

## **Abortion Messaging Toolkit**

Honest and non-judgmental conversations (per the guidelines below) can help identify common ground in conversations about abortion, and can even spread support for safe and legal abortion among most people. Even better, these tips also help us as we work to advocate for reproductive *justice* (as distinct from reproductive rights).

### **Avoid labels.**

Labels (choice/life) are limiting and alienate many people. Increasing numbers of people identify as neither “pro-life” or “pro-choice,” or as both. A recent Gallup poll corroborates that the number of people who say that abortion should remain safe and legal is higher than the number of those who identify as pro-choice. Instead of using labels, leaving space for people to acknowledge the complexity of abortion allows for a different and more comprehensive conversation about real-life decision making.

- Focus the conversation on respecting other people’s decisions, and not enforcing any one person’s ideas onto others.

### **This is not the role of politicians.**

Government should work to ensure that a safe and legal abortion is an option, but it should not be involved in individual decision-making and its influence should stop at the doctor’s door.

Downplaying the moral complexity of abortion is not helpful, but politicians do not need to be the experts in resolving questions of life and death.

- Keep it simple: avoid referring to abortions as either routine or rare; and once you’ve made your point, don’t keep talking.
- Also, talk about one individual “woman” as opposed to groups of “women,” which lead to unfair and unhelpful stereotypes, whereas referring to a person in the singular personalizes the issue.
- Keeping abortion “safe and legal” is one of the most agreed upon statements tested, even among audiences who are traditionally unfavorable to abortion.

*Try these talking points, which tested positively in research done by Planned Parenthood:*

- If asked to affiliate with a label: “These labels don’t reflect the complexity of how most people actually think and feel about abortion.” OR “Instead of putting people in one category or another, we should respect the real life decisions women and their families face every day.”
- “Women don’t turn to politicians for advice about mammograms, prenatal care, or cancer treatments. Politicians should not be involved in a woman’s personal medical decisions about her pregnancy.”

### **We're not in her shoes.**

We're going for 'empathetic attunement', not judgment. Because we often cannot know the complexities of individual situations, **it is important to allow a person to make decisions that are right for them, particularly when they are (a) informed about all the options, and (b) in communication with their faith, family, and doctor.** A person's circumstances are often complex –we should not create fictional scenarios or begin to describe a particular person's situation.

- Using the word "pregnancy" is better than "fetus" or "baby", but including the word "unintended" is unnecessary and provokes judgment.
- Using the word "decision" is better than "choice" because it connotes the thoughtfulness with which it is made.
- Calling out others as "trying to ban abortion" is not helpful. Focus instead on the result of the policies they endorse, which shame, coerce, and judge a woman.

- "I don't know a woman's specific situation – I am not in her shoes. Ultimately, decisions about whether to choose adoption, end a pregnancy, or raise a child must be left to a woman, her family, and her faith, with the counsel of her doctor or health care provider."
- "Abortion is a deeply personal and often complex decision, and I don't believe you can make that decision for someone else."
- "Information should support a woman and enable her to take care of her health and well being. It should not be provided with the intent of coercion, shame, or judgment." (this is particularly helpful for the sonogram, etc. laws)

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