

## Confidentiality Is Key

**Do parents have a right to know if their teenage daughter is pregnant and considering abortion? Headliners reporters look at both sides of the argument.**

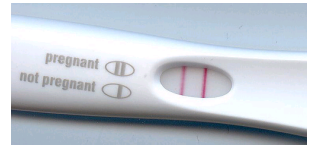
Pregnant teenagers know that if they have an abortion or get advice on abortion it will remain confidential.

We at Headliners decided to examine the abortion confidentiality guidelines, revised by the government in 2004, and ask whether parents should have a right to know if their children are pregnant or considering abortion.

The way the law is at the moment, if a girl under the age of 16 is pregnant and consults a doctor about abortion, the doctor may not tell her parents unless the girl gives her permission. This means the parents are not informed and may not even know if their child is sexually active.

This stops the parents knowing that their child is breaking the law by having underage sex and parents might want to know this to protect or guide them.

On the other hand, vulnerable young girls who become pregnant, could be protected by confidentiality and can seek help and advice without fearing that someone could find out.



### The Government's Mixed Messages

Britain currently has the highest numbers of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. The government has failed in its attempts to halve the number of teenage pregnancies since 1999.

Has the abortion confidentiality legislation limited the relationship between parent and child?

Back in 2005, then Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes made the following statement emphasising the importance of parents' roles in bringing down the teenage pregnancy rate:

"We cannot make the deep, sustained progress we want to make, particularly at that vulnerable age group, without fully engaging with parents and getting them on board."

The confidentiality law would seem to have made it harder for parents to engage with their children on the matter, becoming a barrier rather than an aid.

Sue Axon, a parent who herself had had an abortion and regretted it, even challenged the law in the courts on the grounds that a girl may make a decision that she later regrets or seek the assistance of an unofficial abortionist, but her case was thrown out.

We spoke to Michaela Aston, from pro-life charity, LIFE, who offer free, confidential information, counselling and support for women contemplating abortion, or suffering after pregnancy loss, or indeed struggling to cope after abortion.

She told us she "was very concerned about the confidentiality law" and that she did not think it had affected the rate of teenage pregnancy.

She also expressed concern for the parents not knowing, saying that girls are experiencing traumas alone.

She said: "Now it could be that girl could end up haemorrhaging or being in terrible pain and also to very depressed and if the parents don't know what happened to her they can't help her."

So what's the other side of the argument?

### Why the law should be kept

We spoke to Caroline Lewis Jones, Centre Manager at the Leeds Marie Stopes International clinic. Marie Stopes carry out abortions and provide information, advice and counselling. They are a pro choice charity which means they support women whether they want to go ahead with the having the baby or not.

Caroline said: "It's really important that there are no barriers to services for young people, or any of us at all.

"I think for young people you could be in very difficult circumstances at home or wherever. If you have barriers to particularly difficult services like abortion or sexual health, it must be much more difficult for vulnerable young people."

Caroline explained that counselling is always offered at Marie Stopes and that it is even compulsory for young people, a regulation insisted upon by the government's Care Quality Commission. She explained why:

"If a young person comes to us we have to be sure they have thought about this very very carefully and they have got support talking to an adult and carer, to explore their reason and see where they sit in the decision making process."

### Exceptional Circumstances

We asked Michaela at LIFE whether her view on the law would change if a girl was at risk of violence or being disowned if her family discovered she was pregnant.

She said: "If there are problems within those families or within those small cultures they should be addressed but certainly there should be recognition that if this is the case there should be safe places for those girls to go to in those circumstances.

"But we shouldn't change the law to look after the minority because [for] the vast majority in this country it would not be a problem."

## **Our Opinion**

During our investigation, there have been two cases reported in the media where confidentiality has been broken:

Luton and Dunstable Hospital has launched an internal review following reports in the Sun in January this year that an NHS nurse allegedly called the relative of a 16 year old girl who had been admitted to the hospital with complications following an abortion. The girl claims to be have been thrown out of her home by her devout Catholic mother.

A week later, a 19 year old mother of two informed the BBC that she regretted having an abortion after a member of staff at Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales informed her Catholic grandmother, who then disowned her.

At first we thought parents should know because the law was stopping them taking an active role in bringing down teenage pregnancy but we have found that in some cases, them knowing may cause more harm than good.

However, we feel the confidentiality law should be in place because it gives everyone an option. If girls have more than one choice, they will be more confident in talking about them.

## **About this story**

This story was produced by Ashley, Daniel, Dannielle, Husain, Nadhir, Nafisa and Samile.

## **0 comments**

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

## **Related Links**

### **From the rest of the web**

[Marie Stopes International](#) Marie Stopes International offers expert & supportive advice on abortion, vasectomy and sexual health services.

[LIFE charity](#) Free, confidential information, counselling and support for women contemplating abortion, suffering after pregnancy loss or struggling to cope after abortion.

[NHS Choices website](#) Advice on pregnancy and abortion

---

Built on [Cubik](#)

©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)