



# Walking with Love

a pastoral response to abortion and unexpected pregnancy

A PRACTICAL GUIDE





*Walking with Love* is an educational and pastoral initiative of the  
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[www.walkingwithlove.org.au](http://www.walkingwithlove.org.au)

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# *Thank you*

Thank you for your courage in making a difference. You stepped into the unknown and put your faith in your own strength and the support of the community around you.

To those who are unexpectedly pregnant: know that you are not alone, and that we want to help you. This can be a scary, confusing, and seemingly lonely time. You are strong. You are courageous. You are enough. Know that you are loved. Thank you for wanting to seek a better option. No one should have to struggle or suffer- especially when they are experiencing vulnerability.

To those burdened with the effects of a past decision: thank you for your strength in finding your voice and giving words to your suffering. You face fear and darkness, and are surviving. Each day is another victory. Thank you for pressing on, living and breathing a little stronger every day. Being open to sharing your journey with others enables you to reclaim your power, and affirms others in their desire so to do.

To those seeking to provide support for someone in a difficult situation: your concern and compassion for helping others who may be struggling or feeling lost is valued beyond measure. We build a Culture of Life through our relationship with others. Thank you for striving to ensure that no one feels like they must make this journey alone- we deserve better.

And finally, thank you for being the beautiful, courageous, unique, strong, important person you are. The world is a better place because you are in it.

*"You are valuable.  
Your whole life has value."*

Archbishop Julian Porteous

What is  
*Walking*  
with  
*Love?*

*Walking with Love* describes the loving, gentle way in which we are called to support vulnerable pregnant women, including their husbands, partners, and families, to choose life. It also involves the embrace and support of those who suffer the effects of an abortion.

Women often have more than one reason for undergoing abortion. It is usually their life's circumstances which present challenges, and not the pregnancy itself. During this time, women can feel uncertain about many aspects of their life – relationships, finances, housing, study, employment, psychological and physical resilience, faith and beliefs. This can also be compounded by psychological low points which may occur during pregnancy.



## *A Practical Guide*

This guide is designed to help you to support others to choose life, or if they are already suffering the effects of abortion, to find healing and reconciliation. You will have a clearer understanding of these issues if you use this guide together with the *Walking with Love* educational resources listed on website, which are designed to help you to spread this approach to others.

Your approach can have a huge impact on whether or not someone feels supported and encouraged. This guide gives you the tools to know what to say and do to help a woman choose life. However, this does not negate the need for professional counselling if the person is struggling.



# *Unexpected or Difficult Pregnancy*

*"He said it had to be my choice, but it was his baby, too; how is that fair?" (Leanne)*

Being told that the choice to continue their pregnancy, and as such the responsibility, is entirely their own can lead people to feel isolated and abandoned. Focusing exclusively on the unborn child can also lead to feeling neglected or objectified. Here are some things you can say that show you are supportive of someone in a difficult situation.

*"How are you feeling?"*

Ask how they are feeling. Feelings may change a lot during this time; they may feel excited, scared, and anxious all at once.

*"It's okay to feel that way, I'm here to listen."*

Affirm and validate their emotions. It is important that they know their concerns and thoughts have been heard. Don't jump to any conclusions about what they may choose, nor make any judgements. It is important people are given space to verbalise all options.

*"I wanted someone to let me talk through all my options without making me feel guilty for what I was considering."  
(Sara)*

Find out what they need: a listening ear, encouragement, or practical help may be all that is needed.



*“What do you need from me  
at the moment?”*

There is no rush. Prompts to get them to start thinking about what kind of support is needed helps to clear the path ahead. Reassure them that they have time to make a good decision and not to feel pressured into making a rushed choice that they may come to regret later.

*“You won’t have to do this alone;  
I will help you.”*

Let them know that you will support them during and beyond their pregnancy; that they will not be abandoned or have to do it alone.

*“Tell me more. Let’s see what we  
can do about this.”*

Often people who find themselves in these difficult situations feel a sense of doom, that their life is ruined. The most helpful thing to do is talk about their concerns, de-escalating the rising anxiety, and building hope.

Affirm that this does not need to be a disastrous experience. They may perceive a lack of emotional support in their life and feel unable to rely on their relationship or parents. The biggest predictor of abortion is the lack of support for the woman in having the baby.

Create a safe space for them to express their feelings, and to be able to go into their own heart and not listen to pressures and voices around them. Often they may need reassurance that they can be a good mother. Let them know that they have resources at their fingertips, and people who will take the time to look at their whole situation and care for them.

*“...it is only the mother  
who can directly nurture  
her unborn child; all  
the rest of us can do is  
nurture the mother.”*

Dr Brigid McKenna, *Common Ground*, p.189

## *Practical Ways You can Help*

Offer to accompany them to doctor's appointments. For many, the excitement of hearing baby's heartbeat for the first time is so much better when it can be shared with a loved one.

When they bring up a concern, reassure them:

*“There are supports available.  
Let's find them together.”*

Help them to find out what sort of support is available. They may want to explore their financial situation, accommodation, baby needs, pre-natal care, a break in career, and many other aspects of concern, including things that may even seem trivial to you.

Your aim is to make normal any concerns they have about being a mother or parenting. Help to find networks and groups that best meet their situation (e.g. young mother's network). The more you can assist them to be part of existing networks, the less isolated and the more empowered they will feel.

When you don't know what to say, sometimes just the offer of a hug says enough. Remember that your availability to them, and the love that you offer, may be all that it takes to see them through.

