

# Alcohol, Pregnancy and Partner Support

## Information for Service Providers

Many women are more likely to avoid alcohol during pregnancy if their partners support them in doing so. Conversely, women find it more difficult to reduce their drinking when their partners oppose that decision or take steps to undermine their efforts. If a woman's partner is supportive of her decision regarding reducing alcohol use during pregnancy, service providers can involve partners in supporting healthy alcohol-free pregnancies.

### 5 Ways Partners Can Support Women

Service providers can talk to women about what they would find supportive. Some of the things women might find helpful include having their partner:

1. Take a pause' from alcohol during the pregnancy by quitting or cutting down. Avoid drinking around her and in social situations when they are together.
2. Tell family, friends and anyone offering her alcohol that there is no known safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy and no known safe amount.
3. Offer her non-alcoholic drinks (e.g., mocktails) and bring non-alcoholic drinks to social events.
4. Take part in social and recreational activities with her that don't involve alcohol.
5. Help reduce the stress in her life. (You can ask her for specific details of how you might do this.)

Many partners want to support their pregnant partners. Service providers can involve partners, directly and indirectly, by:

- ▶ Including information about how partners can support women in both preconception and prenatal materials
- ▶ Asking women if they would like to invite their partner or a close family member or friend to their next appointment to discuss how they can support them in achieving an alcohol free pregnancy, as well as making healthy choices overall.
- ▶ Sharing suggestions of how soon-to-be parents can be supportive of their pregnant partners. Encourage partners to ask pregnant women what kind of support she needs to avoid alcohol, reduce stress, and still have fun.

Remember, a partner can be male or female and that some women may not have the support of a partner and may rely on family or friends.

Many partners are interested in thinking about or changing their own alcohol and drug use as they prepare for parenthood. Service providers can provide information and connect partners with community resources. (It's best to do this separately from a woman's care and treatment).

#### References

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## 6. Alcohol, Pregnancy and Partner Support

### *Background/ Evidence*

Research has shown that women's drinking patterns prior to and during pregnancy are greatly influenced by her social context [1], suggesting that preventing FASD is not solely the responsibility of pregnant women. Support and backing from partners (male or female), other family members, friends and larger social networks plays a crucial role in women having healthy pregnancies.

Many women are more likely to avoid alcohol during pregnancy when their partners support them in doing so [2]. Conversely, women find it more difficult to reduce their drinking when their partners oppose that decision or take steps to undermine their efforts [3-5] [6, 7] [8].

As every woman's situation is unique, service providers need to develop individual approaches to working with women, her partner, and extended support networks. Assessing the role of a woman's partner in her life and with respect to her alcohol use is an important first step. For some pregnant women, their partner may be their primary support person during pregnancy. For others it may be a parent, a relative or a friend. Not all women have a partner or a partner's support, or even family or social support. If she does have a partner, they may or may not be supportive of her decisions regarding alcohol. They may think it is OK for her to drink when she is pregnant. Her partner may not want her to reduce or quit drinking, and/or be resistant or unable to make changes to their own drinking during the pregnancy [9]. For some women stopping drinking during pregnancy can have negative repercussions in their relationships, family and social circles [10].

Service providers may find that many partners are interested in learning more about FASD prevention or have questions about their own alcohol use. Many partners may be interested in changing their substance use as they prepare for parenthood or are interested in finding ways to support their partner in reducing or stopping alcohol, tobacco or other substance use [11]. The preconception period may provide an opportune time to have discussions about alcohol use during pregnancy and in the postpartum period. Some awareness campaigns and resources for partners suggest that partners take a "pregnant pause" from drinking during pregnancy as a way of showing support. While some women may find this helpful, other women may not find this necessary. Determining with each individual woman what would support her in her efforts to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy given her relationship dynamics and unique system of support is indicated by recent research [2].

In some situations, service providers may want to consider asking women's partners about their own alcohol and other substance use. One study testing the effectiveness of a brief intervention in reducing prenatal alcohol consumption found enhanced effects when the brief intervention was given to both the pregnant woman and her partner instead of only to the pregnant woman [12]. Often, women who are struggling with addiction may have partners

who are struggling with their own substance misuse. In these situations, service providers may want to consider providing support to a woman's partner in the form of education or referrals. However, research on tobacco reduction during pregnancy suggests that these types of brief interventions should be separate from a woman's care and treatment due to the potential for creating conflict in women's relationships [13, 14].

In general, many women can benefit from exploring the role their partner may or may not have in supporting their decisions around alcohol use during pregnancy. Increasingly, many fathers and partners are expressing interest in finding ways to support their partners. While there is clear evidence demonstrating the efficacy of gender-specific and women-centred approaches to brief intervention, motivational interviewing, community-based harm reduction programs, and residential treatment for women, effective FASD prevention must also enable and expect men to fulfill their roles as partners and fathers [15].

