



Allentown Women's Center • toll free 877-342-5292

I Know I Made the Right Decision, But...

Resolving Feelings About Abortion

Whether your experience with abortion was yesterday or a decade ago, if you are having unresolved feelings we hope this paper will help you to find healing and resolution.

Although this is written primarily for women, we recognize that men may also be deeply affected when they are involved in a pregnancy that is ended by abortion. Many of the issues we'll explore apply to both men and women.

Because abortion is a complex issue, feelings about it are also complex. Those feelings are affected by many factors, including our religion, our culture, our gender, our relationships and our age. One of the most important factors is the particular circumstances of a particular pregnancy. Each situation is unique. When an unintended pregnancy occurs, it is usually not the only problem that a person is facing, but it may force a crisis, so it becomes the focus. Unresolved feelings after an abortion may have a lot to do with other issues that have not been faced, as well as with abortion. Nevertheless, these feelings can be very painful. This paper is written to help you heal if you are hurting.

We are going to explore anger, resentment, sadness, guilt and shame surrounding having an abortion. If you feel that you need more help with this, we urge you to call us or to consult a counselor who can help you resolve your feelings. We'll be happy to make a referral for you to a counselor.

What does "resolving feelings" mean? It does not mean pretending that nothing happened – it does not mean finding a scapegoat to blame for your choices or your situation – it does not mean pretending that everything is all right when it is not. Resolving feelings means expressing the pain, anger or whatever the feelings are – then sharing them with someone who will really listen. It means finding forgiveness for yourself or whomever else you need to forgive in order to put the experience in the past. Few people have really shared their feelings about abortion, even though approximately one woman in four has had an abortion. Nearly fifty million women and as many men have had this experience, yet we don't talk about it openly. Twenty-five years ago people who were divorced were keeping their feelings silent and secret in the same way. When we keep emotional secrets, they can be like scars that never heal. The attitudes of our society contribute to the lack of resolution. The anti-abortion movement has tried to make women feel guilty by suggesting that abortion is immoral. It is hard not to be affected by anti-abortion protesters outside clinics.

Unresolved feelings can be focused in any of several ways:

- Toward legal abortion
- Toward parents
- Toward the doctor or clinic
- Toward the fetus/potential child
- Toward your partner
- Toward circumstances
- Toward the difficulty of choices
- Toward yourself

Take a quiet moment to think about these questions: Do you feel that you made your own decision about having an abortion? If not, how was it that someone else forced you to have one? If you had been able to make a freer choice, how might things have been different? How would it have been different if you had had a miscarriage instead of an abortion? What were your reasons for having an abortion? How would your life be different if you had not had an abortion?

When you make choices, all you have available to you is the information of the past and present. You cannot predict the future so you must take the risk of doing the best you can **at that time**. Do you think you did the best you could when you decided to have an abortion? Sometimes you can feel that the decision was right but you wish it had all happened in a different way or that you had done some things differently. How would you like to have done things differently?

Some women believe in the right to abortion but feel sad or depressed about having one – as if they had lost something. If you have feelings like these, it may be that you did lose something – the image of yourself as a mother or the feeling of yourself as a “good person”. Choosing an abortion may cause you to feel like a failure. Given your circumstances at the time, what would a “good person” have done? Who determines whether or not you are a moral person? Do the attitudes of your parents have anything to do with how you feel about yourself and your choices?

Many of us, especially men, are afraid of our feelings. Your own feelings are very important to you and they perform important functions for you:

- Your pain helps you to grow.
- Your fear and anger protect you from dangerous situations.
- Your shame reminds you that you are a fallible human being – that you cannot be perfect.
- Your guilt helps remind you of your moral values.

Steps to Healing

1. Identify your feelings. Are you feeling pain, anger, shame, fear? Express your feelings to someone whom you trust who will listen to you without judging you. If you do not have anyone to talk to, you need to find a counselor.
2. Decide which emotional burdens you are ready to lay down. How much longer do you want to feel guilty? Are you ready to begin forgiving yourself? First, you have to be willing to forgive yourself.
3. Visualize your experience with abortion as you would like it to have been. Imagine how you would like to have acted and how you would like others involved to have acted.
4. If you are feeling a sense of loss, allow yourself to grieve if that is what you are feeling. You may want to explain to yourself why you made the decision you made and say goodbye to that potential child. In doing this, experience yourself as a caring and loving human being who did the best she/he could.
5. Think about the other people for whom you may be carrying strong emotions with regard to your abortion – do you want to have peace about them? The forgiveness is for your peace of mind – not to excuse someone who may have been abusive toward you; but to free yourself from the burden of overwhelming feelings that may be getting in your way. The other people involved were probably also doing the best they knew how under the circumstances. Your pain or anger or fear has more to do with you than it does with them.
6. Resolve to make decisions as cleanly as you can in the future. Get all the information you need, visualize the consequences of different choices, communicate with others involved and do not get stuck criticizing yourself for not always making perfect decisions. There is no chance that you will ever be perfect. No one is. But listening to your own feelings can help you to make decisions you will be able to live with.

Some women who have had abortions later decide that they made the wrong decision or they come to believe that abortion itself is wrong. There is a temptation to deal with the pain of unresolved feelings by trying to find someone else to blame – thus “WEBA”, or Women Exploited by Abortion, which is an anti-abortion group. There is no question that the women in this organization have been in tremendous pain. Their decision that the way for them to deal with their pain is to try to make abortion illegal so that other women cannot make a choice is one that they have to take responsibility for. There is a difference between deciding that you would not choose abortion again and trying to prevent others from deciding for themselves. Still, you have the right to take whatever position you come to. If you believe in freedom of choice, you may find it helpful to help keep abortion a safe and legal option for other women. NARAL is an organization in Philadelphia that advocates for the right to choice. (215) 923-3172. They would love to have your help!

If religious concerns play a role in your unresolved feelings, it might help to know that most religious denominations support the Supreme Court decision that determined that abortion is a personal choice. We have materials from Faith Aloud, the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights and Catholics for Choice, which specifically address religious and moral issues of abortion. Let us know if you might find these helpful.

Especially for Men

If you have been involved in an abortion, you may not have found it easy to talk about your feelings. In our society men are usually taught not to express their feelings, so the likelihood is that they remain unresolved. Added to that problem is the fact that an abortion is ultimately a woman’s decision because the pregnancy is involved with her body. In some cases this means a woman has an abortion against the wishes of her partner or that her partner doesn’t tell her how he really feels or that he does not even know about the pregnancy until after the abortion is done. In some instances, he is part of the decision and is involved by accompanying the woman to the clinic and/or by sharing in the medical expenses. Sometimes an abortion (like any other crisis) strengthens a relationship. Other times, the stress leads to the ending of the relationship. Even if you couldn’t make the decision about the abortion, chances are that you had some feelings about it. You may have a sense of loss of the concept of yourself as a father – of intimacy with the woman involved – of your ability to be in “control”. You may feel angry, hurt or confused. “The Steps To Healing” listed earlier may be helpful. Learning to share your feelings can be important for the rest of your life, as well as for resolving this experience.

No matter who you are, your experiences and feelings are important. We’d like to know if this paper has been helpful to you and if you have suggestions or questions that could help us make it more useful. Please let us know. Thank you.

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