Finally, don't forget the little things – a gift for Mum and for Baby – when the Little One is born. These mean a lot and often get overlooked when we focus on the practical supports.



*“It is precisely the woman ... who pays the highest price, not only for motherhood but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived.*

*The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone.”*

Pope Saint John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. (London: Random House, 1994) pg 207.

## *When Contemplating Abortion*

You may be left reeling from your friend or family's announcement of the options they are considering. You may have strongly held convictions about abortion and want to share these with them. It is okay to talk about your values, however be mindful that if the person is struggling with making a decision about pregnancy, they may feel that you are judging their decision. As a result, they may choose not to talk to you about it.

It is okay to tell your friend that you can't help them to seek an abortion. You can say something like:

*“I am here for you while you work this out. Though, you need to know that I don't believe abortion is ever the right thing to do. I really care about you and your baby and want to support you both. Abortion can be very damaging and I love you too much to help you go down that road. But I will still care about you, whatever you decide.”*

It is important that you don't come across as too negative or condescending, as this may discourage them from feeling that they can share all their feelings and explore other options with you.

Finally, be aware not to be judgemental, and to offer your ongoing support to help them throughout their pregnancy.

# *Disability and Life-limiting Conditions*

Facing the prospect of a baby being born with a serious illness or disability is a daunting and scary time. Many people face heavy pressure to abort their unborn child through ableist messages about it being “fairer to the child,” or that it would be “easier than seeing your baby die after birth,” or supposedly “the reasonable thing to do if the baby will die anyway”.

Despite the presence of a disability, families find that the prospects of a good quality of life and a positive future for their child are not thwarted. Once families get past their own negative feelings, their child with disability lives well and becomes a much loved member of the family.

Those who oppose abortion can experience hostility and lack of support, even from the medical profession. Yet research points to the fact that women who have an abortion when their child is diagnosed with a disability have a very high rate of psychological problems later.

## *When a Baby is Expected to Die Soon After Birth*

*"They kept telling me it was the responsible thing to do.  
Where are they all now while I suffer by myself, without ever  
having held my precious baby?" (Sara)*

Women and men who feel pressured to abort under these circumstances rarely have the same chance to grieve and to work through their loss. Their grief is also complicated by the fact that as well as dealing with the trauma of their baby dying, they were a part of the decision to end their baby's life.

However, those who courageously choose to continue their pregnancies with the knowledge that their babies will die, either during birth or soon after, find that they have the wonderful opportunity to hold, get to know, and properly grieve their child.

*"We felt so much pressure to abort our child, even from the doctor. Even though our little boy died, we are so glad that we got to hold him and tell him how much we loved him, even for a little while." (Ellen)*

## *Ways to be Supportive*

Listening to all of their feelings, including grief about lost dreams and wishes. Avoid speaking negatively about life with a disability or treating the potential birth of a baby with disability as a tragedy.

Helping them to find out more information about the disability. Be positive about living with disability and the inherent value of all people.

Encourage them to consider making contact with families who are already caring for a child with disability – this will help them to think more realistically about the future and reclaim some of their dreams.

Helping them to find out about the services and supports that will be available to assist them. A small selection of resources can be found on the *Walking with Love* website: [www.walkingwithlove.org.au](http://www.walkingwithlove.org.au)



# *Caring for Someone Following an Abortion*

*"At the time, I saw no other way out... it wasn't so much a  
"choice" as an act of desperation." (Lynne)*

Many women say that they had an abortion because they felt they had "no other choice". Many continue to suffer, often silently, long afterwards with feelings of guilt and remorse. They can be too scared or embarrassed to talk to anyone about their struggle.

*"I grew up in a very religious family, I didn't want to hurt or  
embarrass them, I had no choice but to have an abortion."  
(Claire)*

There is growing evidence of the damaging effects of abortion on women. This means that more and more women are now realising that they are not alone in grieving for their lost children. More and more are now feeling that they need to, and can, talk about their abortion experience. It is important that a person feels supported, and not judged, at this critical time if they are to be able to work through their grief and loss.

*"I thought the abortion would fix the problem. Nobody told  
me I would have to live with it the rest of my life." (Anne)*

Always be sensitive to how you present your views about abortion with even your closest of friends. Most women keep their abortions a secret, out of feelings of guilt or shame. Hearing words of judgment and condemnation further isolate someone in their experience. Instead, talk about the different pressures women experience that lead them down a path to which they see no other way out.



*“A person is an entity of  
a sort to which the only  
proper and adequate way  
to relate is love...  
A person’s rightful due is  
to be treated as an  
object of love,  
not as an object for use.”*

Karol Wojtyła, *Love & Responsibility*. 1993, 41-42.

If you are the person someone chooses to share their abortion experience with, it is important that they feel safe and not judged:

*“It must be hard for you to have been grieving alone for so long.”*

Try not to show any feelings of shock or negativity you may have that could make her feel judged. Rather, try to understand how it was for her at the time she made this decision. Say things like:

*“Things must have been really tough for you then.”*

Acknowledge their feelings of loss and grief:

*“You must have felt really scared/overwhelmed/unsupported.”*

The worst advice you can give to someone is to say to put it behind them, and dismiss or invalidate how they feel. Let them know that there are people they can talk with who can help work through their grief.

*“How could anybody love me again after what I have done?”*  
(Isabel)

## *Forgiveness is Available*

Many people carry their guilt and shame for many years, sometimes decades, believing they are unworthy of good things or even of being loved. It is important that they know forgiveness and healing is available; that there are people who understand their circumstances then and their grief now. Forgiveness and healing is available through special ministries such as [Rachel's Vineyard](#).