## ***What You Can Do To Help***

Service providers can:

1. Help women to identify if it is safe to involve their partner in supporting their choices around alcohol use during pregnancy.

To identify if it is safe, you may want to ask her to consider the following questions:

- Do you feel safe in your current relationship?
- Do you avoid certain topics out of fear of upsetting your partner?
- Do you ever drink alcohol in response to your partner's treatment of you?
- Do you ever drink to help cope with fear of your partner?
- Do you ever feel pressured or manipulated by your partner to use alcohol or other drugs?
- If you quit drinking, what would your partner do? Would you be supported?
- Have you ever found yourself in an unsafe situation when your partner is drinking?

If she feels it is unsafe to engage her partner, you can ask her if she would like you to help her to find confidential safe support in her community. You can also refer to the Pregnancy, Alcohol, and Trauma-informed Practice section for tips on how to offer trauma-informed support and relevant resources.

2. Help women to explore links between her alcohol use and her partner's. You may want to ask her to consider these questions:

- Will your partner be supportive when it comes to making changes to your alcohol use?
- How might your drinking patterns be influenced by your partner's drinking patterns?
- Is your drinking influenced by stress in your relationship?

- Do you feel pressure or judgement about your drinking by your partner, family or friends?
  - Do you feel shame or fear about your drinking around your partner?
  - Do the pressures of parenting influence your alcohol use?
  - Does your drinking influence your relationship with your partner?
  - Do you drink to socialize or spend time with your partner?
  - Would your partner would be supportive of you finding other activities to reduce stress or anxiety levels other than drinking?
  - Do you feel you want to make changes to your alcohol but do not have the support of your partner, family or friends?
3. Help women to identify and engage a supportive partner, family member, friend or social network. Share with women:
- It is helpful to have support to reduce or avoid drinking and have a healthy pregnancy.
  - Partners, families and friends play as important a role in ensuring babies are born alcohol free.
  - It is helpful for partners, family members and friends to know there is no known safe time to drinking alcohol during pregnancy and no known safe amount.

If a woman raises how family and friends think it is OK for her to drink when she is pregnant, ask her about how she's responded so far. Brainstorms ways of how she might respond in the future with statements such as:

- "I can't compare myself to anyone else"
  - "I don't want to take the chance"
  - "I'm trying to quit or cut down"
4. Help women to engage their partner, if her partner is safe and supportive, and share some ideas of what their partner can do, such as:
- 'Take a pause' from alcohol during the pregnancy - quit or cut down.
  - Avoid drinking around you and in social situations when you are together.
  - Whether it's for one month, three months or the full nine months, they can sign a 'Pregnant Pausers pledge' to remain alcohol free while you are pregnant. Family, friends and colleagues can join in and 'pause' too to support your pregnancy.
  - They can support you by telling family, friends and anyone offering you alcohol that there is no known safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy and no known safe amount.
  - Announce to family and friends they have taken a pause from alcohol to support the pregnancy.
  - Ask family and friends to support you to not drink while you are pregnant. Provide them with details of how they can do this.

- Offer you non-alcoholic drinks (e.g. mocktails) and bring non-alcoholic drinks to social events.
- Engage in social and recreational activities with you that don't involve alcohol.
- Help reduce stress in your life. Again, provide specific details of how they can do this.

5. Provide supports to women if they are in an unsafe relationship. You can:

- Listen with empathy and respect, without trying to “fix” it for her. Let her know she is not alone, she is not crazy, and she is not to blame.
- Ask her if she needs any information or help in connecting with community resources.
- Ask women about their strategies for staying safe from situations that involve violence and/or heavy drinking, and what additional supports they need.
- Discuss what the pattern of abuse can look like in a relationship and how women are controlled and isolated through different forms of abuse, that may or may not include physical violence.
- Discuss how pregnancy can be a more difficult time when women may feel that they have fewer options and some partners become more controlling. Offer safe, confidential community supports and links if she wants them.

