



ACCOMPANYING EXPECTANT MOTHERS CONSIDERING ADOPTION

25 years ago I gave birth to a baby boy and ... lovingly placed him into the waiting arms of his parents. ...I pray that his life has been full of joy, laughter, and abundant love. My thoughts and prayers also turn to my beautiful family and friends that lifted me up then and now.

—Maya*

Maya discovered she was pregnant six months into her freshman year of college. When her son was born, she placed him with a very kind adoptive family; she “just knew they were the right choice.” Now, years later, Maya emphasizes the importance of offering ongoing support to expectant mothers considering adoption. Would you know how to do so? Maya makes the following suggestions.

1. Let compassion guide your actions—always.

Consider whether your words and actions consistently convey understanding, compassion, and empathy. Would a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy know she could turn to you? If you are a parent, consistently reinforce to your children that you love them unconditionally and they can come to you with anything.

2. Do not pit adoption against abortion.

As Cardinal O’Malley once noted while chair of the bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, to a pregnant woman in crisis, adoption is often seen as worse than either raising or aborting an unexpected baby. Placing a child for adoption is “perceived as a kind of double death. First, the death of self by carrying the baby to term,” and second, “the death of the child through ‘abandonment.’” Be aware that “studies suggest that in pitting adoption against abortion, adoption will be the hands-down loser.”¹ So first focus on encouraging her that she can carry this baby to term.

3. Reassure her that she can “breathe.”

In an unexpected pregnancy, decisions begin to accumulate quickly, which can be stressful and overwhelming. Reassure her that she doesn’t need to resolve everything right away. She will eventually have to make decisions on parenting or adoption, but for now, she can just breathe. Maya explains this reassurance helped her consider what she wanted for her life, which, in turn, made it possible for her to consider adoption.

4. Love her for herself.

In some of her friendships, Maya remembers, “I ceased to be Maya at that time. I was just ‘that pregnant friend.’” Show your expectant friend or family member you love her for her own sake, and affirm that she is not defined by her pregnancy. She is still herself, and she will continue to be herself after the pregnancy.

5. Affirm that adoption is a loving choice.

As alluded to earlier, adoption is sometimes negatively portrayed or perceived as abandonment; this misperception is reinforced by the phrase, “giving the baby up for adoption” (an expression many don’t know is insensitive). Your friend or family member is likely experiencing a number of conflicting emotions. Let her know that placing a child for adoption is a loving and generous option that shows her long-term motherly care. In placing, she gives her child the gift of a family, and gives that family the gift a child.



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6. Help her see beyond her pregnancy.

A woman who becomes pregnant unexpectedly may feel as though her world is ending. To women with an unplanned pregnancy, Maya says, "This is survivable. Have hope." Help your pregnant friend set and work towards goals that extend beyond the nine months of her pregnancy. At the same time, be particularly careful not to trivialize her motherhood or the difficulties she may be facing.

7. Be present.

Invite her to spend time with you, and don't be afraid to invite her to join group outings. If you are concerned for her comfort, don't cease inviting her (which can be unintentionally hurtful); be honest about your concern, and ask her what she needs. Maya continues to cherish those friendships in which nothing changed because of her pregnancy—from frequent phone calls and movie nights to invitations to watch her team's volleyball games.

8. Reach out.

Maya explains that the mother, as well as her family members, need support; the baby's grandparents, aunts, and uncles are affected, too. Sometimes people may not know what to say, so they don't say anything; break the silence. Express your support to the expectant mother as well as to her family. Communicate you are there for them, and ask how you can be supportive. They may not have an answer or respond right away, but keep showing you care (unless they ask you to stop). Pray for them, mail a note, send brownies or a gift card to an activity that is not pregnancy-related, or make other creative, thoughtful gestures.

9. Keep reaching out, and encourage her to seek support services, if needed.

Maya also emphasizes the need for continued support of the birth-mother and her family after the placement. Some birth-parents grieve after the placement. It

doesn't mean the decision was wrong, but simply that the experience was life-changing. These can be very normal emotions. Be aware that this season of transition can be difficult as the mother and her family mourn the baby's absence and adjust to a new normal. Encourage her to seek "aftercare services" offered by adoption agencies, if needed.

Every situation is different, so the manner of appropriate support will vary, but the need for continuing compassion remains the same. Help them hold onto hope. May we show others God's tender loving care through faith strengthened by prayer and lived out in love.

**Name changed to protect privacy.*

¹ Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap. "Homily, Opening Mass, 2013 National Prayer Vigil for Life." Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/cardinal-sean-p-omalley-opening-mass-2013-national-prayer-vigil-for-life.cfm>

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