



carry strong: rethinking pregnancy and work *stephanie kramer*

## One of the biggest questions that women often have with regards to their pregnancy and work? How to tell your “boss” you’re pregnant.

This moment of “The Big Tell” when you share your news carries weight. At this intersection of pregnancy and work there is so much excitement, but also a feeling of exposure of your private life and the valid fear of perception, plus the simple fact that you need to communicate clearly. While it can be used for any conversation, in this download I share with you a quick guide to approach how to share *your* news with confidence and comfort—advocacy for what *you* need now to **Carry Strong**.

### Context:

You may have already read the download “What Phase of Your Carry Strong Pregnancy are You in?” on [carrystrongproject.com](http://carrystrongproject.com) to help you understand the five phases. “The Big Tell” after the “Hush” (Phase III) for many women feels right after the hurdle of the first trimester, yet there may be medical or personal reasons to share your news sooner or later. Remember that this is *your* timeline, not mandated by a week number. With that in mind, consider the following 6 classic questions to take “The Big Tell” step by step: Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why.

### Who:

To start, I use the term “boss” to loosely mean whomever you need to talk to about your pregnancy, think about who you truly want (and need) to share your news with and think about the cascade of that sharing from that point. Secondly, *who* you are telling is important, but also *who* you are as a communicator. While you will learn about different styles in *Carry Strong* in more detail which have been adapted from a highly cited tool the Change Style Indicator (CSI)<sup>1</sup> for the purposes of this quick reference, ask yourself these questions to think about your style.

Do you prefer the known to the unknown, like structure and to know the rules of the game. If this is you, you like gradual change, and by the time you’re ready to announce your pregnancy you have likely already done the research and have your questions ready, but only for what you need right now—versus, for example, when you will start off-boarding at the end of your pregnancy.

Now also think about your “boss”. Communication is a two-way street, and you want to think about both your preferences *and* those of who you are communicating *to*—this helps what you’re saying to both be *heard* and to stick—encouraging the person that you are sharing your news to *follow your lead*.

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<sup>1</sup> Musselwhite, W. Christopher, and Robyn D. Ingram. 1998. Change Style Indicator. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.

If your boss also likes this type of more concrete communication, then you also want to have organized points to give security in the unknown and minimize uncertainty. For example: “I have some personal news I’d like to share, I’m pregnant. Right now, I wanted to let you know that I may need to book a few appointments, but otherwise it’s status quo for me. I’m really enjoying my work and am looking forward to the next few months. I’ll check in with you as needed during these regular meetings and set up time for us in X months, to talk about my transition for leave.”

Now what if you could prefer to take an objective and logical approach? This would mean you often take yourself out of a situation and can see multiple sides. Remember that this pregnancy *is* about you, not about anyone else. While it’s helpful for you to consider yourself as part of the options, make sure that you don’t downplay what you would ultimately like to happen in the next few months of your pregnancy at work. And if you don’t know, that’s ok to express too.

If you are communicating to someone who has this style, ensure that you share your perspective as one that they see as top of mind, versus how it may have worked with others in the past. Bring up anything weighing on your mind. For example: “I know that my colleague asked to not go to that trip when she was pregnant, but for me, I’d like to keep it for now and play it by ear. I’ll be sure to check in how I’m feeling before it would affect the project or team.” You’re acknowledging that accommodations have been made for pregnant individuals in the past, but you’re also making clear that you’re not sure if, when, or how you’d like them for you.

Third on the range, you might be ready for a faster and more dramatic change. If this is you, you may have high expectations for how your boss might respond to the news of your pregnancy. Remember that it’s possible they may be in the same mindset, or they might have their mind on other things. If they meet your major news with a neutral or questionable response, it’s ok, you have your joy in sharing it and this is the first of a lot of big things to come from your public pregnancy at work. It is also ok to state this importance: “I have been waiting to share this news for years. I’ve been thinking about it for a very long time and would like to do so in the following way.”

If you’re not this way, but your boss is, it’s also ok to set the tone off the bat: “I’m thrilled you are so happy for me. While this is a big moment for me personally, professionally I’d like to share with just a few of my colleagues for now and focus on the excitement we have going on here at work. Thank you again for sharing in my joy.”

### **What:**

What is your specific objective you’re trying to communicate? Are you stating an update or information with nothing for the receiver to action? (“I am doing fertility treatments this will mean early morning appointments that cannot be moved.”) Are you asking for support? (“I would like to set you and the team up for success when I am going on maternity leave, I have some ideas about what might work best, but would like to go over your expectations for the projects and team when I am away.”) Or are you simply asking for a listening ear? (“I need a friend right now.”)

When communicating what you need, be organized, concise, and clear to prioritize your messages. Ask yourself, what is stated fact, what is up for discussion, and what do you want from the other side of the conversation? By thinking through the questions and having clear answers (for me I write bullets down), you can keep your emotions under control and really think through what you want to say, and what you don’t.

By the way, being human and vulnerable in these moments is only natural—don’t put extra pressure on yourself to have perfect delivery, but if you think through and practice, ultimately you will be expressing what you want to say the way you want to say it to the best of your ability.

If you're having trouble with what you want to say, consider a "What this means for me" and "What this means for you" framework. Essentially it dilutes down why you care and why those you are communicating to should care. You don't exactly have to say, "I'm pregnant, so what this means for you is...", but by framing your news in these terms, you ensure that your teammates understand the expectations you have for them and that you have thought through how your pregnancy may affect them, those around you, or your work.

### **When & Where:**

Homing in on the right timing and location is also part of how to best execute a conversation. You want to be in the right mindset and unrushed. If you have a regular meeting or can take a walk away from your place of work together with your boss or coworker, it takes some pressure off. Of course, sometimes with pregnancy and matters of health time is of the essence, so do not let the perfect moment stop you from making it happen. This also means that while it's helpful to appreciate and anticipate the perspective of the other side, do not let it hold you back from sharing what you want, how you want to and to ask for what you need.

### **How & Why:**

How do you want to share your information and how do you anticipate the message will be best received? Do not diminish yourself for the other person or make limiting assumptions. "I am thrilled about my news that I am pregnant, but I am a private person so would like to only share the news to my team and not make a big deal about it." "I appreciate that you are here for me. What I need right now from you is to focus on work, I will let you know if I need time or to discuss." Why: there may be many reasons why in the specific conversation—the big ones can be defined by your critical need in this moment for self-advocacy.

The most important communication point to get across in the Big Tell, and any moment you are sharing something personal, is that those around you should follow your lead. If you want to lean in more to your work, great! People must respect that. If you are feeling like garbage and need a teammate to support you, then you need to share that so that your colleagues can follow your lead. While there are going to be those moments where your community will jump in, having the notion that you're driving what's right for you and your baby, in your words, your actions, your work, can be freeing.

Remember this is your moment, but it's just one of many important ones throughout your pregnancy including at work. If it helps do a practice run to get out some of the emotions and chest tightness on someone you trust. You may say exactly the same thing in the same way, feeling the same emotions, but give yourself a breather. Now and throughout your pregnancy advocate for yourself and recognize the importance of the moment.

To learn more, sign up for alerts on [carrystrongproject.com](http://carrystrongproject.com) including the launch of the book, "Carry Strong: Rethinking Pregnancy and Work" coming soon from Penguin Life in 2023.