

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS in Public Conversations About Abortion



The difficult, hostile or "gotcha" question can make good conversation challenging, but not impossible. You might feel defensive when asked these questions, but advance preparation, including your own exploration of what is uncomfortable, will help. To increase your comfort in speaking, start with "friendly" audiences--family, friends, coworkers and then gradually widen your circle to more diverse audiences. Having a conversation with just one person is a great start

Public speaking is part teaching so it helps to use the questions from the audience as "teachable moments". Being open to the "question behind the question" will increase your credibility with audiences. With experience, you will welcome these questions because they can open up the discussion. Remember, you are not just answering one person's question, you are using that question as an opportunity to speak to the whole group.

The **Abortion Conversation Project** believes that we can change the conversation about abortion to include the real voices of providers and women, and in so doing, break the silence around abortion experiences. As providers we speak with thousands of women and their families every year, so we can try to give voice to the real experiences of abortion. As a speaker you may not have our hands on experience, but remember, 37% of all women will have an abortion in their lifetime. If you include a partner or family member, there are many, many people touched by abortion. If you want to start community discussions about abortion that are different, start talking to those people, and speak from your own experience. When we speak from an authentic, compassionate place, the conversation is better and there is no need to be defensive or afraid of "tough" questions.

Here are several questions that we have been asked and some of our responses. There are many ways to answer the same question and we have included some different samples. Find the responses that you are comfortable sharing with others.

1. What happens when a woman is ambivalent? Do you give her more time? Do you refer to a counselor/clergy? Do you encourage an alternative?

"No abortion provider wants to knowingly provide an abortion for a woman if she is not sure of her decision."

"Many providers encourage a woman to take more time for her decision if she is unsure. Many also offer her a Pregnancy Options Workbook (www.pregnancyoptions.info) or a referral for more counseling. "

"Options counseling is unbiased counseling that includes all the possible choices a woman can make--birth, abortion, adoption. Some clinics provide options counseling and some refer to other agencies like Planned Parenthood or Family Planning Centers."

"Some providers have clergy or counselors they can refer a woman for further help. Faith Aloud (faithaloud.org) runs a clergy talkline for women and offers words of comfort from clergy on video on their website.

2. How do you know that women don't regret their decisions later?

"We can't know what happens throughout any particular woman's life, but we have to trust that she is making the best decision, at that time, for her life. Abortion providers who include a counseling session, do so to offer a safe place for women to explore her decision and offer help if she needs it."

"It is completely normal to reflect on major life decisions and to have feelings about the choices we have made. However, we can make decisions only at a point in time, with the information and resources available to us then. While we may regret the situation that led us to choose abortion, women choose to end their pregnancies because it seems like the best thing to do at the time."

"The current research on outcomes after an abortion suggest that very few women suffer clinical depression or severe psychological trauma as a result of an elective termination of pregnancy. Most feel relief or a mix of feelings about the abortion and the circumstances that led to that choice."

"As with all major life decisions, there will be women who feel regret or have strong feelings about their decision to end a pregnancy. We want women to get compassionate, nonjudgmental help if they need it and we can help women find additional counseling, self-help, or online resources."

3. Shouldn't parents know if their daughter is having surgery? After all, they can't get their ears pierced without parental permission.

"Ideally, we want every young woman to have a parent they can turn to for help. The question is: can we really mandate family communication?"

"Most providers would agree that the involvement of a parent or an adult is a good thing most of the time, and most encourage young women to talk to their parents or other family member. Usually young women, especially those under 16, involve a parent or other adult."

"In many states there are laws that mandate parental consent or notification before an abortion. All of these laws allow for a judicial by-pass to handle those cases where a young woman feels she is mature enough to make the decision on her own."

The Abortion Conversation Project created handouts for abortion providers to give to young people and their parents because we want to promote good communication between parents and their children. Download them at www.abortionconversation.com or www.MomDadIMpregnant.com or www.abortioncarenetwork.org in English or Spanish.

4. Why do women wait until the second trimester to decide to have an abortion?

"Few, if any, women deliberately delay an abortion. Most people understand that it is easier medically and emotionally at an earlier stage. Of course, some women discover that something is wrong with the pregnancy after tests are done in the second trimester. Many more find that their circumstances have changed, when for instance, a partner leaves, or they undergo a financial crisis."

"Some women, especially young women, do not discover that they are pregnant until the second

trimester. Many have difficulty raising the needed money, finding transportation, or fulfilling the requirements of state laws restricting abortion. Some teenagers are scared to tell their parents that they might be pregnant until they can't hide it any longer."

5. What is "partial birth abortion" and why would anyone use this type of abortion?

"Partial birth abortion is not a medical term, but a name those against abortion have used to describe an Intact D & X procedure (Dilation and Extraction) which may be used in the second trimester, or sometimes in the third trimester if there are problems with fetal or maternal health. It refers to a process of collapsing the skull with suctioning and delivering the fetus intact."

"Sometimes Intact D&X is favored because the fetus can be examined for genetic or other problems, which is important for that woman's future child bearing. Other times it is beneficial for the woman and her family to have an intact fetus to help with grieving."

"Medical procedures are created and developed to improve health and save lives. When politicians are allowed to decide how doctors will provide health care, the quality of that care is subject to the whims of the political party in power. I'm clear that I want my doctor, not the government making health care decisions with me."

"The Intact D & X procedure was developed for use in late second trimester abortions as a safety precaution for the woman because there is less cervical dilation and less chance of injuring the uterus with an instrument. This method may improve women's chances of having a healthy pregnancy in the future."

6. Isn't abortion murder?

"Perhaps the point that you are trying to get at is about life and death and whether women take abortion seriously. Certainly providers, and the women they serve, know that something is alive and then isn't after an abortion. We see women struggle with what is the right time to bring new life into the world. We don't see women treating that bigger question lightly. When that embryo, fetus, pregnancy, baby (whatever she calls it) becomes a person is much more open to debate. Some religions define personhood and some do not. Many people have their own individual idea of when life happens."

"Many women acknowledge ending a pregnancy is a form of killing that is justified by the circumstances or by the kind of life they could offer that child. Some women find ways to grieve that loss. Many do not see it as killing."

"Murder is an illegal act and clearly abortion is legal, so no, it isn't."

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