

*Blue* Tiny  
LINES

# Talking Guide for Religious and Pro-life Organizations

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When I found out I was pregnant, my first thought was to seek help. I was terrified and in denial, and I turned to the first place that I thought of—my university’s health center.

When I finally worked up the courage to walk in, I took yet another pregnancy test and waited for the result. When the nurse practitioner called me into her office, there was no denying it any longer—I was pregnant.

As I broke down in uncontrollable tears in her office and asked basic questions, like how I would get health insurance or where could I find prenatal care, the nurse simply shrugged her shoulders.

My sobs filled the room as she examined her chart in silence. After a few minutes, she stood up and said, “I have other patients to see, but you can stay in here if you want.” She closed the door behind her, walking out on me without so much as an offer of a Kleenex.

**Your first words to a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy matter.**

I know that many people have good intentions of helping young women like me who face unplanned pregnancy; but the truth is, it’s very easy to say the wrong thing. Your words, however well intentioned they may be, just might alienate her and turn her away.

I know how sensitive I was during my pregnancy. I resented that people assumed I was in need of spiritual guidance or looking for a handout. The simple fact of the matter was that I was a normal, Christian young woman who had made a mistake. We all make

mistakes, and we all sin. I was not so different from any of you—my life was not forever doomed, nor did I require teams of spiritual leaders to lift me up in prayer.

What I *did* need was help in accepting my pregnancy and believing that it could be a good thing. What I *didn't* need was people reminding me that I had sinned, or reminding me to “think of the baby,” or long, rambling lectures on the preciousness of life.

I urge you to take it from me—a former president and founder of my college's first pro-life club, a strong Christian, a registered nurse, a professional speaker and advocate for women, and most important, a mother and wife—and educate yourself on some ways that you can find the *right* words to best help a woman who may be facing an unplanned pregnancy. It is so important for us to realize that often, the very Christian values we hold dear can drive a woman to feel she has no other choice but to turn to abortion. Shame, guilt, and fear of judgment from other Christians are powerful motivators to a woman reeling from the shock of an unplanned pregnancy. Even after I had chosen life for my baby, it was a constant struggle against the condemnation of Christian pro-life leaders I encountered. We must realize that our actions—and our words—to women facing crisis pregnancies can turn the tide against abortion.

**1. Realize that she is in a crisis.** It's called a “crisis” pregnancy for a reason. Women facing unplanned pregnancy enter a very real and normal state of shock. The initial news about a pregnancy will leave a woman reeling, panicked, and unable to think clearly. A further complication of the shock state is that a woman simultaneously enters a period of grief and actual mourning for her “lost” life, which can come and go in circular patterns. You should know that women in these early, and sometimes even later, stages of crisis think

irrationally and are prone to self-preservation. Logical, clear reasoning will get you nowhere with her at this stage. What you need to do is focus on showing complete support for her. Some tips:

- *Avoid reacting.* Think “poker face” here. You will never be able to predict all the situations that women face. The worst thing you can do is to show any type of shocked reaction—it will make her feel that her already desperate situation is even more shocking.
- *Encourage her to make her own decision.* Don’t offer up any advice in the early stages. Trust her mother’s intuition and encourage her to explore her wishes about the pregnancy. Support her to be honest about what she—and no one else—wants.
- *When in doubt, remember these words: “It’s okay.”* In the beginning stages, this is all I wanted to hear. I just wanted reassurance—real or not—that everything would be okay. Of course, there was no guarantee that things would be okay, and I knew that, but it still didn’t change the fact that I wanted to hear the words.
- *Don’t convey disappointment.* She is already inflicting enough self-punishment on herself. The guilt and shame associated with an unplanned pregnancy can be overwhelming; usually, she is already disappointed in herself for the actions that have led her there. Don’t fuel the fire.

Example: “It really is going to be okay, Megan, and I promise it will get better. You are a strong woman, and you have a lot of people supporting you. Know that we are here for whatever you need.”

**2. Tread the religious ground carefully.** Navigating the religious aspect of an unplanned pregnancy can be tricky; on one hand, you know that prayer and a relationship with God will help her in the end, but I can't stress enough how important it is to let her come to her own understanding of her spirituality. As I mentioned earlier, I struggled with guilt and "hid" from God for the first half of my pregnancy. During that time, I resented any religious talk or attempts to "save" me. I needed time to find my way back to God on my own. Many women have shared with me that they have struggled with guilt and avoided religious activities in the beginning, so be careful not to push anything on her until she is ready, or you may lose her altogether. Other considerations for treading the religious tightrope:

- *Don't assume she is in a religious crisis.* You may alienate her, especially if she is already feeling conflicted about her religious beliefs in contrast to what she has done. Jumping into prayer or spouting off biblical verses may just send her over the edge.
- *It is okay to congratulate her.* The message surrounding her is that this pregnancy is a bad thing. If not an outright mistake, then at the very least bad timing. People pity her, look down on her, or walk on eggshells around her. Don't make a parade out of it, but don't be afraid to offer up a simple "congrats," either. She needs to hear—and believe—that this baby *is* a good thing. But be careful not to go overboard on talking about the baby. Too much, and she might be scared away, so keep it short and simple.

Example: “I heard your news, Sarah, and I just wanted to say congratulations. I hope your first trimester goes easily for you!”

