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 bring a sudden whirlwind of questions and emotions. You ask, “What should I do?” and fortunately, there are many resources and options out there for you. Family planning clinics (such as Planned Parenthood [2]) or your health care provider can be a first step in finding information, to getting an exam to make sure you’re healthy, and to talk out what you’re feeling. In the meantime, it sounds like communicating with parents (yours and your ex’s, if you choose) about your pregnancy is your main concern and thinking through how you might broach the subject and possible reactions can help you feel more prepared. Beyond that conversation, you may also have a few additional concerns such as considering how you'll want to move forward if the father doesn't want to be involved and what it would mean to be a single parent. You’re wise to take some time to think through how you might address each of these, so read on for more on possible approaches.

Although it’s difficult to predict how the conversation will go with your parents, you can do a little pre-convo prep to calm your nerves. You probably have at least some sense of how they may react to your news, but keep in mind that sometimes parents may have an initial strong reaction — such as anger, shock, or confusion — which may change over time to be more supportive once they have a chance to let the news settle. 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 them, 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 you speak with them.

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

- “Mom and Dad, I have something that I want to talk to you about. I recently found out that I'm 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]. You also mention telling your ex’s parents, but that will be for you to decide whether you’d like to have a conversation with them, based on your comfort level and your relationship with them.

You also 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 his role will be from each of your perspectives, so that you can be on the same page. One thing to consider may be establishing paternity once the baby is born. This might mean that your ex would either voluntarily sign an acknowledgement that he's the father or beginning the process to legally establish if he's the father (this process will vary by state, so check for specifics in your area). There are a few reasons why you might choose to pursue establishing paternity, even if your ex doesn't want to be very involved. Doing so may allow you to:

- Collect child support payments.
- Ensure the legal right for the child to be on the father’s health insurance plan as well as other federal benefits.
- Establish 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, if he decides to be).

Speaking with your ex may be as nerve-wracking as talking with parents, but coming at the conversation with the same strategies (i.e., planning what you might say and preparing for potential reactions) may give you some useful tools for discussion.

In addition to having a potentially difficult conversation with your parents and ex-boyfriend, you might also think about a few concerns on your own. 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 their needs?
- **Material resources:** Will you have enough money for items such as diapers, clothes, and
health care 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 be very rewarding, it can also mean more pressure and responsibilities. The answers can help you weigh your choices: keeping the baby, adoption, or terminating the pregnancy (abortion). To help inform your decision-making process at your own pace, check out some of the Q&As in the Pregnancy Options section of Go Ask Alice! archives. Walking through them with a medical professional might also be helpful.

While a pregnancy can leave you with a lot of unknowns, 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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- Signs of early pregnancy and abortion info
- Tell my ex I'm pregnant by him?
- Parental consent for abortion?
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**Resources**

Medical Services (Morningside)

Medical Services (CUIMC)

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[5] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/relationships