



## INFORMING CHILDREN OF THEIR CONCEPTION BY RAPE

This document will provide some guidance on deciding whether or not a child should be told that she or he was conceived from a rape and how to go about divulging this information.

When a decision has been made to continue a pregnancy conceived by rape, parents/guardians will need to consider the following questions:

- ◆ Should the child ultimately be informed of the circumstances of her or his conception?
- ◆ At what developmental age should the child be told?
- ◆ Under what circumstances should the child be told?



Some parents/guardians feel that their child need not be informed, and others feel that their child should be informed as a matter of propriety. Another reason could be because the child has become aware of some information that creates a need to tell the child about the events of her or his conception.

Should parents tell a child that she or he was conceived as a result of rape?

- ◆ Parents/guardians should explore their motives for telling the child. Is the reason focused on themselves or on the best interests of the child? It must be the parents' belief that telling the child of her or his conception by rape is in the child's best interest. Unless this is true, it may be best not to disclose the circumstances of the conception.
- ◆ Parents/guardians can seek free and confidential counseling through local rape crisis centers to help them decide if telling the child is in the child's best interest.
- ◆ A child may have heard partial or incomplete information about some or all of the circumstances of her or his conception from other sources. In this situation, it is probably best for the parents/guardians to speak with the child about this to ensure that the child has accurate information.

At what developmental age should the child be when told?

- ◆ When a child has learned information from another source about his or her conception from rape, it is best to discuss this with the child at that time.
- ◆ If there is no immediate need to tell the child but the parents/guardians feel that the child should ultimately know, the age at which a child should be told varies, depending on the child's development and maturity.
  - ◆ Generally, a child will be able to understand and deal with this type of stressful information by around the developmental age of 12 years, but this should be determined on an individual basis.
  - ◆ Parents should consider consulting a child counselor or psychologist about the child's individual developmental preparedness to understand and deal with this information in a healthy way.



How should this discussion be planned and conducted?

- ◆ If financially feasible, parents/guardians should consider using a family therapy process for this discussion.
- ◆ If family therapy is not possible, parents/guardians should contact the local rape crisis center and inquire about related services.
- ◆ The first session should be between the therapist and the parents/guardians, focusing on the motive for discussing the child's conception, preparedness of the child for this type of information, and how the discussion will be conducted.
- ◆ The subsequent session or sessions may then be devoted to the parents/guardians sharing age-appropriate information with the child in the presence of the therapist, who would maintain an overview of and give direction to the discussion and who would be immediately available to begin to work with the child and parents/guardians as they respond to the impact of this information.

## RESOURCES

Parents Anonymous - [www.parentsanonymous.org](http://www.parentsanonymous.org)

Bass, Ellen, and Laura Davis. *The Courage to Heal*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.

*Recommended excerpts:* Part Three, Changing Patterns, Children and Parenting  
Part Five, Courageous Women, Eva Smith, "I Have Told My Son"