

healing the hurt

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Do you feel alone

with the memory of an abortion you chose to have? If so, you're actually *not* alone! Thirty-three percent of American women have an abortion at some point, but hardly any of them ever talk about it.

The reason is simple. Many women who choose abortion go against their own sense of right and wrong, and this makes them feel guilty. That guilt stops them from talking about it or getting the emotional help they deserve.

[33% of American women have an abortion at some point in their lives]

The Trauma of Abortion

Professional counselors tell us that many women who have had an abortion are not able to . . .

- . . . process the painful thoughts and emotions—especially guilt, anger and grief—that arise from an abortion experience.
- . . . identify, much less grieve, their loss.
- . . . come to peace with God, themselves and others involved in the pregnancy and abortion decision.

Does any of this describe your journey?

The Grieving Process

Relief is the most common reaction immediately following an abortion. But as time goes on, you may have trouble dealing with the loss you feel. Here are some possible reasons:

- You have no external evidence that your baby ever existed—no pictures or other memorabilia.

- You may not believe you have the right to grieve a loss that you *chose* to suffer.
- There was no memorial service or eulogy to mark the loss of your child.

For any or all of these reasons, you may not feel that your grief is justified, so you end up repressing your feelings of sadness, shame and anger. You just don't want to talk about it! But years later, when you undergo another significant loss or become pregnant again, an intense grief may catch you by surprise. You'll wonder, *Why am I having such a horrible reaction to this? Am I losing my grip?*

Signs of Stress

If this happens to you, you might be exhibiting symptoms of emotional or psychological stress related to your abortion. These can include:

- *Guilt* from violating your own sense of morality
- *Self-destructive behaviors* such as eating disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse, abusive relationships, promiscuity

- *Re-experiencing events related to the abortion:* memories or nightmares involving lost or dismembered babies
- *Anxiety* that leads to headaches, dizziness, pounding heart, abdominal cramps, muscle tightness, difficulty sleeping

【 *It's important to pay attention to what your body and emotions may be trying to tell you.* 】

- *Psychological numbing:* Your unconscious vow never to let anything hurt this badly again hampers your ability to enjoy an emotional, intimate relationship.
- *Depression*, which reveals itself through deep sadness, sudden and uncontrollable crying, poor self-concept, sleep and appetite disturbances, loss of normal sources of pleasure, even thoughts of suicide

- *Preoccupation with becoming pregnant again*, an unconscious hope of replacing the baby you aborted
- *Anxiety* over fertility and childbearing issues, fearing that God will punish you by not letting you bear children
- *Trouble in bonding* with your other children, either by being overprotective or feeling detached from them
- *Anniversary reactions*: an increase in symptoms around the time of the anniversary of the abortion, the due date of the aborted child, or both.

The Path to Healing

When you finally recognize your need to come to terms with a past abortion, consider these important steps:

Remember the Pain

The first step toward healing is peeling away the callus formed by months or years of denying and repressing the painful emotions connected with your abortion. Although your feelings have been



bundled up and hidden away, too painful to deal with, they continue to fester like a smoldering infection, affecting your current choices and behavior. The simplest way to access these old feelings is to find a safe, supportive environment in which you can talk about your abortion experience.

Accept Forgiveness

If you hold any kind of spiritual beliefs, long-term healing will come only when you feel reconciled with God. If you struggle with the feeling that you are a second-class citizen in God's eyes, you may turn away from God completely or try to "prove yourself" by being good long enough for God to forgive you.

Or, you may know in your *mind* that God can forgive any sin, but you can't accept it in your *heart*, because you cannot forgive yourself. Here are three things we must all understand:

1. *Your debt is paid.* The Bible clearly teaches that God has already made provision for your forgiveness: He accepts Jesus' death as full payment for any and all sins we commit. Do not let your guilty emotions still demand that you pay the debt yourself.
2. *God is near.* When we accept responsibility for our choices and openly express our sorrow to God, He is ready and waiting to draw us back into intimacy with Him.
3. *Consequences are not the same as punishment.* A consequence of abortion might be infertility, but this is not a punishment from God. He is as grieved as we are about the losses brought on by our choices. Although we all

【 *God is as grieved as we are about the losses brought on by our choices.* 】

live with the consequences of our choices, Jesus literally accepted the death sentence for our sins. He took the punishment so we don't have to.

