

# LIVED EXPERIENCES

# SUPPORT

»» AFTER ABORTION

## Both women and men struggle after abortion whether they identify as pro-choice or pro-life.

Our [research](#) shows:

- 34% of women and 71% of men experience **adverse change** after abortion.
- 63% of women and 83% of men **looked for help or said they could have benefited** from talking to someone.
- Yet 82% of both women and men **don't know where to go for help** after abortion.

This translates into millions of people hurting after abortion, wanting help, but not knowing where to turn.

## Fear of How They'll be Received

One obstacle to finding help that women and men share with us is fear of how they will be received. They are afraid of judgment and condemnation from those who oppose abortion. And they are afraid of dismissal and ostracization from those who support abortion. They feel trapped and isolated in their pain.

## Grief is Human

Grief after abortion isn't political or religious. It's simply a human issue. People who are hurting need compassion and support so they can find hope, healing, and restored well-being.

## GROWING COMPASSION

- Hearing other people's lived experiences in their own words can help us see beyond our own views and into their reality.
- After all, the first step in building empathy is setting aside our own judgments to create safe spaces for people to share their pain and then being able to listen and respond with compassion.
- It is for this purpose that we share these real experiences from Support After Abortion clients, event attendees, and healing group participants.
- We have removed anything that would identify the individuals to ensure their privacy while allowing their voices to be heard.

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Because our focus is supporting people who are struggling with grief and emotions after abortion, people who are not struggling don't reach out to us. Therefore the voices here are of those who are hurting after their abortion experiences.

## Support After Abortion

Support After Abortion is a nonprofit dedicated to helping women and men impacted after abortion. We focus on compassion and support. When people who are struggling with their grief and emotions reach out to us for help, we connect them with the healing options they prefer. That could be secular or religious, virtual or in-person, clinical or peer-facilitated, one-on-one or group, etc. And we equip providers - peer leaders, counselors, therapists, and others with curriculum, resources, and trainings to help serve those who are hurting.

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

- I feel like my two abortions rule my life. It's been three years and I still struggle everyday. I **have thoughts of self harm. I'm constantly thinking about who the children could have been, getting sad over seeing any kids their age, having nightmares, and self isolating.**
- I'm dealing with miserable depression, mood swings, and very paralyzing, intrusive thoughts since my abortion. Thinking or hearing about children makes me cry. I want to learn to forgive myself, and honor the life I once created. I don't know how I'll get there or what steps I need to take, but I'll do anything.
- When I was going through rehab for substance abuse, I wish my many doctors, counselors and therapists would have gently asked me if I had had an abortion. It might have helped me understand the root cause of my destructive behaviors.
- I feel guilt, regret, and extreme sadness after having an abortion. I was 18 weeks along. I feel so depressed, and I'm struggling massively to sleep, eat, or even think properly. It's getting worse. I am seriously struggling with my mental health.
- I had an abortion when I was 20. Now I'm 67. I feel lost and hopeless. I'm all alone now, my family has all passed on. I keep thinking about the child I would have had. I'm having trouble eating. I Don't know what to do.
- I'm dealing with miserable depression, mood swings, and very paralyzing, intrusive thoughts since my abortion two weeks ago. The thought of, or even hearing about children, makes me cry on the spot. I want to learn to forgive myself, and honor rather than mourn the life I once created. I don't know how I'll get there or what steps I need to take; but I'll do anything.
- I'm dealing with miserable depression, mood swings, and very paralyzing, intrusive thoughts since my abortion. Thinking or hearing about children makes me cry. I want to learn to forgive myself, and honor the life I once created. I don't know how I'll get there or what steps I need to take, but I'll do anything.
- I had an abortion years ago. I **didn't really struggle with it until recently. Now I'm drinking more and listening to sad music.** I want a baby, but haven't been able to. I feel horrible. I would like to meet with other women who've had abortions for support, so I can deal with losing my child.
- How do I recover? **Someone please help me. It feels like I'm drowning in sadness.**
- I'm experiencing major waves of grief over my abortion. It's affected me so much, I feel so depressed.
- For years I've felt like God can't really ever love me because I was a Christian and had two abortions. **I've since had other kids, but feel like I don't deserve them because of the abortions. I'm so ashamed and afraid of how people will think of me and judge me.** I've never told anyone. I don't know how to overcome this.
- I recently had an abortion and **I thought that is what I wanted to do, but now that it's done, I hate myself** for doing it and regret it everyday.
- I had an abortion 50 years ago. **The Supreme Court ruling is bringing up a massive amount of feelings and trauma,** and I just want to talk to somebody.
- I feel ashamed. **Talking to someone might help, but I feel like I deserve the pain I feel.**
- I had an abortion three months ago. **I've tried to suppress my emotions.** It recently hit me that my child is gone. I'm not sure I made the right decision.
- I'm pro-choice, but I never thought I would have to **make the decision myself. I couldn't have known how I would truly feel afterward.** I feel shameful, guilty, and like I stole something from my other kids. I feel alone and unable to talk to anyone.
- I had multiple abortions when I was younger. **When I look at my kids now, I am painfully reminded of the children I didn't have.** I still feel guilty and grieve the loss of my babies.
- No one tells you when you have one how you will feel years later. **I had an abortion at 25, but no one tells you how you feel at 50 about it.**