6. Involve partners – you can:

- Include partner support information in both preconception and prenatal materials
- Provide tools and resources for women to take home (if safe to do so) to assist women in opening a conversation with their partners about alcohol and pregnancy
- Ask women if they would like to invite their partner or a close family member or friend to their next appointment to discuss how they can support them in achieving an alcohol free pregnancy, as well as making healthy choices overall.
- Share suggestions of how soon-to-be parents can be supportive of their pregnant partners. Encourage partners to ask the pregnant woman what kind of support she needs to avoid alcohol, reduce stress, and still have fun.
- Make prenatal programs and services inclusive of teen fathers where appropriate, and understanding of their needs. This may mean including teen fathers in existing services, providing a separate program, or providing information to teen fathers on an individual basis.
- Connect women with community programs and services which involve partners, family members and others in supporting women to be alcohol free during pregnancy

## ***Selected Resources/Tools***

### **For service providers:**

#### **Pregnant Pause: The MANual Survivor Tips for Real Men**

<http://pregnantpause.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/The-MANual.pdf>

An Australian campaign to get Aussie Dads to go without drinking while their partner is pregnant. This MANual provides information about FASD and strategies for taking a pause from drinking while their partner is pregnant. The website also includes info for same-sex partners and women who might not have partners during their pregnancy.

#### **Best Start – Creating Circles of Support for pregnant women and new parents: A manual for supporting women’s mental health in pregnancy and post-partum**

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/pdf/circles\\_of\\_support\\_manual\\_fnl.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/ppmd/pdf/circles_of_support_manual_fnl.pdf)

This manual looks at defining support and the circle of support women need during the perinatal period. It provides evidence and ideas from the literature and practice on how to help women create their own circle of support. A helpful template, to assist service providers and their clients identify their circle of support, can be downloaded as well.

#### **Pimotisiwin: A Good Path for Pregnant and Parenting Aboriginal Teens**

[http://beststart.org/resources/rep\\_health/pimotisiwin\\_sept.pdf](http://beststart.org/resources/rep_health/pimotisiwin_sept.pdf)

Aimed at providers, this resource provides support strategies for working with and engaging Aboriginal Teens. It discusses abusive relationships, mental health and substance use, stress, and cultural-specific issues related to Aboriginal pregnant and parenting teens.

#### **It Takes a Village – Maternal Child Health Booklet**

<http://www.thehealthyaboriginal.net/comics/tav.pdf>

Developed by the Healthy Aboriginal Network, this is a comic booklet about Lara, a young, aboriginal mom-to-be. She is visited by Danis, a stranger, who teaches her about the importance of having a healthy pregnancy, including eating healthy foods, avoiding alcohol and respecting the traditional knowledge of her elders.

#### **“Our Community Supports a Healthy Pregnancies” Poster**

[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/alt\\_formats/fnihb-dgspni/pdf/pubs/preg-gros/2007\\_drug\\_free-sans\\_drog-eng.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/alt_formats/fnihb-dgspni/pdf/pubs/preg-gros/2007_drug_free-sans_drog-eng.pdf)

Canadian First Nation poster promotes alcohol and drug free pregnancies and features a Cree Elder quoted as saying “There is no safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy”. The picture depicts a First Nation woman supported by her partner, family and Elder.

#### **With Dad: Strengthening the Circle of Care**, National Collaborating Centre on Aboriginal Health

[www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/286/With\\_Dad\\_\\_Strengthening\\_the\\_Circle\\_of\\_Care.nccah](http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/286/With_Dad__Strengthening_the_Circle_of_Care.nccah)

#### **Resources for Indigenous Fathers**

[www.fira.ca/cms/documents/39/Fathers\\_Resources\\_List.pdf](http://www.fira.ca/cms/documents/39/Fathers_Resources_List.pdf)

## **For women and their partners:**

### **Babies Best Chance, Parents' Handbook of Pregnancy and Baby Care**

<http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting>

Developed by the BC Ministry of Health, this reference guide help new parents from pregnancy, through birth, and in the parenting of a baby up to six months of age with easy to read information including information about alcohol and the risks and health effects of drinking alcohol.

### **Health Before Pregnancy Workbook**

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep\\_health/Health\\_Before\\_pregnancy\\_2011\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health/Health_Before_pregnancy_2011_FULL.pdf)

In an interactive format, this workbook for young adults and couples raises issues that can affect both women and men and the health of their future children and provides answers to commonly asked questions people think about as they consider parenting.

### **Sensible Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/pdf/hpguide-eng.pdf>

Government of Canada publication for pregnant mothers and their supporters.

### **Mixing Alcohol and Breastfeeding**

[http://www.beststart.org/resources/alc\\_reduction/bf\\_handouts/breastfeed\\_and\\_alcohol\\_EN.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/alc_reduction/bf_handouts/breastfeed_and_alcohol_EN.pdf)

A resource for mothers and partners about drinking alcohol while breastfeeding.

### **Healthy Pregnancies – Information for Partners**

<http://fasd.alberta.ca/information-for-partners.aspx>

Web link to Alberta FASD website with information on partner's role and how to help.

### **The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children**

[https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/append\\_e\\_1.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/append_e_1.cfm)

A list of Sixteen Things Fathers Can Do to Support Their Pregnant Partners

### **HealthLink BC Pregnancy and Alcohol Use (available in various languages)**

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile38d.stm>

This HealthLink BC website page provides information on how partners, friends and community support workers can help women stay alcohol free during pregnancy.

