**Adoption, the Incredible Act of Love**

Pregnancy … It’s a word that can mean great joy or great despair.

Women struggling to fall pregnant or reaching the latter years of their child-bearing age often consider the irony of having spent so many years in their youth avoiding getting pregnant, only to spend an equivalent number of years, and often a lot of money later on, trying to become pregnant.

But facing an unplanned or crisis pregnancy can be difficult and emotional. If you're pregnant, there are a lot of things to consider during this time and arming yourself with information about your options is the first step in empowering yourself to make an informed and well thought out decision regarding your unplanned pregnancy.

The best thing you could do, for both you and your child, is to make an informed decision. An informed decision means that you have studied all your options, understand the consequences of each decision, analysed your and your child's wellbeing, and made a choice that reflects what you've learned and discovered about yourself, your situation, and your needs.

**The test is positive**

So the home pregnancy kit has confirmed your worst fears. While you love children and want to be a mom someday, the timing couldn’t be worse. You haven’t completed your studies yet and you don’t have the financial resources to support a child. Your boyfriend feels the same way. He wasn’t planning to be a father before he had a stable job and was well on his way in his chosen career. What can you do and who can help you make the right decision?

Many social workers, psychologists, doctors and members of the clergy are trained in option counselling. Some aren’t. At this crucial point in your life, it would be very helpful to talk to someone who can clearly explain your options and what the emotional, physical and financial consequences are, both short-term and long-term. Someone to talk to who will be objective, consider your needs and who will not judge you on your choices is crucial.

A good option counsellor will tell you that your options include:

* Keeping the child: to be raised by the birth mom and/or dad and/or their family
* Giving the child up to foster care: placing the child in a temporary home until such time as the birth mom is able to resume full-time parenting
* Adoption: delivering the child and then giving it to a family that been approved as an adoptive family and is on a waiting list to receive a baby.
* Abortion: terminating the pregnancy at an abortion clinic or doctor’s surgery within the first four months of gestation.

**You are not alone**

Women have been experiencing what can be termed crisis pregnancies for thousands of years. While the emotions associated with such a situation may not have changed much in all this time, the available options and the structures that exist to support a woman’s choices have.

A study looking at pregnancy rates amongst school-going learners showed that in 2008, 6.3% of all female learners in South Africa were registered as pregnant. So many young women are faced with this difficult situation each year and not are aware that they have access to someone who can guide them through their options to find a situation that is right for her.

**Giving Life**

If you are facing a crisis pregnancy, have considered all your options under the guidance and with the compassion of a counsellor, and have decided to make your child available for adoption, read on for important advice and insight into what this loving choice will mean for you and your partner, your child and the people who will finally be able to complete their family.

If you are thinking about adoption, either facing a crisis pregnancy or wanting to adopt a child, you should be aware that a wide range of resources are available to offer expert assistance and guidance around the different parts of the process.

“The National Adoption Coalition’s ‘Addoption’ programme was born as a centralised, unified hub complete with a website and call centre to provide information and guidance for birth and prospective adoptive parents in terms of the adoption process, in fact for anyone in South Africa wanting to know more about adoption as an option. In addition it also provides an extensive database of adoption professionals across South Africa. This is the only resource of its kind that provides both adoption information and database resources in one, consolidated format.

“The key focus of *Addoption* is to educate and create awareness among South Africans about adoption as an option when deciding how to deal with a crisis pregnancy, how to become an adoptive parent, or how to extend a family through adoption. Its role is to assist the adoption community as a whole to create awareness and hence encourage the use of their services,” explains Pam Wilson, spokesperson for the National Adoption Coalition.

**For more information about adoption call 0800 864 658 or log onto** [**www.adoption.org.za**](http://www.adoption.org.za) **for assistance and advice.**

***What is adoption?***

Adoption is a legal process which culminates in a biological mother and father signing over the parental rights of their child to another person or couple. The adoptive parents become the child’s parents and the same rights apply as if the child had been born to them.

An adoption is facilitated by an adoption accredited child protection organisation or an accredited adoption social worker in private practice.

An adoption process can be open or closed. In open adoptions, the birth mother has the opportunity to select the adoptive parents from a list of eligible candidates. She may request a meeting to finalise her selection and enter into an adoption agreement which accommodates some of her wishes, within the limits of the relevant legislation. This could mean that she can request updates on the child’s progress and remains in contact with the adoptive parents. She would not, however, be able to contact the child unless the child requests contact with its birth mom once they reach the age of consent at 18.

