

So You're Pregnant, Now What?

I. Introduction

In this booklet, the word "parent" means:

- mother or father;
- legal guardian; or
- managing conservator.

Many young women have mixed feelings about being pregnant. You might be feeling scared and confused. Making a decision about what to do can be very hard, especially if you try to do it alone.

You probably want to get more information about your options. You need to talk with someone you trust. In most cases, a parent will give you the best support and will help you make this important decision.

This booklet is designed to help you understand:

- (1) choices other than abortion,
- (2) the health risks of having an abortion, and
- (3) the "judicial bypass procedure" for you to get permission to consent to the abortion yourself without the consent of a parent.

While your parent is the most likely person to help you make your decision, you might feel that you can't talk to a parent. You may want to ask another trusted person to help you talk to your parent.

Now that I am pregnant, what are my choices, besides abortion?

You have two choices:

(1) Parenting

If you continue your pregnancy and decide to keep your baby, you will become a parent. Parenting is a life-long commitment, involving all of your personal resources. Although parenting is a huge responsibility, it can also be one of life's greatest rewards.

Many teens are happy they made the decision to become parents, but they say that raising a child is more difficult than they had ever imagined.

(2) Adoption

Adoption also involves continuing your pregnancy and having your baby, but then the baby is placed with another family to raise. Adoption can be a good choice for a young woman who does not feel that she can be responsible for a child at this time in her life.

You can ask a private agency to select a good family to raise your child. You can also ask a doctor, someone in your family, or a counselor to help you choose someone to adopt your baby.

If you choose adoption, your baby's biological father will have to agree to it. It is very important that you have your own lawyer for the adoption process. The adopting parents or adoption agency will usually pay your legal costs.

During your pregnancy, private social services can help you, and so can some government programs. For example, you can get:

- medical services from Medicaid or from CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program),
- financial payments from TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families),
- food vouchers and nutrition information from WIC (a nutrition program for women, infants, and children), and
- food from the Food Stamps program.

You can find all of these government programs in your phone book or by calling 211.

To locate places that will help you with choosing parenting or choosing adoption, look in your phone book's Yellow Pages under "abortion alternatives."

How soon do I have to decide?

As soon as possible. The sooner you decide, the better it is for your health. If you think you are pregnant, it is important to see a doctor as soon as possible.

II. What are the risks of having an abortion?

Are there any possible health problems if I have an abortion?

An abortion early in pregnancy has less risk than a later one. However, there are some risks and problems that may occur. Here is a list of possible risks and problems, starting with the most likely ones and ending with the least likely ones.

- Hemorrhage (minor to severe bleeding)
- Infection
- Incomplete abortion (failure to remove all products of the pregnancy)
- Perforation of the uterus (poking a hole in the uterus)
- Sterility (unable to get pregnant or to carry a baby to full term)
- Hysterectomy (uterus is removed; woman becomes unable to have a baby in the future)
- Injury to the bowel and/or bladder
- Abdominal surgery to correct injury
- Rarely, death

Are there any other health risks I should be concerned about?

Several studies have found a higher risk of getting breast cancer after a planned abortion, while other studies have shown no overall increase in risk.

Another health concern can be your emotional reaction to an abortion. After an abortion, a woman might experience strong feelings about her decision. She might wonder if she had made the right decision. Some women who describe these feelings find that they go away, with time. Others find them more difficult to overcome.

III. What is important for me to know about the Abortion Parental Consent Law?

Do I have to tell a parent that I'm pregnant and get his or her written consent to have an abortion?

No, but your doctor does. The law says that your doctor must have written consent of your parent before an abortion can be performed.

There are only two exceptions:

- when your doctor sees that you are having a medical emergency and that an abortion must be performed right now, **or**
- when a judge authorizes you to consent to the abortion and gives you permission to have an abortion without your parent's consent.

What if I don't want a parent to know?

It is almost always best to discuss your choices and your decision with a parent. However, you have the right to ask a judge for permission to have an abortion without having a parent consent to it. This special permission is called a "judicial bypass."

How do I ask a judge for this special permission?

You, or someone representing you, must file a form in any court clerk's office (county clerk, district clerk, or probate clerk). A judge will hold a hearing to decide whether or not to authorize you to consent to the abortion for yourself without consent from a parent.

Where do I get this form?

You, or someone representing you, can get the form from any court clerk's office, your doctor's office, or from the Web site at the Texas Supreme Court. The address to retrieve the form is <http://www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/rules/pnr-home.asp>

What will be included on the form?

You, or someone representing you, will have to sign the form and swear that you:

- are pregnant, unmarried, and younger than 18 years old;
- want to have an abortion without the written consent of your parent; and
- have a lawyer already, or that you need one appointed for you.
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Will the court records be confidential?

Yes, all records must be kept confidential. No one may tell your parents that you have decided to have an abortion.

Do I need a lawyer?

Yes. The judge must appoint a lawyer to represent you, if you do not have one.

Will there be anyone else involved in the hearing?

The judge will also appoint a *guardian ad litem*, who will help you prepare for your hearing with the judge.

You can ask the judge to appoint someone you want to be your *guardian ad litem* (a relative, clergyman, counselor, or other adult). However, the judge is not required to appoint the person you name. The judge may choose to appoint your lawyer as your *guardian ad litem*.

Will it cost me any money to go to court?

No.

When will the court make a decision?

The court will set a time to hear your case — as soon as possible.

If a hearing is not held by 5 p.m. on the second day (not counting weekends and holidays) after your form is filed, you have legal permission to have an abortion without a parent's consent.

How will the judge decide?

You will get permission if the judge believes that at least one of the following is true:

- You are mature, and you know enough to choose on your own to have an abortion, and you understand what that decision will mean for you.
- Getting consent from a parent for your planned abortion is not in your best interest.
- Getting consent from a parent for your planned abortion may lead to physical abuse, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse.

How will I know that I don't need a parent's consent to have an abortion?

You will know by one of two ways:

(1) The hearing was held in time

You had the hearing before 5 p.m. on the second day (not counting weekends and holidays) after your application was filed. The judge has approved your request to authorize you to consent to your planned abortion without consent of a parent.

You will need to get a copy of the judge's approval and give it to your doctor.

(2) The hearing was not held quickly enough

If you did not have the hearing before 5 p.m. on the second day (not counting weekends and holidays) after your application was filed, you get permission without a hearing.

You will need to ask the court clerk who filed your application to give you a certificate that states that your application was approved. The clerk must give you this certificate immediately. You will need to give a copy of this certificate to your doctor.

What if I change my mind and I decide that I do want a parent notified about my planned abortion?

You can always tell your parent yourself. Or, you can ask your doctor, lawyer, judge, or anyone else involved in the process to inform your parent for you.

Once a court order has been issued giving you permission to consent to your planned abortion without involving your parent, no one else except you may inform your parent or authorize anyone else to do so.

What if the judge does not approve my request?

You have the right to ask a new court to hear your request. Your lawyer can help you make the request, known as an “appeal.”

The new court is the “court of appeals.” You will not have to go there. The review of your case must be completed by 5 p.m. on the second day (not counting weekends and holidays) after your appeal is filed. If the review is not done by that time, you have legal permission to consent to an abortion without involving a parent.

You can find information about the court of appeals from the Web site of the Texas Supreme Court, under the heading of “Courts of Appeals.”

Its address is <http://www.courts.state.tx.us>.