

CARE GUIDE: ABORTION

After an abortion, most women and men are not prepared for the physical, emotional, and spiritual after-effects. While some similarities exist in how women and men process an abortion, there can be sharp differences in how individuals grieve or perceive their role in the abortion. What initially felt like relief may be replaced by intense feelings of guilt, shame, pain, or anger. They may stay silent because of fear of rejection from loved ones, friends, the church, and/or society; or they may stay silent as a form of denial that it happened. The value and worth that comes from being an image bearer of God extends not only to every child who has been aborted but also to every woman and man who have participated in abortion. They need loving, compassionate friends willing to listen to their stories, remind them who they are in Christ, and help them pursue healing.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- ***“Abortion is the unforgivable sin.”*** Christ’s death and resurrection heals us from our sin. Remind your friend God’s love and mercy is bigger than any sin. Abortion is no exception. Shame and guilt can be a prison we willingly leave ourselves in. Despite the depth of our anguish, God’s love prevails. There is freedom and restoration in Christ. (1 John 1:9)
- ***“Abortion is not a big deal if it’s done early enough.”*** God created and cares about ALL life. Every human life began at conception and bears God’s image. This places intrinsic value on all of us. Regardless of what stage of development the abortion took place, it ended a life. (Psalm 139:13-16)
- ***“It’s best to just move on after an abortion.”*** The pain from abortion is real. Some may suffer in silence for years, or even decades, from the trauma of their decision to end a pregnancy. The choice causes a void and intense feelings which must be resolved before healing can take place. (Psalm 32:3-5)
- ***“Only women participate in abortions.”*** Both a woman and a man are responsible for the pregnancy. Sometimes a couple will choose to abort together. Sometimes men pressure women into the procedure, but other times women will choose the abortion against the wishes of the man. Every situation has its own unique factors.

HOW TO HELP

Listen to their story. Being a good friend starts by being a good listener. An abortion was not a stand-alone, simple choice for your friend. She didn’t just have an abortion. She had everything that led up to it as well. As your friend is grappling with conflicting emotions, the best thing you can do is listen. Instead of focusing solely on the act of the abortion, focus on the whole person. Thank her or him for trusting you enough to share their story with you. (James 5:16)

Remain present and available. People tend to disengage when they are uncomfortable. Those who participated in abortions often fear rejection. Do not pull away or become distant. Keep moving towards your friend and tell them you are willing to have additional conversations if that would be helpful for them.

Ask open-ended and specific questions. It may be hard for your friend to verbalize what they are thinking and feeling, especially if they kept the abortion a secret for many years. Your friend is seeking a way out from the judgment, guilt, shame, and fear she or he feels. Help your friend process by asking questions like: *How have you coped with this? How has this impacted other areas of your life? What have you read or watched that has impacted how you think about your choice?*

Validate your friend's feelings without validating their choice. Be an active listener acknowledging her feelings while also taking opportunities to clarify facts as well as emotions. Validate the stress and conflict she may have struggled with leading up to the abortion with statements like: *I am so sorry for everything you experienced during your pregnancy. You are not alone. I care about you and Jesus cares about you.* (Isaiah 41:10)

Avoid giving advice. Do not feel the need to answer or respond to everything your friend is sharing. It is unhelpful to add your own feelings to hers or share stories unrelated to abortion of your own. If you have not experienced or contemplated an abortion yourself, you do not understand the circumstances that led to their decision. Even if that is part of your story, remember everyone's situation is unique. Ultimately only God can change hearts and heal.

Remind her or him of who they are in Christ. God loves your friend and is pursuing them. God uses redemption and restoration, not guilt and shame, to heal His children. After choosing abortion, people may feel unworthy to receive the gift of grace He offers, but you can remind them that they are worthy and redeemed by Christ. (1 John 3:1)

DO SAY

"I'm sorry. That sounds so hard."
"How can I pray for you today?"
"I read this verse or heard this song and thought of you."
"I am here for you. You are not alone."
"What lies are you believing right now? Let me pray for you about that."
"God sees you and loves you so much."

DON'T SAY

"At least..."
"It wasn't that big of a deal."
"That was so long ago. Why does it still bother you so much?"
"I know exactly how you feel."
"Why didn't you... instead?"
"You were right to have the abortion."
"This happened to my friend and she/he..."

KEY SCRIPTURE

Ask the Lord to help you discern when and how to share Scripture. Many people in difficult seasons are wrestling with God, so offer verses with compassion, patience, and humility.

Genesis 1:27; Psalm 52; Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 5:8, 8:1, 38-39; Ephesians 2:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-16, 1 John 4:15-18

NEXT STEPS OR WATERMARK MINISTRIES: Worth More, ReGeneration, Thrive Women's Clinic