In a closed adoption, the birth mother does not know the identity of the adoptive parents and entrusts this choice to the adoption agency.

In either case, the birth mother can choose to make her details available should she wish to be contacted by the child once they have reached the age of 18.

From the time the birth mother agrees to the adoption and the papers have been filed in court, she has 60 days during which to change her mind and withdraw her consent.

Whether or not the couple experiencing the crisis pregnancy is married, the biological father has the right to give or withhold his consent to the adoption. His input will be sought and documented as part of the legal procedure. The birth mother will have the ongoing and unconditional support of the social workers assigned to her and may even elect to stay in a caring environment designed for expectant mothers, where medical and pre-natal needs are taken care of.

On the other side of the spectrum, all adoptive parents are put through a rigorous screening process to determine their suitability to adopt. Once they have been registered as adoptive parents, they will be placed on a list with adoption agencies until such time as they are selected to fulfil their dream of becoming parents.

**Adoption Myths Dispelled**

**My family and friends will judge me if I carry a child then give it away.** Our society, guided by our progressive Constitution, promotes freedom of choice. There will always be those who judge others, but giving up a child for adoption is not abandoning it, but loving it enough to allow it to have the kind of life you are not able to give it due to present circumstances. Such a decision is to be admired, and in adoption circles it is acknowledged as an ultimate act of love.

**The child will hate me.** Social Workers and psychologists encourage adoptive parents to explain to children at a very early age that they are adopted and to do this in a caring way that helps the child understand the circumstances around the birth mother’s decision. They are typically able to embrace this as part of their life story and are given guidance to ensure a healthy self-image. Adoptive parents receive counselling before receiving a child, to facilitate this understanding and self-acceptance throughout the child’s life.

**My life will be ruined forever**. Making this choice will allow a birth mother to return to her life path and have the opportunities that wouldn’t have existed if she had kept the child. There are enormous emotional implications associated with giving a child up for adoption, but a caring system exists to help the mother through the difficult time and to make peace with her decision. The emotional implications of abortion or abandonment as alternatives are likely to be more long-term and intense.

**Are you considering adoption or facing a crisis pregnancy?**

Call 0800 864 658 toll-free and speak with an Addoption adviser. Your call will be handled in the strictest of confidence.

**Additional Support Material for Media**

**Real Stories of Giving Life**

Madeleine\* was 18 when she discovered she was pregnant. She was earning a tiny salary and knew right away that she did not have the means to raise the child growing inside her. The baby’s father had made another woman pregnant and was living with her. He didn’t want to know about another dependant. Madeleine was grateful to have the support of her family, and her father backed her decision to give her baby up for adoption. “It was a very difficult decision,” she says, 18-years later. “But, I knew it was the best thing I could do for my child. It was in my hands to give her a better life, and to ensure she grew up in a loving family that would give her every opportunity in life.”

Madeleine chose an open adoption and was able to select the couple that seemed to have the closest match to her own value system and background. At seven months, the baby was in distress and Madeleine feared she may lose her. She took great care and carried the baby to full term. Along the way she had the unconditional support of the adoption agency she had approached and the love and care of two social workers who made sure she knew they had her interests and the interests of her baby at heart. The baby was delivered, and given to the adoptive parents shortly after birth. Despite having 60 days to change her mind after she had signed the papers, Madeleine says that it was not an option. “I had prepared myself months beforehand and was happy to stick with my decision.”

Madeleine requested that the new parents keep her up to date on the little girl’s progress. She received photos and information throughout the child’s life and sent the family gifts at significant milestones, to be given to the child once she had reached 18. The adoptive parents had told the child from an early age that she was adopted. She grew up a happy, content and privileged child who was aware that one woman had given birth to her while another had taken on the role of her mother.

When Madeleine shared her story, she was emotional yet at peace. Just a month earlier, with her daughter having turned 18 and completing high school, a meeting had been arranged between birth mother and child. On meeting her daughter for the first time since her birth, Madeleine was struck by their similarities in mannerisms, music taste and idiosyncrasies. Seeing the lovely, balanced child before her, she was reminded again that her ultimate act of love had been the correct choice. For her daughter, she was suddenly part of a second family, experiencing twice the love and acceptance she had known before. They are now embarking on a journey to discover each other, with the support of the adoptive parents and the extended families on both sides.

