

# Help and Healing

## A Guide to Pregnancy, Coercion or Post-Abortion Help, Information and Resources

### About this booklet

This booklet is for women, men, families or anyone facing pregnancy- or abortion-related challenges, or for those who want to help them.

Help is available, whether you are being coerced into an unwanted abortion or facing other pregnancy-related challenges, or you are experiencing post-abortion grief or other issues.

### Hope and healing are possible.

Inside, you'll find a word of encouragement from someone who's been there, expert tips on how to find the right kind of help for you, what to expect and what you can hope for, and a list of organizations and resources that can help.

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*Portions of this booklet were written by Leslie Graves, Darlene Dunn and Dr. Theresa Burke*

*Elliot*  
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# Help, Hope & Healing

## Finding help for you or someone you love

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In this booklet you will find information about places and people who can help. Whether you are being pressured into an unwanted abortion or need other pregnancy-related help, or you are struggling with post-abortion issues, you'll find helpful tips and information here.

This booklet also includes a word of encouragement from someone who has been there, expert tips on how to find the right kind of help for you, what to expect and what you can hope for, plus other resources and information.

### Compassion, help, hope and healing are available

If you are pregnant and need help, or if someone is pressuring, rushing or forcing you to abort, please know that there are people and places willing to lend a helping hand. If you are struggling with post-abortion issues, various types of help are available for you. You are not alone.

A word about the “big picture” . . . pregnancy-related coercion, deceptive, pressured or false counseling, and exploitation of women and others are common.

Before looking at available help and tips for how to find the right help for you, it may help you to know that, if you experienced coercion or other injustices, threats or abuses before abortion, you are not alone. It may help to look at the “big picture” to know that — while individual circumstances and details vary widely — the larger portrait of abortion is one of widespread coercion that often comes from all sides and various, often rising levels of severity, deceptive counseling or even abuse that can escalate to violence. Indeed, homicide is the #1 killer of pregnant women.

This is not reflective of a culture that sufficiently supports women and families facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy . . . especially those vulnerable or at risk for any number of reasons. Many of us who work in areas related to pregnancy or post-abortion counseling, research or outreach sympathize with your pain and are sorry that we as a community were not there for you in a timely, practical and supportive fashion.

### A closer look at the experiences of women and families who've been there

Evidence indicates that most abortions involve some form of coercion. One study found that most women were rushed or uncertain, and 64% felt pressured by others, yet 67% received no counseling whatsoever and nearly 80% were not told about available alternatives. Those who did receive counseling felt they were insufficiently informed. Stories from women and families who sought help indicate that many were given false information presented as fact. Still others were directly or indirectly forced. (See the *Forced Abortion in America* special report at <http://www.theunchoice.com/coerced.htm>)

For more information about this to keep or to share with others to help raise awareness, visit <http://www.theunchoice.com/whateveryamerican.htm>. The “big picture” information about the abortion industry and other gatekeepers, guides and policymakers, suggests that we as a society can and must do a better job in many ways to offer sufficient, timely and practical support for women, men and families facing pregnancy- and family-related challenges.

### Whatever your situation, help is available

If you are experiencing pregnancy-related challenges, please go to pages 14-15 of this booklet for a list of organizations that can help you. This includes help for those being pressured to abort and those seeking other types of support with pregnancy-related challenges.

If you have had or been involved in abortion, you can find information and many resources for help after abortion. It is a long journey full of ups and downs and heartbreak for those hurt by abortion and their loved ones; but you need not walk this journey alone! Many others have experienced abortion and pregnancy-related injustices, harm and heartbreak. Many families have lost not only an unborn child but also a daughter, sister, wife or friend to pregnancy-related violence or post-abortion injury and death, including but not limited to suicide.

Please know that there are people who care about you and that hope, help and healing are possible. Please stay the course and persevere until you find the kind of help that works for you. May God bless you in your journey.

See the back of this booklet for a list of organizations, resources and other forms of support if you or someone you know needs help during pregnancy or after an abortion.

## **If You or Someone You Love Is Pregnant Help and Support Are Available**

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If you are pregnant right now, you may be scared, confused, alone, afraid, hurting or angry. Maybe your parents, partner or someone else thinks you should have an abortion and is even pressuring, pushing or forcing you to do so. If this is the situation, please remember that no one should ever force you into doing anything against your will. You have the right, as a human being, to health, safety and happiness. No one has the right to take these things away from you.

