

Be Not Afraid

Pastoral Care for Parents Experiencing A Poor Prenatal Diagnosis

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.

Online Resources

Be Not Afraid (peer support for carrying to term)
www.benotafraid.net

National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC)
Phone - 215.877.2660
(clergy & parent resource/provides phone consults)
www.ncbcenter.org

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

Directory of Perinatal Hospice Service
Providers Nationwide
www.perinatalhospice.org

Printed Resources

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

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Be Not Afraid is a network
of concerned parents and
professionals who have
experienced or worked closely
with issues surrounding poor
prenatal diagnosis.

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 as a 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.

When parents contact you for information and/or support, meet face to face and encourage both to attend. The following practices are recommended as a guide to direct this first, very important conversation.

Take Time

- Listen. Parents need to feel that they have been heard and understood.
- Understand the diagnosis. (Have they had a diagnostic test or just a screening test? Is the diagnosis lethal or non-lethal? Are there multiple diagnoses? Is more testing planned and for what purpose?)

Connect with their Baby

- So as to help them reconnect with their baby.
- Keep the baby in the present tense. Use the baby's name if one has been given or refer to the baby's gender as in "your sweet boy."
- Offer blessings and prayers that claim the baby.
- Distinguish between their relationship and the doctor's relationship with their baby.
- Remind them that they have a responsibility to parent their baby to the best of their ability even now.

Reframe the Details

- Affirm their shock and grief.
- Offer your consolation.
- Provide information regarding the differences in male and female grief.
- Encourage them to slow down. They should not be rushed to make decisions that do not allow them first and foremost to be bereaved.
- Remove abortion euphemisms gently.
- Have they have been advised regarding the option of carrying to term? If the diagnosis is lethal, were they provided with information regarding perinatal hospice? Offer this information as needed.

Offer Resources

- Explain Catholic teaching on this issue.
- Offer local support where available.
- Refer by asking them if you can share their contact information with appropriate service providers.
- Offer BeNotAfraid.net as a resource to connect on-line with other parents and learn more about diagnoses.
- Assure them of your availability moving forward and make sure they have an emergency number where you can be reached.

Follow-Up (*within 12-24 hours*)

- The parents are in crisis and the situation may be changing as additional test results become available.
- Remain engaged until the decision to carry to term has been made.

Hebrews 13:6

We may say with confidence:

*"The Lord is my helper,
and I will not be afraid."*