“In some ways, I now get to enjoy the good part. Here is this wonderful daughter who I can spend time with, without having to have been the disciplinarian, and go through the hard times mothers inevitably experience”, says Madeleine.

She has never regretted her decision and encourages women in a similar situation to think about how they can change the lives of an adoptive couple and give their child the best possible chance in life.

**Dalene\*** and her husband battled to conceive a child for several years. They attempted fertility treatment six times without success and having faced one devastating disappointment after another, decided they had to consider another option to fulfil their immense desire to have a child. They approached an adoption agency and embarked on the process to become registered as adoptive parents. After three years of waiting, knowing that it was just a matter of time and their family would be complete, Dalene and her husband finally got the call they had been dreaming of. A birth mother had identified them as potential candidates to raise her child, and wanted to meet them. “We approached the meeting with mixed emotions. Would she like us? Would she misjudge us? We sat down and started to talk and immediately felt a connection. We asked each other lots of questions.”

Later, the birth mother said it was the baby who helped her choose the couple. She was in Berg en Dal, a home for expectant moms and was reviewing the couple profiles she had been given. When she picked up Dalene and her husband’s profile, the baby kicked. She picked up another. Nothing happened. She went back to Dalene’s profile and the baby kicked again. She knew this was the right choice.

Dalene was able to share the last few weeks of her pregnancy with the birth mother, accompanying her to her scans and being part of the process. They held hands when they discovered the baby was a boy. At the birth, Dalene was in the delivery room and was able to hold him right away. She reflects on the incredible moment when the paediatrician announced to her husband, ‘Mr Kruger, here is your boy’. “My husband was so moved by the experience that he cried for six weeks. We had been married 17 years when our little boy came into our lives. For 17 years you dream, wonder, cry about this empty feeling and you know there is a space in your heart for a child yet there is no child. Then along comes this woman—a hero prepared to perform this act of love—who makes a decision to give us the opportunity to feel the love and fill the empty hole in our heart. It was amazing.”

“Adopted children are incredibly special. Of course all children are, but an adopted child is doubly loved and so wanted. He has changed our lives and every day the love grows more. We cannot express our feelings of love and admiration for his biological mother.”

**Nadia’s\*** story is similar. Her health made pregnancy a risky situation. Nevertheless, she tried to conceive and underwent fertility treatment until she decided that it was time she and her husband considered adoption. After three years of waiting, a birth mother chose them from a selection of adoptive parents and virtually overnight, Nadia and her husband became parents. “We received the call from the adoption agency and heard that a birth mom wanted to meet us. We were so nervous. She had had her baby boy eight days earlier and had decided to give him up for adoption because her circumstances were difficult and she already had children who she was struggling to care for. Nadia says, “When she reviewed our profiles, she saw that my husband loves to fish. She remembered little of her own father but did recall that he was a passionate fisherman. This helped her decide that we were right for her little boy. We assured her that this child would be raised with every opportunity to experience and enjoy the outdoors.”

Nadia and her husband took the child home to a welcoming party of about 40 people. “I had never even changed a nappy before and here I was with this gorgeous child with soft blonde curls and the baby things our friends had given us that we hadn’t had time to get. Even today he loves to hear the story of how he was born from my heart through another woman’s tummy, and how I struggled to change that first nappy.” Now, at eight-years-old, he goes everywhere with his father, and loves fishing and hunting and camping.

Nadia was grateful they had the opportunity to adopt this wonderful son and she felt that God had meant for her to have a daughter too. Two years after adopting their boy, they were aware of another child in need of a home. The adoption agency advised them that they had been chosen by the birth mom to adopt the little girl. The mother was experiencing a high risk pregnancy and there were fears that the child would be harmed or exhibit signs of the mother’s alcohol dependency. “We were concerned that having a special needs child would compromise the care we give our son, but it wouldn’t have made any difference to how much we wanted her. We had faith that she would be fine…and she was. Now we are blessed with two beautiful children who love each other like mad and who are so similar to my husband and me.

The adoption process is like a partnership. The adoptive parents are so blessed to be able to give the children a life and this allows the birth mother to go on with hers. “This matching of parents to children is a Godly act – it’s not human. You see the hand of God in it. Our children know they were adopted and we’ve explained to them it was God’s plan right from the beginning.”

*\*Names have been changed in the interests of privacy, but these are true accounts shared by those who want to inspire and assist others facing crisis pregnancy or following the adoption pathway.*