If an abortion is in your past, you need to know...

This is the place to heal your wounded heart.

This is the place to find loving arms to embrace you.

This is the place to receive Christ’s forgiveness and grace.

If you are the mother or father of a child lost to abortion, we want you to know this is a place of hope and healing.

We will not judge you.
We will help you on the road to wholeness.
We will support you with prayer.

You don’t have to suffer in silence anymore.
Information for
Clergy and Christian Counselors
Ministering to Those Who Regret Their Abortion Decision

Be Prepared to Care

What will you say to the men or women, young or old, who present themselves to you and are struggling with a pregnancy loss from abortion? Statistics indicate there is a good chance that you will encounter many such persons in your church, parish or practice. The Alan Guttmacher Institute estimates that 43% of American women will have at least one abortion by the age of 45. They also estimate that 73% of women having abortions claim some Christian affiliation. Regardless of your personal opinion or attitude concerning abortion, you are likely to encounter men and women who are feeling guilty, ashamed and numb as a result of their abortion experience.

How can you further the healing process for those conflicted men and women? Can you address the inevitable spiritual questions – Can God forgive me? ... Will God punish me? Thankfully, our God does forgive. This information seeks to help you by offering some direction in meeting the needs of those who regret their abortion decision.

The Aftermath of Abortion

Women and men who have had an abortion often experience guilt, sadness, chronic depression, fear and/or anger in the aftermath. These feelings are commonly referred to as Post-Abortion Syndrome or Stress (PAS). According to research, approximately 40% of women in abortion recovery programs suffer intense PAS, while 80% will manifest some PAS symptoms. Symptoms reported by women participating in abortion recovery programs include:

- 92% experience emotional deadening/numbing (described as either feeling less in touch with one’s emotions or feeling a “need to stifle their emotions”.)
- 82% experience intense feelings of loneliness and/or isolation
- 86% describe an increased tendency toward anger or rage. (48% reported that they became more violent when angered.)
- 86% fear that others will learn of their abortion or experience a greater sense of fear for unidentified reasons.
- 75% report less self-confidence.
- 73% report some sexual dysfunction. (Increased pain during intercourse, promiscuity, frigidity or loss of pleasure.)
• 63% experience denial of doubt or negativity regarding decision to abort.
  (Average period of denial of any doubts or negative feelings about their abortion was 5.25 years after abortion.)
• 58% suffer from insomnia or nightmares.
• 56% experience suicidal thoughts.
• 53% begin or increase drug and/or alcohol use to deaden their pain.
• 39% report eating disorders that commenced after their abortions.
• 28% attempt suicide.

Guilt, preoccupation with the anniversary of the abortion or due date, depression, sadness, anxiety, a sense of loss, crying spells, regret, helplessness, inability to relax, marital stress and fear of failure are among the feelings commonly described by those who have had an abortion.

Sometimes those who have had an abortion are not aware of how the experience has affected them, but nonetheless are exhibiting many of the above PAS symptoms. It is difficult to bring up the subject of abortion, so one must have a clear sense of God’s direction before addressing the issue.

Most of the men and women who will seek you out will be aware that they are in a struggle that stems from their abortion experience. Sometimes they are brought to awareness by a life-affirming sermon by clergy that expresses sympathy for the post-abortive person. Such tenderness is often the very key that God uses to unlock the denial and allow the grieving to begin.

Pastoral Care

The men or women who come to you are likely to be in acute pain after having encountered a recent crisis where they were forced to wrestle with their previous decision to abort. By following the steps outlined below, you may be the very person God uses to begin or further their healing.

Additional, it would be helpful to contact one or two local pregnancy centers (listed as Abortion Alternatives in the Yellow Pages or http://www.optionline.org/advantage.asp), and determine whether they offer post-abortion counseling. You may want to maintain a list of such centers, with their addresses and telephone numbers and make the list available to those men and women who would benefit from continued counseling.
1. **Listen.** Let them tell you their stories. Consciously avoid indicating shock or dismay or anything other than compassion, regardless of how you may feel about what you are hearing. Guard against being instructive as well. Just listen.