**3. Focus on her.** In the beginning, the last thing she is thinking about is the fact that there is a real, living baby inside of her. It just feels so unreal. She needs time to come to terms with the life that she has now lost—her own—before she can focus on the baby, and that’s okay. I promise you, she *will* come around, but right now, the last thing she can think about is the baby. She will come to the place and time over the next nine months when she is ready to focus on the baby, but right now, she needs to focus on herself and so do you. Not to mention, it’s a lifelong lesson she will need to learn. She will always need to place the oxygen mask on herself first. Focus your energy into supporting the mom and what she needs right now. That means putting the baby booties away for now. Instead, try a few of the suggestions below.

- *Be real.* Share a story about your own pregnancy, make a joke about morning sickness, or relate an experience you’ve seen another young mom go through. Don’t be afraid to let your guard down a little—you may be a “professional” or someone she is relying on for guidance, but showing your human side will help her relate to you even more.
- *Don’t try to solve all of her problems at once.* There’s usually more to the picture than just a pregnancy—college scholarships, relationships, parents, jobs. Don’t get lost in the big picture just yet. Take it one day at a time. Today, just offer support.

- *Don't assume that she needs help.* This was one of my biggest pet peeves. Even after I became a professional speaker and advocate for young moms, people would still come up to me after my talks and offer me cribs and changing tables. Um, what? Just because a young woman is in a crisis pregnancy doesn't mean every part of her life is in a crisis. We aren't all looking for handouts. It's a natural reaction to want to offer help, so if you feel strongly about it, please, just simply ask her what she needs.
- *Suggest that she take time for herself.* This is the perfect opportunity to suggest that she take a "day off." Surprise her with a gift certificate to get her nails done, or suggest she pay a visit to your massage therapist. Treat to her to coffee or a lunch out. Show her that you really do care about her first.

Example: "Lydia, I know it seems like everyone is pressuring you right now. I want you to take a day off and just focus on yourself. I know how much you love to read, so I got you this gift certificate to the local bookstore. I hope you can spend an afternoon there to just relax. You deserve it!"

4. **Encourage her.** There is so much emphasis on all the hard parts about being a young mom. From the TV shows about young mothers to the campaigns against teenage pregnancy, the message is always the same: pregnancy is a plague to be avoided. Even as a married woman, my sister-in-law, who became a mom at age twenty-one, was bombarded by negative messages from family and friends about how hard it

would be to juggle being young and having a baby. Trust me, pregnant young women are well aware that it's going to be hard, and one of the toughest blocks you will have to break through to help her to choose life is breaking through that negative thinking. Her thinking, *I don't think I can do this*, will quickly become, *I can't do this*, and a trip to the abortion clinic if all she ever hears are negative comments about the hardships of young motherhood. Help her by encouraging her from the get-go. You need to believe that she can succeed, and your confidence in her will catch on. Try these encouraging motivators:

- *Don't judge.* It should go without saying, but honestly, I found people were very quick to judge me for (1) having sex and (2) “letting” myself get pregnant. As a young, married mom with three children, I still get people judging me. Don't place blame on her for her situation. Do your best to remain completely objective.
- *Share the success stories.* Counteract her doubt with the stories you know of inspirational young mothers—mothers who have made the mom, school, and job thing all work together. For some good examples, check out my website series, “Your Lines,” which features interviews with some amazing young mothers.
- *Put things into perspective.* My mom did this for me, and I am eternally grateful. It's not a car wreck, it's not cancer. It's a baby!
- *Help her to get involved.* You know what helped me the most during my pregnancy? Connecting with other moms. When my college didn't have a support group for



pregnant and parenting students, I started one. Meeting other young moms, hearing their stories, and sharing our struggles, tears, and most important, cookies, helped us all to heal and gave us strength to go on. Encourage her to reach out to other moms and work to pave the way for the future. See the section, “Thirteen Steps to Changing Your Campus” for ideas and tips on practical resources she can utilize, such as starting a website or placing pregnancy packets in her campus health center.

- *Point out the resources.* The hard thing about being a young mom is that we can all be too busy to talk about our experiences. From the best place on campus to breast-feed to answers about scholarships and kid-friendly places to study, getting through college as a pregnant student can be difficult to navigate. Fortunately, a lot of young moms and organizations work together on resources for pregnant students and young mothers (like this book, ahem). See a complete list of resources on page 133 to become familiar with help that is available.

Example: “I know it can seem overwhelming right now, but I know moms like you who have done this. Have you heard of the blog *Mrs. Mommy, MD*? She was a senior in college at Michigan about to head to medical school when she found out she was pregnant. She didn’t give up and is now in her medical school of choice, at the top of her class, all with her adorable two-year-old son. You should check her out!”

While this list is meant to guide you in best helping a woman facing a crisis pregnancy, please know that every woman will react to

her pregnancy differently. There simply isn't a "right" or a "wrong" way to get through an unplanned pregnancy, just as there isn't always a "right" or a "wrong" thing to say to her.

I encourage you to follow her lead and to relax—the most important thing you can convey to her is that you do care about her. Trust yourself. Just as you will encourage her, please believe that you can do this! You are offering such valuable and lifesaving support to women and their babies, and I thank you for all that you are doing, whether it's offering prayers, volunteering at a crisis pregnancy center, or simply passing this book along to a young mom in need of encouragement.