



Resources:

BeNotAfraid (peer support for carrying to term) www.benotafraid.net

National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC)
Ph 215-877-2660 (clergy and parent resources and phone consults)
www.ncbcenter.org

National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) (prenatal diagnosis resources for sensitivity and ministry development)
www.ncpd.org

Directory of perinatal hospice service providers nationwide
www.perinatalhospice.org

[My Child, My Gift: A Positive Response to Serious Prenatal Diagnosis](#)
www.mychildmygift.com

[For the Love of Angela](#)
www.theobooks.org/product/for-the-love-of-angela-by-nancy-mayerwhittington-1039.cfm

[Waiting For Eli](#)
www.waitingforeli.com

Special Considerations:

A wide range of conditions can be diagnosed prenatally. Abortion is routinely offered not only for fatal, but also disabling conditions by medical providers who see no reason to continue a pregnancy when the prognosis is poor. Make certain you understand what the parents have been told about their baby's condition and treatment options. Encourage them to seek a second opinion if need be.

Do not presume parents have been referred to supportive resources. Connecting them to life-affirming ministries, agencies, support groups or other families who have gone through the same situation, and perinatal hospice and/or infant bereavement support may be your greatest gift to them.

Be sensitive in prayer. Pray for the health and/or well-being of this baby, comfort for his/her parents and family, and blessing that they may each feel God present in this difficult circumstance.

The illness, disability and/or death of a child can produce stress on a marriage. Share information regarding the differences in male and female grief, and be sensitive to fathers who may feel the need to fix situations and/or protect others from circumstances not under their control.

Honor confidentiality regarding the details of the baby's condition.

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Pastoral Care for Parents Experiencing a Poor Prenatal Diagnosis



Distributed by *Be Not Afraid - Charlotte*.
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In your effort to provide pastoral care and guidance to parents who have been given a poor prenatal diagnosis (PPD), remember the circumstances they have just encountered. Very likely in the course of an hour-long office visit, a normal pregnancy has been turned upside down. All their hopes and dreams for the future have been cast aside in the immediacy of the news that this child is not healthy. Though still pregnant, they are grieving the loss of their dream pregnancy and, though their baby is yet alive, they are bereaved parents who are very much being encouraged to move quickly beyond the reality of the delicate life entrusted to them.

When a pregnancy is complicated with the news of a PPD, the medical focus shifts away from the baby for whom there is no treatment or cure to a clinical perspective which views the pregnancy itself as the condition requiring intervention. The parents come to you in a confused circumstance of grief, shock and ambiguity because suddenly their second-trimester pregnancy has been deemed disposable, and their precious child is nothing more than a prognosis to be avoided.

Recognize that in this terrible moment, you may be one of only a few with whom they have chosen to share the details of this circumstance. You cannot do this from a distance. Make time to meet face-to-face, encourage both parents to attend, make certain they feel unrushed, and consider the following...

+Listen carefully. Make certain you understand whether this diagnosis involves a fatal condition or not, and respond accordingly. Repeat what you are hearing, clarify information as needed, remove abortion euphemisms gently, and acknowledge their shock and grief. Very likely they have not yet been affirmed in these feelings. Provide them with the safe space in which to begin to experience what has happened and the uncertainty that has suddenly become part of their child's life. Offer your consolation.

Help them reframe the details by offering statements like "What terrible shock and grief you must feel..." "It sounds as if your doctor has his mind made up. Perhaps in his certainty, he has not provided you with information that would support carrying your baby to term..." "I hear you saying 'induction of labor', but at 21 weeks with no hope of treatment for this child, you need to understand that what we are really talking about is abortion."

+Help them reconnect with their baby. Let your actions and words acknowledge the inherent dignity of the life of their child no matter how precarious or brief. Refer to the baby in the present tense and by the name they have chosen for him/her. If there is no name, reference the gender, as in, "your precious son." Offer blessings and prayers. Offer anointing for the Mother. Include baby's name on what-ever prayer lists the parish maintains for the sick. Provide information concerning carrying to term and perinatal hospice. Keeping this baby alive in your thoughts and present in your interaction with them is both a powerful witness and a compassionate gift.

+Encourage them to slow down. Communicate to them that they cannot ignore the devastating emotional toll of the information that has been given to them, and its probable impact on their ability to make decisions. This is especially important in this circumstance as they have a responsibility to parent this child to the best of their ability.

They should not allow themselves to be rushed to make decisions regarding additional testing and/or procedures on any schedule that denies them adequate time to be first and foremost bereaved parents. Make certain they understand in clear terms that the Church considers an early induction of labor as the result of a poor or fatal prenatal diagnosis to be an abortion.

+Let them know they are not alone. Be familiar with the resources listed below and have them ready. Refer them to the BeNotAfraid website and local support where available. Give them the NCBC one-page statement on "early induction of labor" so as to reinforce and clarify Church teaching, and provide practical guidance for the pregnancy, birth and beyond. Make certain they have an emergency contact number at which you can be reached. Encourage them to call at any time. You too should make a note to check on them by phone sometime in the next 24-48 hours. Follow up on any questions or concerns they may have.

+Restore hope and provide encouragement. Share scripture or prayer material that has meaning to you. Offer a blessed medal for the mother to wear. Remind them that their baby is alive right now and safe with them, and note that the weeks ahead are precious time they have been given to love, hold and protect this child. In the midst of this confusing circumstance, there is blessing in that simple truth. Consider sharing the following quote from John Paul II, "For God and before God, each human being is unique and unrepeatable...chosen from eternity and called by name." Close with prayer, and thank them for sharing this time and their baby's life with you.
