

Coping With an Unplanned Pregnancy

✖ As every mother knows, there is no respite from parenting. When my teenage daughter became pregnant, I had to find a way to nurture her and confront my own issues at the same time.

My daughter Windsor had been sleeping a lot. She would come home from school and take long naps before dragging down to dinner.

She was keeping company with a young man who was pleasant, but had few ambitions. I didn't prevent them from seeing each other, but I certainly hoped their relationship would soon run its course.

Windsor accused me of being judgmental and not trusting her. Our relationship became volatile and frustrating. I was keenly disappointed and even questioned God about these developments.

One afternoon Windsor came and sat beside me on my bed. I saw fear in her big blue eyes as she confessed that she suspected she was pregnant. My mind raced. I tried to prepare myself for what lay ahead as I embraced her and told her it would be OK.

I was not sure that I was ready to deal with all that might come if we found out for sure. But a friend urged us to go for a pregnancy test immediately. I drove Windsor to the doctor's office.

My mind raced ahead. I wondered: How would we handle this? Could I protect her? And what about my own reputation? What would people say now? I was a single mom, and I was not prepared for this. This was not supposed to happen in our family-not to me, the daughter of Billy Graham.

The doctor confirmed that Windsor was pregnant. Still in the doctor's office, I looked into her eyes brimming with tears and held her tightly as moans escaped from her inner depths. Our lives had just been changed forever.

What Now? – What do you do with the information that your 16-year-old daughter is pregnant? I knew Windsor was wounded already. She was feeling guilty and ashamed, and I should not add to it. She did not need more rejection from me.

At some point, too, I would have to confront the many issues involved and face my responsibility. In spite of my love, tears, prayers and efforts at discipline, my child had made bad choices with serious consequences.

To ease my confusion, I reached for a devotional book, and it opened to Bible verses about peace. I read: "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all" (2 Thess. 3:16, NKJV); and "'My presence will go with you'" (Ex. 33:14). I felt a peace that was not my own.

Windsor made the first big decision herself-she did not want an abortion. I was thankful for that. When she informed her boyfriend of her pregnancy, he said he did not love her and did not want to marry her.

I contacted a local crisis pregnancy center to find out what resources they offered. Their counselors were understanding and helpful. They provided me with the names of unwed mother homes, but these were far away or seemed to be too rigid.

Windsor had heard enough preaching. She needed a balanced approach and did not want to be manipulated into a decision. The search was frustrating, and we clashed often.

As her mother, I was the safest person for her to take her anger out on-and she did. I love my daughter so deeply. I can honestly say I was never ashamed of her, although I certainly grieved for her and with her.

To show her how much I cared, I listened and listened some more. I heard things I did not want to hear. It was hurtful. Arguing was futile, but often I fell into that trap.

My daughter needed to be able to trust me with not only her angry outbursts but also her deepest thoughts and fears. I rarely let Windsor see my own anguish and doubts, which is one way I failed her.

Eventually I needed counseling. It forced me to take responsibility for my anger, doubt, guilt and shame.

The Need for Nurturing – Anyone involved with a child in an unplanned pregnancy becomes part of a complicated journey. I found others to lean on and allowed those I trusted to comfort me.

I was blessed to have a wonderful friend who was also a counselor by profession. Sara Dormon often provided a home, counseling and support for women with unplanned pregnancies. She took Windsor into her home, and walked her through the realities of parenting and adoption.

Although she changed her mind just about every hour, Windsor eventually decided to release her baby, a girl, for adoption. She was on a roller coaster of emotion to the very end.

My daughter pulled at my heartstrings and pushed all my buttons. Windsor needed me as never before. But she was more difficult than ever. There were days I didn't want to face another decision, argument or emotion. I didn't want stamina; I wanted out.

To keep going, I had to nurture myself physically, emotionally and spiritually. I did things I enjoyed. I went antiquing and read books for pleasure more than for self-improvement.

But despite my efforts, I became depressed. The help I received from wonderful doctors and counselors helped me make

decisions and kept me from spiraling downward emotionally.

Anger, Blame and Forgiveness – My life was altered by Windsor's choice. People looked askance at her and at me. I was mad about this.

I was angry with these people, with Windsor, the young man, myself and with anyone else who happened to cross my path. My anger wasn't rational, and I frequently lashed out. I was angry with myself for being angry and needed to find someone to blame.

I blamed Windsor's father. He was not there for her as she grew up, and he rejected her early on. He left a huge void that she desperately wanted to fill. I felt, too, that the church let us down. And I was angry with God because He hadn't intervened.

Unloading the anger began when I made a conscious choice to forgive. I told God about my decision and asked for His help in carrying it out. The first day I had to remind myself of that decision 100 times.

Forgiveness does not mean being tolerant of bad behavior. Nor is it about denying reality, excusing sin, avoiding conflicts or ignoring the consequences.

Forgiveness looks the hurt straight in the eye, calls it for what it is and says to the offender: "I relinquish the right to make you pay. I give you the opportunity to make a new beginning." It costs you.

My heart had been deeply wounded, and the healing process wasn't always smooth and pretty. But the more I practiced forgiveness, the greater my capacity to forgive became.

Asking forgiveness of Windsor, her father, God and others for my harshness and anger was the hardest and most humbling thing I ever had to do. But even if my daughter continued to hurt me

with her choices, that couldn't stop me from making the decision to forgive every day. I saw it as my responsibility, and I didn't wait for Windsor to ask for my forgiveness-I gave it.

A Shared Journey – My daughter spent nine months thinking of very little else but the baby within her. Windsor loved this child more than anything.

I admired Windsor's courage. She knows this now, but back then she did not think I cared because I kept so many of my emotions to myself. Windsor needed me to cry with her, but I carried my grief inside.

After Windsor released her daughter for adoption, she attempted to return to her routine. She soon found that she didn't fit in with her former friends at school or at church. Naturally, she gravitated toward those who didn't make her feel bad about herself. She began dating again, and things deteriorated rapidly, to the point where she moved out of my home.

After nearly a year of this behavior, she informed me that she was pregnant again. I wept; I could not go through it again. I told her she was on her own this time, but I would not abandon her.

I remember how I felt when Windsor told me that she was not going to release this baby for adoption. I got up, hugged her and told her that I was glad she was settled with it and could move forward. When she left the room, I picked up my Bible, and my eyes fell on the verse, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

In my heart, I felt an unexplained peace that could only have come from God. Windsor and her baby boy belonged to Him, and He would take care of them.

The Scriptures tell us that God is with us in the midst of our heartaches. Jesus not only experienced life here on Earth in all its agony, but He also became human so that He could understand and comfort us in our need.

It has taken Windsor and me years to uncover all the areas we have needed forgiveness. When, finally, she asked my forgiveness, we both cried. The healing continues today.

Ruth Graham is the third child of evangelist Billy Graham and author of several books, including *In Every Pew Sits a Broken Heart* (Zondervan) and *I'm What?* (Regal), co-authored with Sara Dormon, Ph.D.