2. **Pray.** Even when they are sharing their stories, begin to pray silently asking for God’s wisdom and guidance in selecting your words as you respond. Use non-judgmental words that will promote trust and confidence between you and them.

3. **Reassure them** of God’s unconditional love for them. They may be feeling excruciating guilt and in fear of God’s judgment. Scripture passages that have proven very effective in comforting those who are guilt-ridden and fearful are: James 5:15-16, Micah 7:18-19, Psalm 32:5, Psalm 103 and 1 John 1:8-9.

4. **Acknowledge** their pain. Do not judge whether their pain is valid, seek to justify their abortion decision, deny their feelings or try to lessen it by telling them that time will take away the hurt. They need to be able to address the pain they carry and be assured that God will take away the hurt, especially if they face their pain and open themselves to His healing.

5. **Stress reconciliation** between themselves, their baby and God. It is here that you may introduce the concept and term, “post-abortion stress or syndrome.” Be sure to share with them that others who have aborted feel just as they do and that there is hope that they will be helped. Suggest to them that they contact one of the agencies from the list you will provide for them. Encourage them to consider a post-abortion counseling program in order to bring about complete healing and reconciliation with God.

6. **Grant permission** for them to grieve the loss of their baby. Ask whether they feel the baby was a boy or girl and whether they have named their baby. By asking these questions, you give them the opportunity to begin grieving. If you are ordained, offer to have a memorial service for the baby after they have completed counseling.

7. **Offer forgiveness** to them. If they do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, then share the gospel with them and lead them in a prayer of commitment. Pray with them and ask out loud that God will help them to find peace with Him and their baby. (Healing of Memory prayers can be very pastoral and helpful at this point. For more information, see next column.) Use whatever format you are comfortable with. Trust God to show up!

8. **Introduce journaling** to them. Encourage them to journal their feelings beginning wherever the Lord leads them. Request that they share their journals with the post-abortion counseling program.

9. **Offer** your continued ear, especially for them to be accountable during their post-abortion counseling programs. Make God’s love and support tangible.

Confessions of Sins *(Book of Common Prayer, page 352)* “Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought word and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in Your will, and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your Name. Amen”
Declaration of Forgiveness by layperson (Book of Common Prayer, page 353) “Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.”

The Healing of Memories

Agnes Sanford pioneered an area of inner healing that has been coined the Healing of Memories. Praying for the Healing of Memories is quite simple, though exceedingly powerful to the recipient of such prayer. In essence, its purpose is to “redeem the time” Eph 5:15 (KJV) by asking the person to be present in their memory at whatever age and circumstance they were at the time and allow Christ to redeem it.

You begin by asking them to describe what they remember. Once they have shared their memory, you ask them to invite Jesus Christ Himself into that memory; to literally place the Person of Jesus in the room or wherever the memory took place. Then you have them ask Jesus to forgive them and those who hurt them and to say out loud that they accept Christ’s forgiveness and forgive whoever hurt them in that memory. Once done, simply ask God to seal the forgiveness He has lavishly poured out and give Him thanks for who He is and for redeeming that memory.

In the instance of someone who has experienced an abortion, it would be good to have them remember the conception, accept Christ’s forgiveness and forgive their partner; to remember the moment they knew they were pregnant, accept Christ’s forgiveness and forgive anyone else who influenced their feelings at that time; to remember the circumstances that led to the decision to abort, accept Christ’s forgiveness and forgive whoever else was involved; and finally, to remember the actual procedure, accept Christ’s forgiveness and forgive the medical personnel and anyone else who was involved. The key to healing of memories is inviting Jesus Christ into the memory; to be present with Jesus at that specific time and place; and then walk through His forgiveness. Since we experience our memories as our realities, it behooves us to ask Christ to redeem our memory so that the actuality of it (how we respond in the future) can be freed from pain and shame. There are no theatrics involved – no emotional watersheds – just the gentle invitation to Jesus Christ to come into that memory so that we may receive His forgiveness and pronounce our forgiveness to those who have caused us pain. Though the memory will remain, the pain and shame of it are laid at the feet of Him who has the power to forgive our sins and those who have sinned against us.