Even if you are just not sure about your situation, please take the time to read this page and think things over. Too often, there is no counseling before the abortion takes place. If you are not given counseling, or if you are lied to, ignored, dismissed or manipulated in any way, this is a form of coercion. It is not just and it is against your rights as a human being. Unfortunately, you can't count on abortion clinic staff to help you out here. When you walk into an abortion clinic, whether it is your decision or not, research shows that there is usually no effort made to find out if this is really your choice. Abortion is a business — a multi-million dollar industry — and it is the job of the staff to perform, or even sell, an abortion.

### **There are many resources to help you**

*Thousands of centers than can help*

It is therefore a good idea to seek help from another source before entering an abortion clinic, even for a pregnancy test. If you suspect you may be pregnant, there are many home pregnancy tests available on the market today. If there is a pregnancy center in your area (look in the Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives," on page 15 of this booklet to find out) they can usually give you a free pregnancy test and sometimes even an ultrasound to determine the age of your baby. It is much wiser to go to a pregnancy resource center before entering an abortion clinic. If you want to have your child, or are uncertain about ending your pregnancy, it is best to go where there are people who want to do all they can to help make having the baby an option for you.

If you suspect or know that you are pregnant and are not sure about continuing the pregnancy, or if your parents, partner or someone else is insisting you abort, please consider a pregnancy center first. They are equipped to give you options, not just an abortion. Even if you are being pressured, coerced, abused, or forced into aborting, you can still go to a pregnancy center to find out about your rights and the help you need to overcome someone else's will and protect the rights of your unborn child and yourself. (If someone is hurting or abusing you, or your life or safety are in danger, the police or other authorities can help you leave this situation. Please call the police and get out of this situation as soon as possible. No matter what, you do not deserve to be hurt or abused.)

For a list of pregnancy centers and hotlines that offer live, confidential help, please see the list of resources on pages 14-15 of this booklet. Centers such as those listed here can usually provide help with things like medical care, baby and pregnancy supplies, social services assistance, parenting classes, counseling, adoption and more. If you have been told you need to have an abortion for health reasons, they can put you in touch with a doctor who can help assess your situation and get you the care you need. They may also be able to help with finding a job, housing or childcare if you need it. Their services are confidential and, in many cases, free. They can help you talk with your parents or partner about your pregnancy and work out the best solution for you and your baby.

### **If You Are Being Coerced or Forced to Abort**

If you are being pushed, pressured or forced to abort by your parents or someone else, there is legal help available. The Center Against Forced Abortion can help you or put you in touch with someone who can talk with your parents and explain that they cannot legally force you to have an abortion. Find out more by going to [www.txjf.org](http://www.txjf.org) and clicking on the Center Against Forced Abortion link. You can also call them at 210-614-7157 or email them at [info@txjf.org](mailto:info@txjf.org). Again, if someone is hurting or abusing you, or your life or safety are in danger, the police or other authorities can help you leave this situation.

Please call the police and get out of this situation as soon as possible. No matter what, you do not deserve to be hurt or abused. If someone at a domestic violence shelter or social services is pressuring you to abort, contact a pregnancy center for help (see page 15 for a list).

### **A word of encouragement from someone who's been there**

Remember, you don't have to abort your child because you don't feel ready to have a baby or someone else says you have to.

Speaking as someone who went through an abortion against her will, please know that if someone is pushing, pressuring or forcing you to abort, you have the right to do what is best for you and your baby. You deserve to be treated with respect from your family, partner, friends, the medical industry and clergy or counselors. No one has the right to give you false information or coerce us into anything.

If you find yourself in an unplanned pregnancy, stop and realize that the baby is already here. You have the right to carry your baby to term. Even if you may not be ready for a child in your life, there are many other healthy options for you and your baby.

If you are being pushed against your will or feel there is no way out but abortion, please take advantage of the many people and groups who can help you (you can find a list of on pages 14-15 of this booklet). You don't have to succumb to someone else's wishes, especially if it not good for you or your child.

Some people will tell you that it is "your body" — and it is your body that the baby lives inside. You have a right to the support you need to bring your baby safely into the world. Learn your rights. Know that there is help for you. With help, you can find the strength to overcome your circumstances and the abuse of being coerced. There are many counselors, clergy, organizations and other people who want to help. Please take advantage of this — they can help you avoid being coerced or having an abortion that you may come to regret and that can hurt you physically or emotionally. Studies show that women who have abortions are at risk for physical and emotional problems, including a nearly four times higher risk of death.