Identify and Release the Anger

Perhaps you resist verbalizing your anger, thinking, *If I get in touch with the rage inside me, it might lead to a total loss of control.* The paradox is this: Until you openly acknowledge the pain and anger you feel about your abortion, you will not get rid of it.

Grieve the Loss

The need to grieve a pregnancy loss fully is well-documented, and for good reason. But you may cry out, "How do I grieve the death of a child when I was the executioner?"

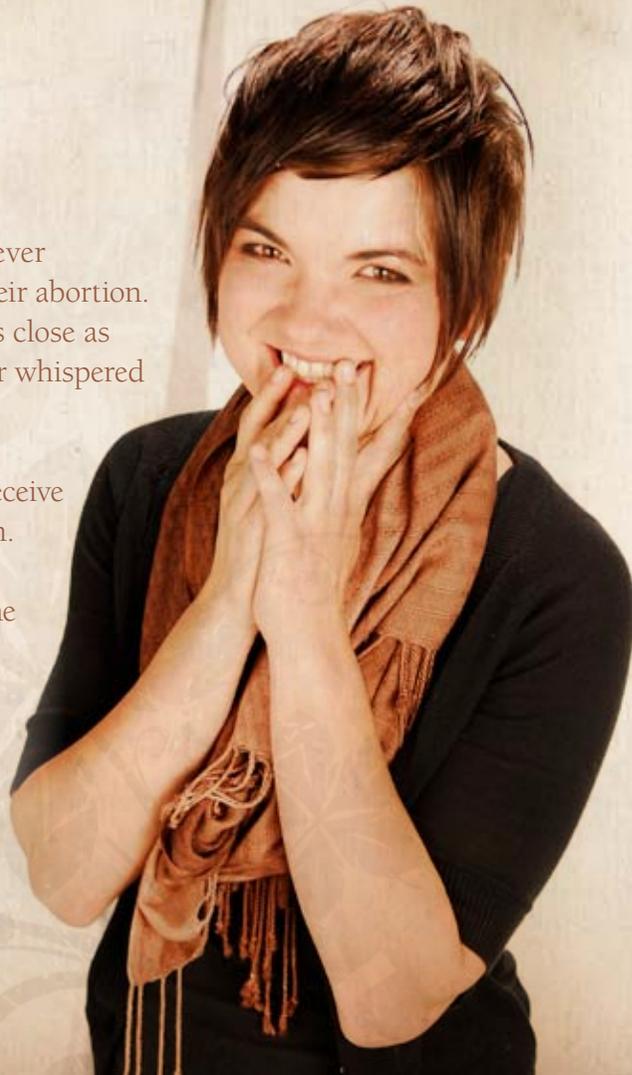
Some ways to work through your grief include thinking of your baby as a real individual, naming the baby, writing out your feelings for your child, and even having a quiet, private memorial service. Many pregnancy resource centers host small, confidential groups where you can walk this path together with other women.

Take Hope!

A lot of women feel hopeless about ever resolving the pain connected with their abortion. But healing is possible, and God is as close as the air we breathe, waiting to hear our whispered cries for help.

Thousands of women will seek and receive help this year; you can be one of them. There is no need for you to continue grieving silently. Reach out to someone who understands. You are *not* alone.

*Reach out . . .
you are not alone.*



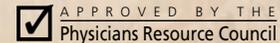
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Additional Reading:

If you'd like to learn more about abortion's impact, visit standapart.org and click on Resources or Downloads to do your own review of the research.

All models were used for illustrative purposes only.

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