Article compliments of Anglicans for Life.
2. She must grieve over her lost child.

This means tears, real grief, mourning and usually praying together. We all really understand this. If you go to a funeral home and see your good friend, now a widow, standing by her husband’s coffin with dry eyes, uptight, holding it all inside, you know something is wrong. If you’re close enough to her, you will counsel her, “Mary, let it out. Cry.” And if you are that close friend, you will share her tears.

Is the unborn a lost child? Yes, certainly. Many women will name the baby. That makes it more real, easier for her. She must go through the same grieving process that a mother would go through for a child killed in an accident or for her spouse whom she has just buried. It’s been very accurately said that there is healing in the mourning (note the spelling).

Your role is to help her grieve. Your role is to encourage her tears and to again be a shoulder for her to lean on. In fact, at times you may be the only person in her life who can offer her the kind of support and help in grieving that will be so crucial to healing the wounds to her heart and soul. And remember, this grieving process takes time.

3. Divine forgiveness.

Those of us Christians who are pro-life found it entirely natural and appropriate to assure her of God’s forgiveness, if she was a believer. What came as a surprise was that 98% of all women counseled, including a majority of women who were not churched, needed to experience Divine forgiveness. Along with Alcoholics Anonymous, this may turn out to be the second medical, psychological problem that, in almost every case, can be helped only by openly seeking Divine assistance. However she knows or does not know God, the vital third step in healing is for her to come to the realization that she is not totally worthless, that she is not condemned, that she can be forgiven by a Higher Power.

If a woman can progress this far, her major symptomatology will usually be alleviated, and she can find reasonable stability and peace once again in her life. But there is a fourth step.

4. Forgive others.

This is difficult but, again, as with the three steps above, she needs your help in doing this. She needs your support, counsel and encouragement. If she can, she must bring herself to forgive the abortionist, the boyfriend who paid for the abortion, the mother, the sister who talked her into it, the school counselor, her classmates, husband, doctor or clergyman. If she can bring herself to this most difficult decision, that is, to forgive those who were a party to this disaster, then, truly, she will have substantial peace and stability in her life.

5. Forgive herself.

Not many women can really achieve this goal. A very few of these women will then feel spiritually motivated in love of others to give public testimony about their stories. We must never ask her to do this. It must always be a spontaneous volunteering. In giving testimony, she relives a very traumatic experience in her life. Only a few women can do this, but those few are truly pearls of great price to the pro-life cause.

You Can Help

In summary, we know a lot about Post-Abortion Syndrome. Is this your friend, classmate or relative? Do you recognize these symptoms? If so, do not depend upon your local physician or clergyman to have great insight into this, or necessarily to know the steps needed in healing. You probably should not attempt the above alone, although many do and with success. Your help, almost certainly, will come from one of the 4,000 pregnancy help centers now in existence throughout the United States. It is these good women who know most about this and who often are best equipped to help her or him. You may well be the central person who is the key to turn the lock to open up her problem and to help her go through the steps of healing. There are so many wounded women now in our country. We need each one of you to help your neighbor.

Men Hurt Too

In many ways PAS in men is similar to this in women, but there are differences. For more details on men, please see the pamphlet Men Hurt Too available from this same publisher.

J. C. Wilke, MD
POST-ABORTION SYNDROME

It would be difficult to find a pro-life person who isn’t aware of the negative psychological aftermath of abortion, commonly known as Post-Abortion Syndrome (PAS). For most people PAS conjures up a rather vague vision of the woman feeling considerable personal guilt and regret at having had the abortion. Frequently one’s knowledge of this comes from having known a friend who is suffering from this problem. For a few readers, this is intensely personal, as it is they who are hurting.

My purpose here is to briefly set forth the problem and its symptoms, and then to discuss how each of you can help such a woman.

Post-Abortion Syndrome is the inability to process the fear, anger, sadness and grief associated with the loss of an aborted child.

