How do I tell my parents I'm pregnant? [1]

Dear Alice,

I am pregnant and my ex-boyfriend is the father. He broke up with me before I found out I was pregnant. He's going out with another girl now and acts like he doesn't want anything to do with me or our baby! Neither my parents nor his parents know yet. How do I tell them? I don't want to go through this as a single parent. What should I do?

Worried,
IN

Answer

Dear IN,

Finding out that you’re pregnant can feel like a sudden whirlwind of questions and emotions. You ask, “What should I do?” and fortunately, there are many resources and options out there as for you. Family planning clinics (like Planned Parenthood [2]) or your health care provider can be good places to find information, to get an exam to make sure you’re healthy, and to talk out what you’re feeling. In the meantime, it sounds like there are three things on your mind: (1) how do you tell your or your ex-boyfriend’s parents, (2) what to do if the father does not want to be involved, and (3) considering what it would mean to be a single parent. The following paragraphs will touch on each of these, one at a time.

The parents. Although it is difficult to predict how the conversation will go, you can do a little pre-convo prep to calm your nerves. You probably have at least some sense of how your parents may react to your news, but keep in mind that sometimes parents may have an initial strong reaction?like anger, shock, or confusion?which may change over time to be more supportive once they have a chance to let the news sink in. As you prepare, you can put yourself in a few different imaginary scenarios: What is your plan if they start yelling? Or what might you say if they pepper you with questions, or, conversely, fall completely silent? Depending on your relationship with your parents, it could help if you had a trusted friend or mentor come with you. You might even consider taking one or both of your parents with you to visit your health care provider as they may be able to assist you when telling your parents.

Now, what are you actually going to say? Here are a few ideas you could play around with:

- “Mom and Dad, I have something important that I want to talk to you about. I recently found out that I am pregnant. Would you be willing to talk to me about this?”
I know you’re upset, and I understand. But I’m scared and not entirely sure what to do, so I could really use your support.

Mom, Dad? I really value your support. It would mean a lot to me if you could help me figure this out.

For more information on how to tell your parents, you may want to check out Telling Parents: You’re Pregnant [3].

The baby’s father. You say that it doesn’t seem like your ex-boyfriend wants to be involved. If you decide to keep the baby, it may be worth asking the father if he would be willing to talk about what you and he think his role will be, so that you can be on the same page. One thing to consider: establish paternity once the baby is born. This might mean that your ex would either voluntarily sign an acknowledgement that he is the father, or undergo a DNA test to legally establish if he is the father (this process will vary by state, so check for specifics in your area). There are a few reasons why it might be a good idea to establish paternity, even if he doesn’t want to be very involved:

- It gives you the ability to collect child support payments.
- It gives the child a legal right to be on the father’s health insurance plan, as well as receive inheritance or life insurance.
- It establishes a basis for a potential future relationship between your child and the father (legally, once paternity is established, the father has a right to be involved in the child’s life, should he decide to be).

Your options. In addition to having a difficult conversation with your parents and ex-boyfriend, you might also think about a few things yourself. While parenthood can be full of joy, it can also be full of challenges and sacrifices. There are five major things you may want to consider as you weigh your options:

- **Time:** Do you have the time to devote to a baby, considering any work, school, or other responsibilities?
- **Energy:** Do you have the energy, such as a willingness to be patient, even when things get tough?
- **Planning:** Are you ready to plan your days around a baby and its needs?
- **Material resources:** Will you have enough money for things like diapers, clothes, and healthcare for a baby?
- **Lifestyle changes:** How easy would it be to give up certain things (e.g., like alcohol or smoking, for instance) during your pregnancy to protect the baby?

These questions are especially worth considering if you’re thinking about single-parenthood; while it can give you freedom and be very rewarding, it can also mean more pressure and responsibilities. These questions can help you weigh your three choices [4]: keeping the baby, adoption, or abortion. The Go Ask Alice! Pregnancy archives [5] has information on each of these options, which you can explore at your own pace. A health care provider or a professional at a family planning clinic can also help inform your next steps.
While a new pregnancy can leave you feeling like you’re in the dark, talking with people in your life—whether it’s a health care provider, your parents, your ex, mentors, or friends—can help you navigate whatever path you decide to take from here. These conversations can be hard, but remember: at the end of the day, what you do about your pregnancy and your future is your decision.

Alice!
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Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
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