- Yesterday was the final day of my pill abortion. I was not prepared for what was going to happen. I can't stop crying. **My boyfriend and I saw the baby's arms and legs. We're so shaken and distraught about what we saw.** At 9 weeks, I didn't know the baby would be that developed. I feel so guilty. I can't stop thinking what if...I had tried harder...what if... I need to talk to someone.
- My pill abortion was some of the worst pain I have ever felt. **I'm having a hard time, especially because I thought I was only six weeks along and then found out during the abortion that I was more like 13 weeks.** My mom and boyfriend pressured me. I feel so alone. I'm struggling and need to talk to someone.
- I took the abortion pill. The after effects are unbearable. I'm not sure I did the right thing, even though I thought about it intensely before deciding. **I'm hurting so much, and I keep thinking *How did I make this decision and become so powerless?***
- I had a very traumatizing pill abortion and can't move on. **Since the abortion, I don't do anything. I quit college. I'm just devastated.** I thought then it was the best decision for both of us. I wasn't sure I could give him what he deserves. I'm so broken.
- I can now see it was a baby. **I thought it was a clump of cells, but I saw eyes.**
- **It was horrific. It was 100 times more painful and took longer than I was told** - over 12 hours to completely expel the tissue. It was so much more traumatic than a surgical abortion, which I had once before. - Survey respondent - Strongly pro-choice, abortion was 3-4 years ago.
- **It affected me a lot more physically and emotionally than I expected.** - Survey respondent - Strongly pro-choice, abortion was 5+ years ago.
- The way it was explained to me was not how it truly happened. They said it would be painless, it definitely was not. **It was a lot more frightening than expected.** - Survey respondent - Somewhat pro-choice, abortion was 5+ years ago.
- **I regret it still to this day and probably will for the rest of my life.** - Somewhat pro-life, abortion was 5+ years ago.

## MEN'S EXPERIENCES

- I don't think people realize how this affects men also. I've been so depressed since the abortion. I cry out of nowhere because of it. I have a hard time getting out of bed or doing anything. It's so hard. I don't know what to do. **It's like falling in a hole with no lights, spinning and spiraling, and having no direction.**
- My girlfriend aborted our child 10 years ago when I was 20. Soon after **I started using marijuana to cope with the emotions, anger, grief, anxiety and depression.** The abortion has affected my ability to form and maintain relationships. I don't want to lose more time because I didn't deal with my emotions, feelings, and grief in a healthy way.
- Almost ten years ago I got my girlfriend pregnant. She didn't want to keep it. **Being a dad is what I always wanted. To this day it haunts me to the core. Because of it I sunk into a depression and lost who I was.** I still have trouble being around babies or even accidentally walking down the baby aisle. I still would like a family of my own, but I need to get around this first. Please, help me.
- **I struggled for 15 years with alcohol and drug abuse, acting out, poor decisions, and destruction after encouraging my girlfriend to have an abortion** when we were in our early 20s. After going through AA and into deeper healing I realized the root for me was the abortion. Going through *Keys to Hope and Healing* helped me to process the sad thoughts, regret, sorrow, and shame I used to feel.
- **I have an emptiness that always lingers.** I said I'd raise it if she didn't want it. I had no choice, I couldn't say save my baby.
- Even though I'm pro-choice, I was surprised I felt so much. **I thought since I was okay with abortion I wouldn't be affected. But it just destroyed me.**
- I wasn't consulted about the decision and learned about it as it was happening. **I have to deal with being left out of any discussion surrounding the options and the loss itself.**
- **I have insurmountable grief. Regret. I feel like a horrible person.**

