

Counseling a Friend After an Abortion

a guide for friends of a woman or man with a past abortion



Being the friend willing to talk through hard things is vital. Abortion is a unique experience yet 1 in 4 women will have an abortion before the age of 45 (Guttmacher Institute). After an abortion, most women and men are not prepared for the physical, emotional, and spiritual after-effects. What initially felt like relief may be replaced by intense feelings of guilt, shame, pain, or anger. Some may suffer in silence for years, or even decades, from the trauma of their decision to end a pregnancy. 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. These ineffective coping strategies may leave them grasping to make sense of their experience and heal from their pain.

Women and men may go through stages of what is called “Post-Abortion Syndrome” (a term used to describe the anguish following an abortion). Symptoms such as intense guilt, shame, anxiety, self-hate, prolonged grief, bitterness, anger, depression, emotional numbness, and even suicidal thoughts are just a few of the feelings they may experience. While some similarities exist in how men and women process an abortion, there can be sharp differences in how each individual grieves or perceives their role in the abortion. In talking with someone who has had an abortion, remember the following Biblical insights:

Abortion is not the unforgivable sin. Christ’s death and resurrection heal us from our sin - and abortion is no exception. Despite the depth of our anguish, His love prevails. Abortion does not define your friend, Christ does. (Romans 8:1, Psalm 103:10-12)

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. This value and worth extends not only to every child who has been aborted, but also to every woman and man who have participated in abortion. (Psalm 139:13-16, Genesis 1:27)

The pain from abortion is real. Regardless of what stage of development the abortion took place, it ended a life. This causes a void and intense feelings which must be resolved before healing can take place. (Psalm 32:3-5)

God loves your friend and is pursuing them. God uses redemption and restoration, not guilt and shame, to heal His children. Your friend may feel they are unworthy to receive the gift of grace He offers, but you can remind them they are worthy and redeemed by Christ. (Romans 5:20-21, 2 Samuel 14:14-15)

There is freedom and restoration in Christ. Shame and guilt can be a prison we willingly leave ourselves in. The good news is God is in the business of setting people free from what enslaves them. If you know someone who is enslaved by guilt and shame from a past abortion, bring them the good news that Jesus paid the penalty already, and they can be free. (Isaiah 61:1, 2 Corinthians 3:17)

They are not alone. Your friend may feel like they are suffering alone. Not only do they have you as a supportive friend, but there are many who have shared this experience, and there is support to help them find healing. (Isaiah 41:10)

As you engage in conversations, discern what your friend needs:

someone to listen, or someone to speak truth? counseling from biblical community or professional therapy alongside community? an after-abortion bible study or support group?

Being a good friend starts by being a good listener. An abortion was not a stand-alone, simple choice for your friend. They didn't just have an abortion, they 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.

Ask, "Would you tell me about your story?"

Be an active listener acknowledging their feelings while also taking opportunities to clarify facts as well as emotions. Validate the stress and conflict they may have struggled with leading up to her abortion with statements like, *I am so sorry for all that you experienced during your pregnancy, I want you to know you are not alone, and I care.*

Ask perceptive and open-ended questions. It is unhelpful to add your own feelings to theirs or share stories unrelated to abortion of your own. Do not feel the need to answer or respond to everything your friend is sharing. Your friend might have kept their abortion a secret for many years and isolated their self. Your friend is seeking a way out from the judgment, guilt, shame, and fear they feels. You may validate those realities without needing to increase them. Avoid giving advice. Questions like, *have you shared this with others? 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?* can help your friend process their experience.

DO:

- Listen and eliminate distractions.
- Affirm feelings.
- Speak truth in gentleness.
- Physically comfort and encourage them.
- Ask good questions.
- Circle back to the Gospel.
- Pray continuously.
- Provide a next step.
- Follow up and follow through.

DON'T:

- Disengage because you are uncomfortable.
- Allow feelings to validate their choice.
- Feel you have to prove why abortion is wrong.
- Remain distant or diagnose their problems.
- Share your own stories and issues.
- Dismiss the power of God's Word.
- Allow lies your friend may believe to linger.
- Assume they will figure it out on their own.
- Avoid further conversations.

Remind them that God's love and mercy is bigger than any sin. Thank them for having the trust to talk with you. Share passages like Matthew 11:28-30 or Isaiah 61:1-3, and provide a next step.

Next Steps

Someone Cares (for women): watermark.org/someonecares

Forgotten Fathers (for men): watermark.org/forgottenfathers

ReGeneration (for all recovery related issues): regenerationrecovery.org

Ask, Is there anyone else we can share this with to encourage and comfort you?

When would be a good time for me to follow up with you about this?

What other resources would be helpful as you begin healing?

How should I pray for you?