Remember that this position is only temporary. Pregnancy does not last forever, and once your baby is born, your life will have changed, but it can be restored. You are strong, you can work through this situation.

It may help to remember this quote from St. Teresa of Avila:

"Let nothing disturb you; let nothing dismay you. All things pass; God never changes. Patience attains all that it strives for. He who has God finds he lacks nothing; God alone is enough."

—*Darlene Dunn*

# Help After Abortion

## A guide to finding the right support

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### **You are not alone: a message from someone who's been there**

If you are in emotional or spiritual pain after abortion, there are resources and options available to help you in your journey to renewed emotional and spiritual well-being.

You are not alone in what you have been feeling, and you don't need to be alone and isolated as you recover. As you reach out for assistance, you will discover a community of compassionate, experienced men and women who will be able to offer skillful and significant help.

My prayers and encouragement are with you as you walk on this path of recovery. Others, including me, have walked it before you. We know that what once seemed impossible — peace, forgiveness, and restoration to a sense of wholeness — is indeed possible. However deep your trauma and your sense of pain and emotional turmoil, I encourage you to look forward to recovery with renewed hope and confidence.

### **There is hope: finding the right people and resources for you**

If you are suffering after abortion, you may feel very alone. You may have experienced abortion many years ago and never told anyone. You may be struggling with a more recent abortion. You may have been denied the choice you wanted or the support you needed. Women's experiences vary widely. For some, it was a decision they made and later came to regret; for most, it involved some form of coercion. For still others, the decision was made by other individuals in positions of authority or power. Regardless of your personal circumstances, healing is possible.

As you investigate the resources listed here, keep in mind that not every program is a good fit for every person. Please keep trying until you find a person or group where you are truly safe, comfortable and welcome. Bear in mind that any time you reflect back on a painful time in your life, you will most likely feel worse before you feel better, because you will be thinking and feeling more on a daily basis about what happened. That's normal, and it's one reason why support is so helpful on your journey.

However, some people may try a particular resource, and continue to be in a lot of pain, experience flashbacks and intrusive thoughts, or have behaviors that they dislike and want to stop but which are continuing. If that happens, you may be tempted to say, "It must be me, and I can never expect to truly experience peace and joy again. Because of what happened, I will always have to struggle with destructive thoughts and unhealthy behaviors." Don't give up!

#### **Please keep trying!**

Many, many people have experienced help healing of their post-abortion symptoms through one of these programs. You might want to read "What does recovery feel like?" on page 13 if you are wondering whether more healing and recovery might be possible for you.

The next several pages include a questionnaire to help you find out if post-abortion help would be a good option for you, and a guide to finding the right kind of support.

—Leslie Graves

## **Are you suffering from post-abortion stress? These questions can help you find out**

If you have had an abortion(s), you may be suffering from post-abortion stress. The risk is even higher if it was an unwanted, coerced, deceptively informed or even forced abortion, which is not unusual. Answering the following questions can help you determine how the abortion(s) experience may have affected your life.

Do you find yourself struggling to turn off feelings or memories related to your abortion(s)? Do you need to keep reminding yourself to just forget it or put it behind you?

Do you become uncomfortable around reminders of the abortion, such as being around babies, pregnant women, doctor's offices, or when hearing news reports about abortion?

Do you feel nervous or anxious at the idea of telling a loved one about your abortion? Is your abortion a secret that is holding you back from greater intimacy with others?

When you do choose to share your abortion experience with others, are you overcome with strong feelings such as anger, sorrow, grief, or guilt?

Do you have trouble talking about the abortion issue as a political issue? When you do talk about it, do you find it hard to respect opposing views, or do you become overly emotional, either in support of or opposition to it?

Do you have an unhealthy sense of fear that you, your loved ones, or your other children will be hurt or killed? Are you "smothering" or overly protective of your children?

Do you tend to look at life in terms of "before" and "after" the abortion(s)? Has the abortion changed the way you look at yourself? Are there traits about your "self" before the abortion that you lost but would wish to regain in your life? Do you become angry or depressed more easily?

Have you experienced "reconnectors" to your abortion, such as nightmares, flashbacks, or hallucinations, such as hearing a baby cry?

