

A ChildLine Information Sheet

Pregnancy and contraception

"I had sex for the first time last night with my boyfriend. I'm really, really worried about being pregnant. I'm also petrified that my parents may find out." Tatum, 15

Each year, around 8,000 children and young people contact ChildLine about pregnancy and contraception. Several hundred more call us, concerned about someone else's possible pregnancy.

Like adults, talking about sexual health, emotions and relationships can be embarrassing and difficult for children and young people. Callers tell ChildLine that pregnancy and contraception are a very private and personal part of their lives, and they find it very difficult to discuss the subject with their parents and other adults.

Sometimes their feelings and the information they have are confused. By phoning ChildLine or another helpline (see list at end), young men and women can talk to someone who won't judge them or tell anyone else about their call. Also, they won't think they are silly if they don't have the right information.

ChildLine counsellors appreciate that young people, both boys and girls, become aware of their sexuality at an early age and need to talk about this. Counsellors respect children and young people regardless of their age, gender or sexuality. Some callers ring several times and talk to the same counsellor each time.

The facts

- Pregnancy can occur when a man and a woman have sexual intercourse, although not every time they have sex.
- Contraception is a way to avoid pregnancy when a man and a woman have sex.

- There are many different forms of contraception, which vary for men and women. For example, men can use condoms and women can take the pill or use a diaphragm or other forms of contraception.
- Condoms are the only forms of contraception to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) being passed from one person to another. STIs include chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and the HIV virus, which can lead to AIDS.
- Sexually transmitted infections can be passed on when any two people, male or female, have sex.
- Not everyone knows the facts about contraception. Even when they have the correct information, some of it may be confusing. Some choose not to use contraception.
- Some young women tell ChildLine that they have become pregnant as a result of violence, such as rape or sexual abuse.
- Young people tell ChildLine that they take risks that they would not normally take when they are using alcohol or drugs.

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Where can I get advice about contraception?

There are many forms of contraception, including condoms and the pill. You need to find the right one for you if you are considering having sex! For clear, practical advice, you need to speak to your GP, a family planning clinic, or visit one of the health websites set up for young people like Brook at www.brook.org.uk

I won't get pregnant, will I?

"I think I'm pregnant, but the father is my dad's friend. I'm too embarrassed to tell anyone. Everyone I know will say I am sluttish." Olivia, 17

Often the thought is 'it won't happen to me', but frequently it does, even in the most caring of relationships. If a couple do not use contraception, the woman can get pregnant the first time she has sex, whether she is on her period or not.

Condoms are available from young people's services or your local family planning clinic. They can also be bought at chemists, supermarkets and from vending machines. There is no law that says you have to be 16 or over to buy them.

Britain has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. In 2000, there were over 87,000 children in Britain with a teenage mother. Protect yourself if you do not want you or your partner to become pregnant.

I think I'm pregnant. What should I do?

"I had sex with someone I met at a club. I'm now pregnant and don't know what to do. I don't think I want an abortion, but am not sure. I'm scared." Chantelle, 14

If you do have sex without contraception, you can still prevent pregnancy by using emergency contraception up to three days after you had intercourse.

If you are 16 or over, you can buy the emergency contraceptive pill, commonly known as the "morning after pill" from your chemist. If you are under 16, the pills can be obtained from your GP or family planning clinic.

An emergency intrauterine device (IUD) can be inserted up to 120 hours (five days) after sex, but this is only available at your GP or family planning clinic.

If you do not wish to take any of these options, or if you are too late, then you can take a pregnancy test or talk to your GP or a family planning clinic.

I'm pregnant. Can you help me?

"I've just found out that my girlfriend is pregnant. I'm scared to tell my parents and am worried about how this will affect my plans to go to college."

Mark, 16

Finding out you or your partner is pregnant can be a great shock, even if you know you have had sex without contraception. Many worry that their family or other people will find out. As a result, they find it easier to keep the pregnancy to themselves in the early months – even though this can cause greater problems later on.

If you or your partner is pregnant, you need to talk to someone, preferably someone who cares about you, as soon as possible. It's not going to go away, so it's important you seek help and advice. The earlier you seek help, the more options you will have. You can get advice from a family planning clinic, GP or ChildLine.

Young men may not even know that they are to be fathers. Even when they know, they, like young women, tell ChildLine that they have very mixed feelings and are faced with many issues. Some young men feel they have little choice or control over the future. Facing being a teenage parent is frightening for young women and men, and they both need support.

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Further information and advice

Brook

Brook provides free and confidential advice about sex and contraception to young people up to the age of 25.

421 Highgate Studios
53–79 Highgate Road
London NW5 1TL

Helpline: **0800 0185 023**
(Monday to Friday 9am–5pm)
Website: **www.brook.org.uk**

FPA (formerly Family Planning Association)

Promoting sexual health and family planning by means of information, research, education, training, publications and publicity.

50 Featherstone Street,
London EC1Y 8QU

Helpline: **0845 122 8690**
(open Monday to Friday 9am–6pm)
Website: **www.fpa.org.uk**

Sexwise

A free and confidential advice line on sex, relationships and contraception. Anyone aged 18 or under can call. Lines are open from 7am to 12 midnight every day.

Helpline: **0800 28 29 30**
Website: **www.ruthinking.co.uk**

Sexual Health Helpline

A 24-hour, seven-days-a-week, free and confidential telephone service with advice about HIV, AIDS, sexual health, sexually transmitted infections, local services, clinics and support services.

Freephone: **0800 567123**
Website: **www.playingsafely.co.uk**

NHS Direct

NHS Direct operates a 24-hour nurse advice and health information service, providing confidential information on:

- what to do if you or your family are feeling ill
- particular health conditions
- local healthcare services, such as doctors, dentists or late night opening pharmacies
- self-help and support organisations

The telephone service is available in England and Wales

Tel: **0845 46 47**

Website: **www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk**

For health information and self care advice in Scotland contact NHS24.

Tel: **08454 242424**

Website: **www.nhs24.com**

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ChildLine is a service provided by the NSPCC.

Registered charity numbers
216401 and SC037717.

Please note – all names and identifying details have been changed to protect young people's identities.

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CONTACTING CHIDLIN E

Children can call ChildLine on **0800 1111** (all calls are free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year).

Or write to us at ChildLine, Freepost NATN1111, London E1 6BR; or visit **www.childline.org.uk**

Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try our textphone service on **0800 400 222**.
Monday to Friday 9.30am to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 9.30am to 8.00pm

We have a special helpline for children and young people living away from home in places such as refuges, boarding schools and young offenders' institutions called The Line on **0800 88 4444**.
Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 2.00pm to 8.00pm

ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS) helps schools set up schemes to encourage children and young people to support each other. For more information call **020 7650 3230**.