## AFTER-ABORTION HEALING EXPERIENCES

- Reaching out, getting support, and finding healing after my abortions changed my life, saved my life. It was the most important thing I've ever done.
- Support After Abortion provided exactly what I needed. They gave me the opportunity to have a safe place where I could share not only what I am struggling with, but also a place to celebrate the hard work I have been putting into healing. I finally feel like I am not alone. I am thankful beyond belief.
- Thank you for helping me. I lived in silence for 30 years until I found help.
- My abortion was the biggest secret I ever carried. I never thought I would get out of the darkness that I was engulfed in. I felt completely alone and misunderstood. Then I found Support After Abortion and was connected to a group. I shared my abortion experience for the first time in my *Keys to Hope and Healing* group and instantly saw light breaking through. My secret changed, my life changed.
- I carried the guilt and shame of my abortion for 45 years before I attended an after abortion support group through Support After Abortion. There I was able to come to terms with my past and release the shame and guilt that I carried for so long.
- I already see the changes the last six weeks in my support group that Support After Abortion connected me to has made in my day to day. I look forward to continuing on my healing journey. Thank you for everything.
- I know that the topics are going to be hard and the emotions up and down, but I find myself encouraged and ready. We heal in layers, and I am ready to peel away the next layer on my journey to wholeness.
- I felt safe to share, safe to cry, even safe to yell! Now I know I don't have to do this alone or in silence. There are people who care and understand.
- I got to meet other women struggling just like me. In the support group. It's not easy to talk about my abortion, but I'm not alone in my pain anymore.
- When I called the After Abortion Line I never considered that I would talk to someone else who has had an abortion. As soon as the person on the other line said, "I understand, I too had an abortion," my fear and uncertainty lightened. I felt for once like I wasn't alone. In talking with this woman, I was able to ask questions without the fear of not feeling understood. I got to hear that there is hope, I can move forward. I am so glad I picked up the phone and called Support After Abortion.
- I called the After Abortion Line out of desperation. I couldn't go on like this any longer. The pain was all consuming. A woman answered. She let me cry, told me it was okay to feel. She stayed on the phone with me until I felt better; drained, but better. I just finished my healing group and cannot believe how different I am today than I was just a few months ago. Thank you for saving my life.
- I am so grateful for the opportunity to be in the *Keys to Hope and Healing* group. I have been able to talk about my abortion experience with others who understand me. I knew the day I walked out of that clinic I would never be the same. I was ashamed and embarrassed to admit that I was not ok. Then I found Support After Abortion and called the After Abortion Line. If it weren't for them, I'm not sure how I would have gotten out of the darkness I was in. They listened and connected me to a virtual group. I am beyond thankful for this opportunity, for this healing journey.
- Recently in my *Unraveled Roots* group I had an awakening, so to speak. I have been so focused on healing from the aftermath of my abortion that I neglected the trauma that came before it – the abandonment I felt, the abuse I endured, and the dysfunction I grew up in. *Unraveled Roots* helped to put the pieces together as to why I even got to the point where I was facing the abortion decision in the first place. My trauma was so much deeper than I imagined.
- I am blown away by the dynamic in the group, being able to talk about what some of us have struggled with for so long has been very helpful for those that are newly walking this journey. I am so grateful we have this support and encouragement.