Was there a period after your abortion when you experienced an increase in the use of alcohol or drugs (illegal or prescription)? Have you experienced other forms of emotional deadening?

Have you experienced any suicidal thoughts? Do you take risks that put your life in danger? Do you try to hurt yourself? Have you developed any eating disorders?

Have you lost interest in taking care of yourself? Do you care about how you look? Have you tried to become less attractive to avoid the risk of becoming involved in a relationship, love, and sex?

Do you have trouble with finding, building, or maintaining good relationships with people of the opposite sex? Do you have trouble with issues of trust and control? Do you get involved in hurtful or abusive relationships? Do you tolerate abuse because you don't feel you deserve any better?

Is there an increased distance between you and your parents or siblings because of the past abortion(s)? Is there tension between you and others because the abortion is something everyone avoids talking about?

Have you lost your desire for a healthy sexual relationship or become promiscuous because of low self-esteem? Have you lost your desire to have children?

Do you experience periods of depression, heightened anxiety, or physical symptoms during certain months of the year, particularly during the months that would correspond to the month of your abortion(s) or the due date of the aborted pregnancy?

Have you lost your faith? Have you lost a sense of God's peace? Do you think God still loves you? Are you afraid of God? Have you rejected belief in God for emotional reasons rather than thoughtful reasons?

If you are experiencing any of the above problems, post-abortion counseling may help. Skilled and understanding people want to help. Many have been through the same things you are going through now. There are many post-abortion counselors and support groups, often run by individuals who have had abortions or were directly or indirectly involved in abortion. They can help you find out how to deal with your experience. There are options for men, children and families, too. In some cases, repeat abortions are an aftereffect of complex psychological issues surrounding abortion-related trauma.

Please seek assistance via post-abortion counselors and support groups. A list of national groups that offer support nationwide can be found at the end of this booklet.

Many pregnancy help groups (sometimes called crisis pregnancy or pregnancy resource centers) also offer support after abortion. Local groups can be found by checking with the national affiliates listed on pages 14-15 of this booklet or looking in the Yellow Pages under "Abortion Alternatives." You can also learn more online at [www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm](http://www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm).

*Please note:* While efforts were made to check out all of the organizations listed here, inclusion in this booklet does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by the Elliot Institute of any organization, their philosophies, or their practices.

## Many options are available

When seeking support and healing for post-abortion trauma, one basic choice is between group support or one-on-one counseling. If you're not sure whether a group setting or an individual setting is a better fit for you at this time, go to the sections below titled: "**Is group support the right choice?**" and "**Is one-on-one counseling for you?**" for a brief discussion about things to consider for each.

Another choice is between in-person support (attending a weekend retreat, working with a therapist, a clergyperson or a peer counselor, or going to a weekly group) or online support (online chats, Internet message boards, email groups). Several organizations offer a combination of email or Internet-based group support and in-person support. See the "**In-person or online support?**" section below for reflections on these options.

Another choice is between programs with a spiritual component and those without. Spiritual beliefs are personal and are often tied-in with how we look at abortion in general and our own experience with abortion in particular. It is not uncommon to feel that we are unacceptable to God if we have had an abortion, or to feel that abortion is "the unforgivable sin." That pain is indeed hard to bear, and it is one reason that many, but not all, post-abortion groups have a spiritual basis. There is information about that with each listing at the end of this booklet.

### ***Is group support right for you? Some things to consider***

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it." —Helen Keller

"Mutual help groups are a powerful and constructive means for people to help themselves and each other. The basic dignity of each human being is expressed in his or her capacity to be involved in a reciprocal helping exchange. Out of this compassion comes cooperation. From this cooperation comes community." —Phyllis Silverman, Ph.D., Dept of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, from *Introduction to the Self-Help Sourcebook*, 1995, p. 24

Research indicates that self-help groups can have a powerfully positive impact on us. In post-abortion healing, this would be found at a weekend retreat, a weekly bible study or recovery group, in a structured online group or in a more free-wheeling e-group.

Yet, entering into a group can be scary. Imagine going to a first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and saying for the first time outside the privacy of your own mind, "I am an alcoholic." Or even just going to the first practice of a sports team at your new high school, or any other new group setting.

