

What Would You Do?

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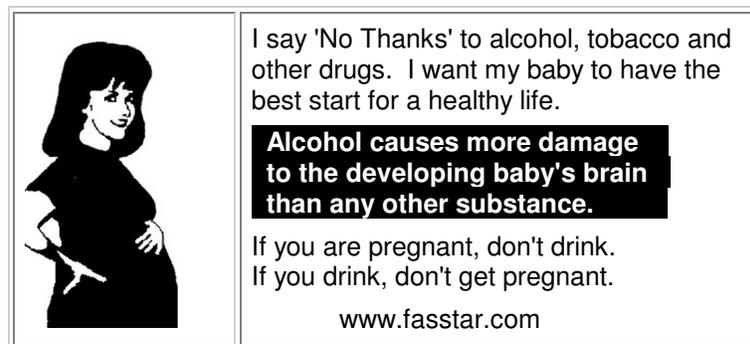
One day not long ago, a prominent leader in the world of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders called me. She said she had an experience recently that shook her up and left her bewildered. This is what she told me:

"We went out to dinner last Saturday night, and while we were enjoying our wonderful meal, my eyes caught sight of an obviously pregnant woman seated at another table drinking a glass of wine. Of course this troubled me. A moment later she ordered another glass. Of course I know that the safest limit of alcohol for a pregnant woman is zero. And here this woman was drinking 10 or 12 ounces right in front of me. I didn't know what to do. Should I say something? If so, what should I say?" As I listened, I tried to put myself in her place. She asked me, "Have you ever had that experience? What would you do in this situation?"

I replied that I have not had that experience, yet, but that it is likely to happen one of these days. This is a delicate situation. We cannot assume that every woman knows that the only safe amount of alcohol for a pregnant woman is zero, that a woman who might be pregnant, or who is sexually active and not using effective birth control should not drink any alcohol at all. If the woman knows the risks, we cannot assume she is an alcoholic. We cannot determine her reasons for drinking. It's not our place to judge her predicament. We cannot guess how any pregnant woman consuming alcohol in public might react to a confrontation, no matter how friendly the conversation or well meaning the advice offered. I myself would be a little reluctant to say anything. On the other hand, I don't think I could sleep at night if I didn't do something. But what?

After thinking about this for a little while, I came up with the idea of the "No Thanks" cards. These cards have a drawing of a pregnant woman, with the text "I say 'No Thanks' to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. I want my baby to have the best start for a healthy life." This quote is followed by the statement, "Alcohol causes more damage to the developing baby's brain than any other substance." After this is the best advice, a phrase coined by Eva Carner of CAL-FAS, "If you are pregnant, don't drink. If you drink, don't get pregnant." At the bottom is a link to my web site. These cards are the same size as business cards and can be carried in a wallet or purse.

Next time I see a pregnant woman in public who is drinking alcohol, I will wait for the right moment - either when I am ready to leave or when she is getting up to leave - and I will hand her the card or set it on the table in front of her, and then I will smile and walk away. I don't have to say anything or being any sort of uncomfortable confrontation. She can read it, heed it, ignore it, or throw it away. She may not want the information at the moment, but she just might look up the web site on the Internet later, and just maybe the information she learns will help her to stop drinking. Whatever happens, I know I will have done my part in raising awareness and possibly preventing further damage to her baby.



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