The Problem

For most women, induced abortion is a traumatic experience, both physically and emotionally. For some, the emotional impact has been likened to that of being stabbed or shot. For others, it works for a time. For a few, it never works at all. For some women it seems to suffice post-abortion. For many, it is a normal psychological defense mechanism each of them uses to a point this is normal and, hopefully, effective. For some, the emotional impact has been likened to that of being stabbed or shot. For most, it works only for a while and then things begin to bubble up. Typically, major symptoms can be and are repressed for at least five years — sometimes ten or twenty. Sometimes, even in one’s dying years, the problem rears itself once again.

Repression and Denial

The main coping mechanisms in PAS are repression and denial. Her counselor and the abortionist both said this wouldn’t bother her. Her girl friends said it wouldn’t bother her. So did her boyfriend or husband. Only too often it was her referring physician and sometimes even her clergyman. She also told herself that the abortion would not bother her. Then, when the symptoms surface, she denies they are related to the abortion, and she represses the symptoms, internalizing them, and tries to consciously obliterate them from her memory. “It isn’t the abortion,” she tells herself. “It’s something else.” Such as . . . Oh no, that isn’t why she feels so bad. It’s because her boss, or whoever, was mean to her. No, that’s not why sex has turned so sour. It’s because her husband is so inconsiderate, even a beast. No, that’s not why she finds it so difficult to hold her sister’s new baby or gush over a fellow-worker’s infant brought to the office.

Yes, it’s exactly one year since she had the abortion, or five years, and the reason she feels so bad today must have been the food she ate last night. It is typical that, through this coping mechanism, she does not connect her psychological and emotional troubles with her abortion.

Another coping mechanism is to make up for the abortion by having another baby and becoming a “super mom,” or by becoming very active in church, charity or in her career. This proves that she is a “good person” in spite of the abortion.

Such compensation, other rationalization and the process of repression and denial does seem to work for some. For most, it works only for a while and then things begin to bubble up. Typically, major symptoms can be and are repressed for at least five years — sometimes ten or twenty. Sometimes, even in one’s dying years, the problem rears itself once again.

Symptoms

When symptoms do occur, they take a variety of forms. They can include:

- Guilt feelings — she has killed her own child — she is a bad person. She deserves whatever unhappiness she has. These feelings won’t go away. They are relentless.
- Dreams, nightmares about the baby. Flashbacks — awake or asleep — re-experiencing the abortion, e.g., tripped off by hearing a noise like the suction machine.
- Remorse — regret.
- Low self-esteem — she is a wicked person, she deserves these problems. She is no good. She knows she will fail so why try.
- Anniversary reactions on the date when the baby was killed or when she would have been born. On those days she is “impossible to live with.”
- Fear of becoming pregnant again, or just the opposite, an overwhelming need to have a replacement baby.
- A loss of tenderness and empathy towards others, particularly to infants, pregnant women, or mothers. This psychological numbness is pervasive. She avoids little children, misses the baby shower and the christening and cannot cuddle an infant. If she is distant, she is not vulnerable.
- Sexual coldness. A certain hostility to men in general but particularly to her husband who agreed to the abortion. Sexual dysfunction is common.
- Resort to alcohol and drugs to dull the pain. This transient relief usually ends up making her more miserable and creates new problems.
- Promiscuity. In an attempt to fill the emptiness in her life, she sometimes seeks solace in other arms, but, like drugs, this solves nothing and only adds to her psychological downward spiral.
- Depression can become severe. It can be sadness and moodiness. It can cause sleep disorders, loss of appetite (or binge eating). She can have crying spells, withdraw from others and all of the symptoms of clinical depression. If severe and prolonged, it can lead to thoughts of, and occasionally to actual suicide attempts.
- Withdrawal from church attendance and from praying. “I know God will never forgive me, and I cannot pray anymore.”