### **Pregnant Pause**

<http://pregnantpause.com.au/>

An Australian campaign to get Aussie Dads to go without drinking while their partner is pregnant. Campaign offers a 'Pregnant Pause Pledge' for partners, family members and friends.

### **Mocktail Recipes for Women and their Partners**

Best Start - [www.beststart.org/resources/alc\\_reduction/LCBO\\_recipe\\_cards\\_bro.pdf](http://www.beststart.org/resources/alc_reduction/LCBO_recipe_cards_bro.pdf)

## ***Evidence-to-Practice***

### **Self-Assessment and Discussion Questions**

The following questions are intended to support direct-service providers, program leaders, and system planners in reflection on their current practices, policies, and procedures in relation to pregnant women and mothers who use substances. These questions can be used for self assessment or as a tool for group discussion and collective reflective practice

1. Are we discussing partner support with women pre-pregnancy?
2. Are we taking women's safety into consideration when discussing potential partner involvement?
3. Are we offering links to supportive community services and programming to pregnant women in unsupportive and/or unsafe relationships?
4. Are we tailoring information about partner support to both pregnant women and their partners?
5. Are we providing tools and resources for women to take home (if safe to do so) to assist women in opening a conversation with their partners about alcohol and pregnancy?
6. Are we asking women if they would like to invite their partner or a close family member or friend to their next appointment to discuss how they can support them?
7. Are we engaging soon-to-be partners in conversation about their ideas of how they can be supportive of their pregnant partners and encouraging them to ask their partner what she specifically needs to avoid alcohol, reduce stress, and still have fun?
8. Are we making prenatal programs and services inclusive of partners where appropriate, and understanding of their needs? This may mean including partners in existing services, providing a separate program, or providing information to partners on an individual basis.
9. Are we connecting women with community programs and services which involve partners?

## ***Referrals***

### **BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs**

<http://www.bcapop.ca/>



Pregnancy Outreach Programs (POPs) are located all over BC and provide free prenatal and early parenting support to women who experience health or lifestyle challenges during pregnancy, birth and the transition to parenting. The website provides information, resources, and contact information for programs across the province. 1-604-31-8797

### **Alcohol & Drug Information & Referral Service**

1-800-663-1441 Lower Mainland: (604) 660-9382

This service is available to people across B.C. needing help with any kind of substance use issues 24 hours a day. It provides multi-lingual information and referral to education, prevention and treatment services and agencies around the province. There are programs in some BC communities that provide women-only services, and that prioritize pregnant women.

### **First Nation, Métis and Inuit Specific Programs**

If you are living in a First Nations community, contact your local health centre, community health nurse, or community health representative. If you are living outside your First Nations community or feel uncomfortable accessing service through your First Nation, contact your local BC Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Pregnancy Outreach Program, or your local health authority's public health nursing or mental health and substance use team.

BC Association of Friendship Centre's <http://www.bcaafc.com/bc-friendship-centres>

First Nations Health Authority <http://www.fnha.ca/about/regions>

Metis Nation BC - <http://www.mnbc.ca/>

**Here to Help** <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>

A website of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions. Self-help resources in multiple languages.

### **Local BC Public Health Unit**

Go here to find out the services that are available in your area – search for maternal child health services.

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority - [http://www.vch.ca/locations\\_and\\_services](http://www.vch.ca/locations_and_services)

Island Health Authority - <http://www.viha.ca/locations>

Interior Health Authority - <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/FindUs/Pages/default.aspx>

Fraser Health Authority - [http://www.fraserhealth.ca/find\\_us/](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/find_us/)

Northern Health Authority - <http://www.northernhealth.ca/OurServices/ContactUs.aspx>

**Mental Health Information Line** 310-6789 (no area code needed)

A provincial line that is answered 24/7/365. It provides empowering emotional support, information on appropriate referral options and a wide range of support relating to mental health concerns. The Here to Help website provides additional information, screening self-tests, and self-help resources related to mental health and substance use.

### **Motherisk**

[www.motherisk.org](http://www.motherisk.org) 1-877-FAS-INFO (1-877-327-4636)

Includes up-to-date information for professionals and mothers about alcohol, drugs, and pregnancy. A toll-free helpline is available 9am to 5pm with information in English or French based on continuing research and study by Motherisk's specialized team of physicians, psychologists, pharmacologists and counselors.

**Options for Sexual Health BC** <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>

Provides services on sexual health, birth control and pregnancy through clinics, education programs and the 1-800-SEX-SENSE information and referral line. See their clinic finder.

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