What is counselling?

Counselling gives you the opportunity to talk to a trained health professional in a safe and confidential environment. It allows you to explore your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour relating to difficult issues in your life. Counselling approaches can be different depending on the theories, beliefs and approaches used by the counsellor. Attending counselling does not mean that you are ‘crazy’ or ‘weak’ or ‘not coping’.

What is pregnancy options counselling?

Some women feel able to turn to their friends, family and partners for support, but others feel there is no-one around who they can talk to in detail about their unplanned pregnancy. This might be because:
- there is conflict over the decision
- their family and friends aren’t close by
- they think they might be judged by those around them.

Whether or not they have others they can talk to, some women will want professional support and information.

‘Pregnancy options counselling’ is usually a short-term service that acknowledges the urgency of the situation. It focuses on a woman’s unplanned pregnancy and supports her to make her decision. It should be unbiased and non-judgmental. The counselling helps women to take steps to carry out their decision and explores their coping strategies. It aims to support women through what can be a difficult period.

Warning

Not all counselling is unbiased. Some organisations that offer ‘pregnancy counselling’ do not aim to discuss all of the pregnancy options in an unbiased way. Some pregnancy options counsellors may advise women against abortion because of their own beliefs. It’s a good idea to ask questions over the phone before making an appointment so you can get an idea if they will be sensitive to your situation.

What the Women’s can offer you

The Pregnancy Advisory Service (PAS) at the Royal Women’s Hospital will support every woman with the decisions she makes and will help her to access the services she requires. Counselling is usually in person, but can sometimes be provided by telephone.

PAS counselling:
- is optional
  - But we will encourage a woman to have counselling if she is dealing with coercion or feelings of great distress, confusion or fear
- provides a confidential space for you to talk through your options
- provides you with support if you think you have made up your mind but still have some feelings of concern
- provides a skilled, sensitive, female counsellor who may help you to better understand your own feelings, thoughts and decision
- helps you to reflect on your values and priorities so you can clarify the best decision for you or how to cope with the decisions you make
- explores the relevant parts of your life affecting your decision — family, relationship, violence, emotional wellbeing, community, culture, religious and/or spiritual beliefs
- assists with your decision-making (but does not make the decision for you)
- is usually short-term
  - At times further counselling or support within the hospital or community may be required.
A PAS counsellor will:

- be guided by you
- see you as the expert in your own life and help you explore options you think are relevant
- see you on your own first
- focus on your rights to make the decision yourself
- provide relevant information you might need to make a decision
- treat your information confidentially and as part of your overall care at the Women's
- discuss, advocate and refer you to other medical and social support available at the Women’s or elsewhere in the community (if needed)
- refer you to generalist ongoing counselling regarding other issues in your life (if needed).

A PAS counsellor will not:

- make the decision for you, but they will assist you to make it
- persuade you that any particular decision is best, or try and talk you out of your decision
- pressure you to make a decision by the end of the session
- make a psychiatric diagnosis of you or ‘your problems’ (but they can refer you to other services if needed).

You can make an appointment to speak with a counsellor at the Pregnancy Advisory Service on (03) 8345 3063.

Other counselling services

Below is a list of services that also offer pregnancy options and counselling:

- Family Planning Victoria 03 9257 0121
- Action Centre (for young people aged 13–25) 1800 013 952
- Australian Association of Social Workers
  www.aasw.asn.au/membersdirectory or
  email mentalhealth@aasw.asn.au
  Ask for Medicare Rebate for pregnancy counselling.
- Australian Psychological Society
  Find a Psychologist
  www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist
  (Tick the ‘Non-directive Pregnancy Support Psychologists’ box and search for psychologists in your local area)
  Ask for Medicare Rebate for pregnancy counselling.
- Psychotherapy & Counselling Federation (PACFA)
  www.pacfa.org.au or 03 9486 3077
  These services may also provide counselling for couples.

References

2 Royal Women’s Hospital, ‘Submission to the Senate Inquiry Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005 (June 2006)’, <http://www.thewomens.org.au/AdvocacyforImprovementstoWomen’sHealth>, viewed 2 June 2010;

Disclaimer The Royal Women’s Hospital does not accept any liability to any person for the information or advice (or use of such information or advice) which is provided in this fact sheet or incorporated into it by reference. We provide this information on the understanding that all persons accessing it take responsibility for assessing its relevance and accuracy. Women are encouraged to discuss their health needs with a health practitioner. If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your health care provider or if you require urgent care you should go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department. © The Royal Women’s Hospital, February 2011