Predisposing Conditions

There is much that needs detailed investigation as to predisposing conditions. We do not know the exact incidence of PAS nor the exact percentages of those who suffer from mild, severe or catastrophic PAS. We do know that it is not directly related to a prior knowledge of fetal development, for a majority of such women did not know this was “a baby.” We also know that it is not ordinarily related to prior religious beliefs, for a majority of women under treatment were unchurched at the time, or at least felt that this was not a serious offense against God, or that He would forgive them.

Treatment

Happily, we now have a reasonably good grasp on how to treat PAS. This breaks down into a number of steps.

1. Counter the repression and denial.

She must bring the abortion back into her consciousness. She must admit that she was a party to the destruction of her own offspring. Denying this fact has been extremely corrosive. The only answer is to bring it back to her consciousness and admit this.

Your role here is important. And, “by you,” I mean any person reading this. Please do not rely on physicians, clergymen or social workers. Professionals often do not help a great deal in this effort. Sadly, they frequently have little understanding for the need of healing. Her doctor is more likely to continue to give her anti-depressant pills. Much more is needed than a series of short visits to a doctor with no one who is informed, competent and sympathetic. The treatment for and resolution of PAS takes considerable time and depends upon you or some other compassionate person who does not necessarily need to be professionally trained.

Your job is to be a shoulder for her. You must encourage her to open up and help her in this process. You must support her, understand and love her through this very difficult process. Above all, do not judge. Just listen. She is often supersensitive, filled up with judging herself. If you judge, she’ll withdraw.
better in the short-term, but it will only make matters worse over time.

Eventually, your emotions will find their way to the surface, possibly at an inappropriate time, for example, if you find out the woman in a future relationship has had an abortion, and you take out your resentment on her. You may be reminded of your loss by seeing a baby or a pregnant woman. The loss from abortion may have affected you dramatically. However, you may not be aware that it could be the root-cause of your problems.

Society makes it doubly tough for men to deal with abortion stress. First, many psychologists don’t acknowledge that women suffer psychological after-effects of abortion. As a result, they’re even less likely to acknowledge yours. Secondly, men are often taught as children that it is less than manly to show weakness or cry.

It’s OK to grieve for the baby you will never see or hold in your arms. It’s OK to cry for your profound loss. Cry as much and as often as you need. You must grieve to help heal the loss and shame.

Find someone to talk with. The worst thing you can do is hold it inside. Unprocessed grief and guilt can lead to more serious problems. Share your grief and shame with someone you can confide in. It helps to talk it out. A trusted friend or counselor may help you see things more clearly.

Forgiveness is essential

In order to complete the healing process and find closure, it is important that you forgive those with whom you harbor anger or resentment, i.e., your partner who had the abortion, the abortion clinic staff, or those who encouraged your partner to have the abortion.

Don’t confuse forgiveness with “excusing, pardoning, forgetting or reconciliation.” Forgiveness is making a conscious decision to extend an undeserved kindness toward the guilty party instead of imparting anger and retribution. When we hold on to anger we are giving control to those who have hurt us.

Almost every woman who has begun the road to recovery after her abortion has given credit to the fact that she returned to, or discovered, her religious faith. That has proven to be also true with men. If possible, consult with a member of the clergy. Experience the joy of knowing that, with repentance, you have complete, divine forgiveness, which is the foundation for your next crucial step — forgiving yourself.

Always remember...

If you’re suffering from the loss of a child due to abortion, there’s help for you. You’re not alone. The feelings that you are experiencing are also felt by millions of other men. Compassionate men and women, many of whom have also experienced abortion, are willing to assist you, free of charge, in dealing with this loss. You can reach us, anonymously if you like, at our website at www.lifeissues.org. Go to “Men and Abortion.”

Our e-mail address is info@lifeissues.org. Or contact us at: Life Issues Institute, 1821 W. Galbraith Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45239. Phone 513.729.3600. We will be able to put you in touch with someone who can help. Any way you choose to contact us, your privacy is our priority. Reach out for help today. Further information is on our website at www.lifeissues.org.

Bradley Mattes
Life Issues Institute

Bradley Mattes is the Executive Director of Life Issues Institute. He counsels post-abortive fathers and has done considerable anecdotal research on this topic. Mr. Mattes has lectured and written internationally on the effects of abortion on men.