It's common to have many anxieties and fears about attending a weekend retreat or group support meetings. "Will my

confidentiality truly be respected?” “Even if people didn’t say anything harsh, will I witness fleeting facial expressions of condemnation and judgment, and experience even more shame?” “What if I start crying and can’t stop?” “Will I be the only one there with multiple abortions?” The people who coordinate your particular support group probably experienced the very same fears at one point, and will be able to talk about them with you.

Besides abortion, you may have had other experiences in your life that cause you to experience other people as damaging and untrustworthy. Meeting others in groups is a chance to experience people who are safe and trustworthy. If you have had bad experiences with people, it can feel risky. The rewards can be as great as the risk.

For a helpful website with good information about the advantages of mutual self-help groups, visit [www.mentalhealth.net](http://www.mentalhealth.net). Look for the article, “The Value of Self-Help Support Groups” (<http://www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/selfhelp.php?id=865>).

Jilly, who offers online support through her own PASS website, wrote this about the value of group support:

I run one every three months, and it is a ‘private’ board on the message board system, so the group meeting for the experience has a private board and private chat room. It seems that of the women who start, usually about 30 percent end up dropping out ... either they find they aren’t ready for it yet, or real life things come round and take up their spare time and they don’t have the time to do it; but, for those who stay in, it seems to be a very binding and healing experience. The women who do the group tend to ‘stick together’ on the main boards afterwards, and end up becoming ‘phone friends’ and even get together in real life now and then. It seems to be a very good way for women to start healing.

Theresa Burke of Rachel’s Vineyard ([www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org)) shares her thoughts on the value of a group support experience in *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*:

The profound healing that Michelle experienced was new to her, but not to me. I have been privileged to witness literally thousands of such transforming moments, when the labor of grief ends in the birth of a new, restored woman. It is as though an emotional key turns, simultaneously releasing all the muck and grime and weight of past abortions while opening a door to a fresh new future. ...Tears of sorrow are mixed with tears of joy as women and men experience their first taste of freedom after years of cruel bondage.

But such healing can only happen when the isolation and secrecy are dismantled, and one’s story is revealed to others who do not seek to judge or condemn. Only then is it finally possible, with the support of a small community of others who compassionately affirm the loss and respect the grief, to grieve one’s losses to their fullness. The importance of social support to the grief process reflects an important aspect of our human nature. Though we are individuals, we are inescapably social beings. The lack of social support will degrade or destroy our well-being. Conversely, the experience of social support, in even a single relationship, can strengthen our well-being.

For most of us, it is only when we have the support of others who will not judge or condemn us that we feel safe from social rejection. This support makes it easier for us to confront and explore the deepest part of our souls. With it, one learns how to accept forgiveness from God and one’s aborted child. With it, one learns how to extend forgiveness to oneself and others. And with it, one discovers how the most difficult, soul-breaking experiences imaginable can be used as the foundation for building a richer, deeper, and more meaningful existence.

—From p. 246 of *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*

### ***Is one-on-one help the best option for you? Some things to consider***

One-on-one support and therapy as you begin to heal from post-abortion trauma could come in several forms. You could seek help:

- from a mental health professional (a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, social worker, or other mental health clinician)

- from a clergyperson
- from a peer-counselor who may use a recovery approach and meet with you one-on-one for a period of weeks at a time convenient to both of you. (Generally, these sessions will be free or have a very low cost.)
- Individual email counseling through a number of different online sites that offer it.

Advantages of one-on-one counseling include:

- Flexible scheduling
- Ability to tailor sessions to your particular issues
- Privacy

Here is an excerpt from a comment made by someone who participated in one-on-one sessions with a peer counselor from *Victims of Choice*:

My 10 counseling sessions have ended with my lay counselor from Victims of Choice (VOC), and I wanted to write and thank you for this life changing experience.

I learned of the VOC Ministry when you led a workshop at our church. I attended it because I was curious about a ministry dealing with men and women who have had abortions. Although I considered myself a committed Christian and had known the Lord for 15 years, I evaded the issue with Him that I too had had an abortion 25 years ago. I knew abortion was wrong and for years I had conditioned myself not to think about it. I told no one about my abortion – struggling to stay in denial even to myself.

The abortion experience itself is very traumatic for a woman to endure. I learned that years of sleepless nights and other phobias were directly related to my abortion. My low self-esteem was mostly due to the tremendous guilt ... hidden deep in my heart so no one could see what an awful thing I had done.

