

Expectant Parent Counseling (Options Counseling) Outline

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Many different types of professionals can be in the role of counseling expectant women or couples on their options when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, including mental health professionals, health care workers, pastors, friends, and adoption agency personnel. We will be focusing today on the role of adoption or child welfare social workers who are in this counseling role. This counseling goes by different names: birth mom counseling, expectant parent counseling, one part of unplanned pregnancy counseling, and options counseling.

It helps to begin with an understanding of how the history of adoption in the US has influenced how we counsel women and couples considering this option. Up until about 30-40 years ago, adoption was a secretive solution to a teenage pregnancy or otherwise unplanned pregnancy where the parents did not feel able to parent. It was a taboo subject with great efforts made to hide the adoption—including issuing a new birth certificate, closing adoption records to adoptees even years later, and sometimes not telling the child. This history lays the groundwork for and continues to impact adoption to this day.

Options Counseling

- What options are generally available and how should they be presented?
- What other information should ethical adoption providers share with an expectant woman or couple?
 - She has the right to change her mind up to relinquishment and the revocation period, if applicable.
 - Open adoption agreements are difficult to enforce?
- What are some examples of services and resources that should be shared with an expectant couple to fully explore the parenting and abortion options?
- How to keep the expectant couple's wishes and concerns front and center in this process?
- Concurrent parenting and adoption planning?

- Working with women/parents under the age of 18.
- Working with an expectant mom who cannot or will not identify the birth father.
- Is there an inherent conflict of interest in someone who works for an adoption agency counseling an expectant mom on adoption?
- How to make sure that expectant parents accepting living expenses will not be coercive?

Introduction to Prospective Adoptive Parents/Hopeful Adoptive Parents

- What issues should prospective adoptive parents and expectant parents discuss before a decision is made?
 - Openness?
 - Naming?
 - Vaccinations?
 - Circumcision?

Hospital Experience

- Family to Family Support Network conducted a *Assessing Care in the Hospital – A Birthmom’s Perspective* in 2021. Two of the questions were:
 - Did you feel pressured in any way by comments or questions? If so, what specifically was said?
 - If you could go back, how would you change your hospital time with your child?
- Adoptive parent’s place at the hospital?
 - In labor/delivery or not? Is this a subtle form of coercion?
 - Rooming in or not? Is this a subtle form of coercion?
- Relinquishment
 - Independent attorney for the birth parents?
 - When to sign?
 - Explaining that the law specifying the number of hours after birth that they can sign is a minimum time period.
 - How to leave? Who leaves first? Entrustment ceremony?
- What mementos to keep or share with adoptive family or child?

To keep up with legislation that would provide a network of birthmother options counseling through the healthcare system, go to [Family to Family Support Network](https://www.familytofamilysupport.org/) (https://www.familytofamilysupport.org/)

Resources:

- To keep up with legislation that would provide a network of birthmother options counseling through the healthcare system, go to [Family to Family Support Network](https://www.familytofamilysupport.org/).
- National Council on Adoption- [Consider the Possibilities Pregnancy Counseling Training](#). This free online program designed to give professionals basic knowledge and the tools they need to understand and share the option of adoption on an equal basis with all other options. This training aims to give pregnancy counselors the confidence to comfortably share the option of adoption so that pregnant clients can be empowered to make a fully informed decision.

- [BirthMom Buds](#) provides unique support for pregnant women considering adoption and birthmothers through peer support. “While counseling is beneficial and we do not want to be a replacement for counseling, we can offer the support of people who have walked down a similar path and have experienced similar turmoil.”
- The following webinars are provided by [Open Adoption & Family Services](#). The webinars are designed to provide the skills to confidently talk about all pregnancy options and open adoption.

Part 1 Adoption: Exploring Values and Spotting Biases

Part 2 Creating a Safe Space: Non-Coercive All-Options Pregnancy Counseling

Part 3 Open Adoption: Trauma-Informed Approach

Combined webinar: Trauma-Informed All-Options Counseling & Open Adoption