5 C.T. Coyle, Ph.D., Men and Abortion a Path to Healing, 1999.
You are not alone

If you’re struggling with the loss of your child from abortion, you are not alone. The most thorough research done to date involved 1,000 men who completed questionnaires as they waited for their partners in 30 different abortion clinics. This and follow-up research indicates that more than 3 million men may have been profoundly traumatized by abortion. This can be a deceiving statistic, because there are countless more who are suffering significantly, but to a lesser extent.

Why are you affected?

In many ways men respond very differently to the loss of a child from abortion. To understand your reaction, it is important to first understand what motivates the human male.

Instinct drives men to achieve success in five key areas of their lives: the ability to procreate, provide, protect, perform and [enjoy] pleasure.

An important element motivating men is their desire to procreate. Men provide an essential role in the continuation of the human race. Almost every man, whether he verbalizes it or not, values the idea of having offspring of his own flesh and blood — carrying on the family name or bloodline.

Men are also highly programmed to protect their family. This need to protect your offspring should not be underestimated.

Society often judges you based on your ability to be successful at procreation, provision, protection, performance and pleasure. If you experience an abortion, these key elements of life may be seriously damaged, or often totally obliterated.

The symptoms

They say that the conscience is what hurts when everything else feels so good. The conscience, in a significant number of fathers who lose a child to abortion, kicks into overtime and wreaks emotional havoc.

The most consistent and evident symptom in men due to the loss of a child from abortion is anger. You will almost certainly experience a higher level of anger after the abortion than before. In addition, it is highly likely that you will act on that anger in some way that is harmful to yourself or someone else.

You may see, hear, smell or otherwise experience something that triggers a memory of the abortion. This memory is then often translated into anger, which is usually directed at the nearest person, place or thing. This can be experienced subconsciously, leaving both you and the victim in the dark as to why you had this negative reaction. This is called “hooking.”

Your anger and frustration at not being able to protect and provide for your unborn baby, because of abortion, may manifest itself in other ways.

It’s OK to grieve for the baby you will never see or hold in your arms. It’s OK to cry for your profound loss.

You may experience grief, shame, guilt and remorse. An overwhelming feeling of helplessness and hopelessness may be constant companions.

You may turn to alcohol and drugs to dull the pain of knowing you participated in or were, in your mind, too “weak” to prevent the death of your unborn baby.

You may become a workaholic to avoid contact with other people or to protect your closely held secret. You may feel a desperate need to succeed at your job — a crucial aspect of your life — to counter the failure of abortion.

Or you may be unable to hold a job due to poor coping skills or an inability to handle decision-making. Your very core, the ability to provide and protect, has been seriously shaken. As a result, you may have little faith in your other abilities.

You may be an excessive risk-taker in work and social environments, setting yourself up for failure. This may come from the feeling that you deserve what you get for failing when it counted most — protecting your unborn baby.

Once the abortion takes place, the odds are overwhelmingly against a successful relationship with the mother of your unborn child.

In addition, future relationships with women are often difficult or impossible. A woman has total control over the decision to abort your baby, leaving you no legal recourse. This lack of control regarding a critical, life-impacting decision often generates considerable resentment and mistrust toward the woman. As a result of a past abortion, you may not want to be put into a situation where another pregnancy may occur and you have no control of the outcome.

Other symptoms include sleeplessness, panic attacks, flashbacks, nightmares, self-imposed isolation or suicidal tendencies.

Sexual problems

You may suffer from forms of sexual dysfunction such as impotency. The painful memories of abortion can be so closely associated with the act of sex that you may be uncomfortable with the thought of sex. Some men become addicted to forms of sexual gratification that allow them to maintain total control and have no commitment or fear of pregnancy. These include pornography and masturbation. Some may experiment with homosexuality.

Dealing with the symptoms

It is normal to have these feelings if you have lost a child to abortion. However, it is necessary to work through these feelings of hurt, shame and grief if you are to have a future healthy relationship. Burying your emotions may feel