But our wonderful God loved me too much to allow me to be in bondage to this buried sin. I clung to Isaiah 50:7 that says the Lord God will help us. I would set my face like a flint and ask Him to help me get over being so ashamed.

After the workshop, I contacted VOC and made an appointment with a lay counselor. I really appreciated the discreet way in which I was treated. This very special person helped me to feel God's cleansing, healing and forgiving love!"

Here is a web link that offers advice on finding a compatible therapist: [www.nacronline.com/dox/gethelp/therapy.shtml](http://www.nacronline.com/dox/gethelp/therapy.shtml).

### ***In person or online support?***

In-person support for post-abortion healing would either be on a weekend retreat, one-on-one counseling with a therapist, clergyperson or lay facilitator, or a weekly support group.

Online support would be through a message board, e-group, online recovery group, scheduled or spontaneous online chats, or email.

People often wonder how the online experience stacks up against face-to-face experiences. Therapists wonder whether online therapy can be effective, Catholics wonder what it means to pray before the Blessed Sacrament that is displayed on a web page, young lovers wonder if it is "real" love if you only know the person online.

For most people, as they journey toward healing, face-to-face contact is likely to end up being very important at some point. Online support, however, has great strengths. For most people, it is not an either/or choice (either in-person or online support) but a both/and choice (both in-person and online support).

Jilly from the PASS web site notes that participants on those message boards have shared these perspectives on the online experience:

- **Convenience** — the ease of being able to “communicate” and discuss this on their computer, in the privacy of their own home, at times that are convenient for them.
- **Privacy** — the anonymity of using a computer and not having to talk face to face right away about what was and is for some a totally upsetting and incredibly painful issue.
- **Safety** — they like not having to use their real name, and be private.
- **Ease** — Also for many women it is easier to type things than to say them, especially when it comes to this issue!

I think there’s still much to be gained from an in-person hug, and an in-person group, but if there isn’t one in a woman’s area, or she is not ready for the step of going out into ‘public’ with this, an online group is invaluable! My online groups have had women from the US, Canada, Mexico, Australia, England, Ireland, Sweden, Italy, Soviet Georgia, France and Germany in them — this just wouldn’t be possible with an in-person group!

## **Basic expectations when seeking counseling**

### *What you have a right to expect from a therapist or group*

There are many options and things to consider when seeking help. There are certain basic things you have a right to expect when seeking individual or group counsel or other types of help. If you feel that you are not being treated with the respect you deserve, move on until you find the people or program that works for you.

- 1. Confidentiality.** Your confidentiality and privacy should be strictly respected at all times, unless you are threatening harm to yourself or others. Also, no one should share the details of your story—even if no one would recognize that it is about you—with others without your explicit permission.
- 2. No pressure to “tell your story.”** Because of wanting to reach out to those who still suffer, many people who have experienced post-abortion trauma do share their story with friends or in public. This is a very personal decision, with many, many factors that you will need to consider. If you indicate an interest in raising awareness through sharing your story, a good support group will encourage you to carefully discern what is truly best for you, and to take plenty of time in making this decision.
- 3. Prompt response.** If you email an organization, you should expect a response within 48 hours. If you call a hotline or therapist and get voicemail, you should get detailed information about when you can speak to someone in person. If you leave a message, you should get a call back within 48 hours.
- 4. No political component.** The program should not include any political component at all. Because pro-life organizations were inclined to believe that post-abortion syndrome exists, pro-life groups were and are very important in supporting post-abortion research and healing. By contrast, some pro-choice activists can feel threatened by the idea that abortion can hurt a woman emotionally or spiritually, and react in damaging and defensive ways to your pain. Bottom line: You may find help from a source you did not expect, but you should probably steer clear of any therapist, clergyperson or healing program that in any way will use or minimize your pain or vulnerability or tells you that you have to be pro-life or pro-choice to receive help or to heal.
- 5. Respect and professionalism.** The program and the individuals involved with it should be nonjudgmental, respectful, and knowledgeable.
- 6. Avoid “quick fixes” and “spiritual band-aids.”** See this article, “On Quick Fixes” by Dale Ryan for more information: [www.nacronline.com/dox/library/daler/quick.shtml](http://www.nacronline.com/dox/library/daler/quick.shtml)

## Be wise when seeking wisdom

### *Advice from experts on post-abortion healing*

Some words to the wise from Theresa Burke, PhD, founder of Rachel's Vineyard and co-author with David Reardon, PhD, of *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*:

Post-abortion healing is a specialty unto itself. The average psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or counselor of any other academic stripe who does not understand post-abortion issues can often inflict more harm than good on the unsuspecting woman. Many may believe they have enough insight to help, but unless they have had additional training, they often don't. Certainly, if your thoughts and feelings become so overwhelming that you feel you can no longer cope, seek professional assistance immediately. But generally, I encourage you to take the time to find one of the growing number of professional therapists and experienced lay counselors who have received special training in post-abortion healing.

