of her baby should have in her pregnancy decision.

- How did your father impact your life?
- Describe your father’s relationship with your mother when you were growing up?
- How was your father involved in your life?

- In what way do you think your relationship with your father could have been different?
- How would you like the father of your child(ren) to be involved in their lives?
- How can you establish a healthy relationship with the father to benefit your child(ren)?

While we know having the father of the baby involved in the pregnancy decision is typically best, it is ultimately up to the woman to decide if and when he is involved during the first and future meetings.

See him second: While a female Life Disciple meets with the expectant mother, a male Life Disciple, whenever possible, should welcome and engage the father of the baby at the same time.

Engaging the father of the baby in this way allows the male Life Disciple to ask questions and learn about the father's perspective on the couple's relationship and about his level of desire in being involved with the pregnancy decision. The male Life Disciple should ask questions to determine the man's desire for a specific pregnancy decision and how the pregnancy has or may impact his relationship with his partner. The Life Disciple should also ask about the man's desire for involvement in the life of his child should his child not be aborted.

During this first meeting, the Life Disciple can use the questions below to explore the man's relationship with his own father. If his relationship with his father was healthy, you can draw from that to help him want to be a good father to his own child. On the other hand, if his relationship with his father was poor, you can help him recognize the opportunity to be the kind of man his child will be proud to call "dad."

- How did your father impact your life?
- Describe your father's relationship with your mother when you were growing up?
- How was your father involved in your life?
- In what way do you think your relationship with your father could have been different?
- How will you be involved in the life of your child(ren)?
- How can you establish a healthy relationship with the mother to benefit your child(ren)?

The male Life Disciple should be aware that a man who initially seems happy about the pregnancy, and positive about the future of his relationship with the mother, may change his outlook if the pressure builds during the pregnancy. As a result, the male

Life Disciple must follow up with the father of the baby about his thoughts and feelings throughout the pregnancy.

See them together: If the expectant mother agrees, the female Life Disciple may invite the father of the baby to join them in the meeting. If a male Life Disciple has been working with the father, he should be invited as well. Together, the Life Disciples can work with the couple to create an action plan, including appropriate referrals and follow-up services available at the church.

A NOTE ABOUT MARRIAGE

Research is clear that children do better, on average, when they grow up in a home with their two married, biological parents.²² Given that growing up in a married home is the best environment in which to raise a child, you, as a Life Disciple, have a role in discussing marriage with expectant mothers and fathers.

Keep in mind that an unplanned pregnancy is neither a reason to get married nor is it a reason for a couple not to get married. It may, however, be a great opportunity for a couple to consider whether they should commit to each other for a lifetime. When appropriate, you should ask them if they have considered marriage. You may also share literature on marriage (e.g. how to prepare for marriage, the benefits of marriage, etc.) when they indicate openness to it.

If they are considering a long term commitment, encourage the couple to seek counseling to help them prepare for a stable future for their child and discover whether marriage to each other may be right for them. Encourage them to prioritize a healthy relationship between the child and each parent, whether or not they choose to marry each other.

More on marriage as a life-affirming alternative in Session 6.

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