

# Module One:

## Foundational Training

As you move forward with the development of a pregnancy care centre in your community, you will need to understand the clients you seek to serve and what they may experience during an unexpected pregnancy or after experiencing an abortion.

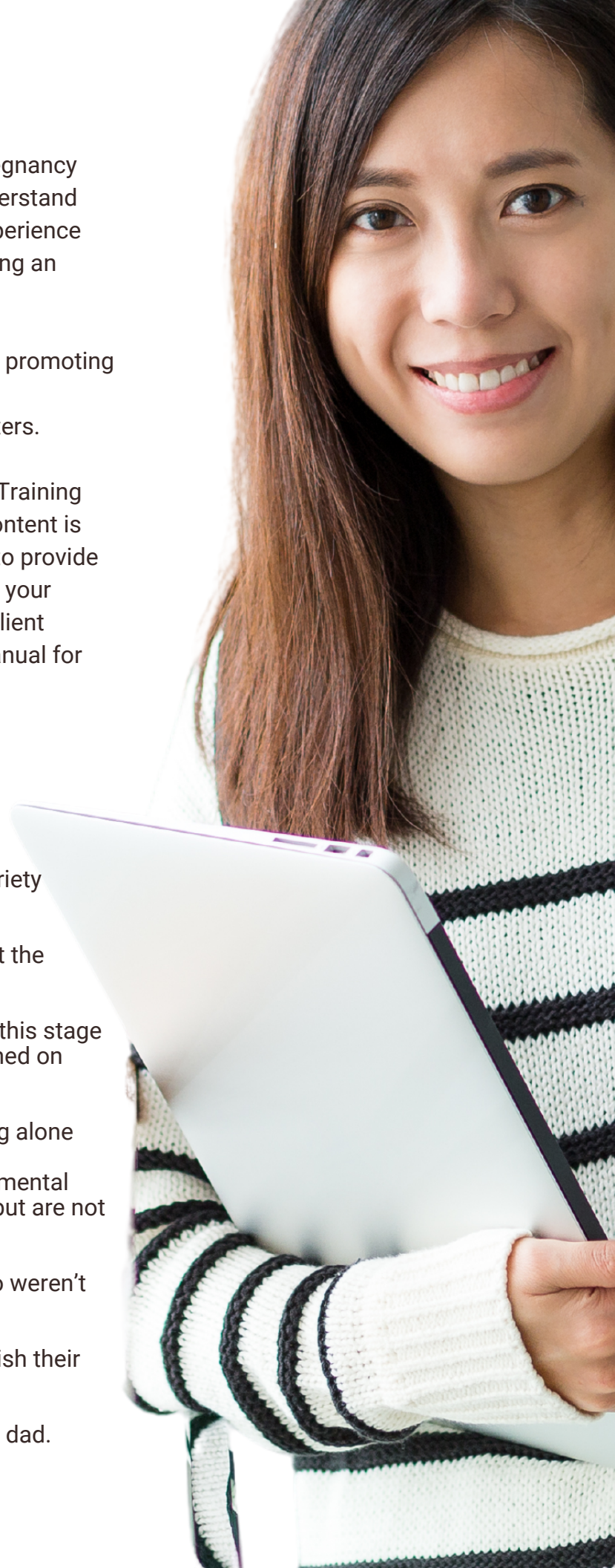
This foundational understanding is essential before promoting your centre development to others. An accurate representation of your work will help gather supporters.

Provided in this module are excerpts from the PCC Training Manual for Client Care. Please note, the scope of content is reduced and does not contain sufficient education to provide client support. If you choose to work or volunteer at your centre once it is open, you will receive 21 hours of client support training along with the full PCC Training Manual for Client Care.

### LESSON ONE: UNDERSTANDING UNEXPECTED PREGNANCY

Pregnancy care centre clients come from a wide variety of backgrounds. For example, centres may see:

- Young teen girls (as young as 13) terrified about the possibility of pregnancy
- Women in their 40s hesitant about parenting at this stage of life or devastated because they had not planned on having another child
- International students far from home and feeling alone
- Teens who are street-involved, abused, or have mental health issues, who want to have a baby to love but are not in a position to parent
- Women working in their chosen profession, who weren't planning on having children
- College and university students who want to finish their education.
- Young men who want to learn how to be a good dad.





No two clients who visit a pregnancy centre are the same — everyone has their own story. However, clients often fall into two very general categories:

**1) Pregnancy will change a planned future**

These clients currently perceive their life circumstances as positive; they might be in school or working at a job they enjoy. Life may not be perfect for them, but overall, it is going according to their plan. An unexpected pregnancy will create a drastic change in these clients' lives, plans, hopes, and dreams.

**2) Life is already very difficult**

These clients often come from backgrounds of childhood abuse, trauma, and adversity. Because their families of origin may not be healthy or supportive, they may still be “stuck” in poverty, abuse, and hardship. In these difficult circumstances, pregnancy for women often tips the balance of their life from “hard” to “unbearable.”

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada website states: “Unintended pregnancy is common and can be a difficult experience for women of all ages, from adolescence to near menopause. Nearly 50% of all pregnancies in Canada are unplanned.”<sup>1</sup>

Because of societal norms and trends, sexual activity is generally initiated before commitment is established. Therefore, many clients are not in stable, committed relationships. Also, an unexpected pregnancy threatens the stability of any relationship.

Some clients do not know who the father is due to multiple partners and/or drug or alcohol-related decisions. This can increase the feeling of crisis and indecision about options.

With a lack of societal stigma or pressure, sex is not seen as a negative act. Getting pregnant outside of commitment, however, is still seen as negative. Therefore, abortion may not only be seen as acceptable, but even a preferable decision in an unexpected pregnancy.

## **THE FEELINGS CLIENTS EXPERIENCE**

An unexpected pregnancy is a great equalizer, and emotional reactions will have some similarities even if the stories are very different.

For many women, an unexpected pregnancy signals the first time they have had to make a health-related decision, and one closely tied to the course of their life. The decision-making process may raise questions about future goals, values, and current relationships. It is common for a pregnancy care centre client to experience a variety of emotions as they work through this process.



**Some feelings a client may experience are:**

**Ambivalence.** Ambivalence during the early stages of pregnancy is a known phenomenon among expectant mothers,<sup>2</sup> even in planned pregnancies. Conflicted feelings, exacerbated by hormonal changes, are normal and expected.

**Joy.** Even when a pregnancy is unexpected, there can be a sense of joy that comes from the knowledge or possibility of being pregnant with one's own child. Though this emotion may be tainted by the circumstance, it is important to acknowledge this emotion for what it is.

**Confusion.** Crisis creates adverse influences on decision-making. It is difficult to see the situation objectively as it was unexpected, and in many cases, unwanted.

**Guilt.** The client may vacillate between justifying behaviour and feeling guilty. The feeling of guilt can be overwhelming and the need to justify actions and thoughts may intensify if she feels judged.

**Depression.** Studies show that adolescents who engaged in more romantic activities experienced increases in depressive symptoms and as well, greater depressive symptoms predicted romantic involvement and sexual activities, including intercourse.<sup>3</sup> It seems depression can be both a cause and effect of adolescent sexual activity.

**Anxiety.** The anticipation of real or perceived losses – whether a loss of freedom, goals, or relationships – can frequently cause anxiety.

**Embarrassment.** Clients often express that they feel “stupid” for getting pregnant.



1 <https://www.pregnancyinfo.ca/your-pregnancy/specialconsiderations/unintended-pregnancy>

2 K.Holmgren and N. Uddenberg. "Ambivalence during early pregnancy among expectant mothers." *Journal of Gynecological and Obstetric Investigation*, 36, no.1 (1993)

3 Davilla J., C.B. Stroud, L.R. Starr, M.R. Miller, A. Yoneda, & R. Hershenberg. "Romantic and sexual activities, parent-adolescent stress, and depressive symptoms among early adolescent girls." *Journal of Adolescence* 32, no. 4 (November 21, 2008).