Here is a longer excerpt from the book *Forbidden Grief* that is another word to the wise as you think about seeking help with any post-abortion issues you may be experiencing:

The interaction between therapists and women who have experienced abortion may be obstructed by unspoken secrets, fears and political biases. It should be no surprise that because of their own psychological needs, many counselors simply don't want to delve into the subject of abortion. If they do, some prefer to quickly reassure clients that they did the best thing and thereby close off any further expressions of grief. In some cases, this occurs because many counselors have neglected to identify their own fears and anxieties that might be aroused by such conversations.

Many therapists may have been involved in an abortion themselves. Others may have encouraged clients to abort or may have given their therapeutic 'blessing' to the abortion option for clients considering abortion. This is often done out of ignorance, including research showing that women with prior psychological problems fare poorly after abortion. . . . While some therapists may simply be ignorant of these undisputed findings, others simply ignore or disbelieve them for their own psychological, political or other reasons.

Once a counselor has encouraged or approved of an abortion for Patient A, he or she may become 'invested' in defending abortion. If he or she subsequently allows Patient B to delve into her post-abortion grief and associated pathologies, then the counselor may be forced to question his or her advice to Patient A. The counselor may be instinctively wary of witnessing an intense post-abortion reaction because it may provoke his or her own sense of guilt in having given Patient A bad advice.

Julianne described her experience with her therapist this way:

After my abortion, I could not stop crying. I went to see the therapist who had encouraged me to have the abortion. I cried the whole time there. She sat across from me with a blank look on her face. She said nothing. During this session she was removed and distant — emotionally cold and withdrawn.

As I was leaving her office, she came up to me and said, "I don't usually touch my patients, but you look like you need a hug." She then proceeded to embrace my shoulders and offer a squeeze. I felt like I was being embraced by an evil presence. I shuddered at her touch. How dare she even come near me! A hug! I was sickened at the thought of such a trite expression — after having encouraged me to kill my own child!

Never a word of support for my motherhood! Not an alternative plan, or a resource to help me. She knew I didn't want another abortion. She told me to have an (expletive deleted) abortion because I would not be able to handle another baby.

Then she offered me a hug!

God, I miss my baby. That's who I wanted to hug ... my baby who is gone, whom I will never hold or cuddle.

If the therapist has personally had an abortion, a client's confession of grief is quite likely to run into either a wall of denial or another quagmire of unsettled issues.

According to Hanna, another of Dr. Burke's clients:

I thought I had put my own experiences behind me. I was totally unprepared for the onset of emotions evoked by hearing one of my clients talk about her abortion. There are times when I feel as though I have opened a Pandora's box and my life will never be normal again. Memories I did not know existed have been surfacing at the most inopportune times. My sleeping hours are plagued by graphic nightmares. I vacillate between feeling in control and fully out of control. As a professional counselor, I struggle to find a bridge that will allow me to merge my professional expertise with my personal trauma. "Physician, heal thyself!" I do know that the time to reconcile this is now and that it is no accident. I have arrived at this particular fork in the road.

Fortunately, Hanna recognized her own symptoms that screamed for attention and decided to seek help. She was willing to deal with the trauma that she had for many years successfully pushed away but had never truly worked through.

(The above excerpt is from pages 60-61 of *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*, by Theresa Burke, Ph.D with David Reardon, Ph.D.)

## **What does recovery feel like?**

*You will reach a turning point*

Almost anyone who has had a lot of recovery and healing from traumatic experiences and loss will tell you that you never stop healing this side of Heaven. Yet, for many people a turning point comes when they can say, "I am not in that black hole any longer." It's like falling in love ... when it happens, you'll know.

### **Please keep trying!**

**Until you find a compassionate therapist or program that works for *you***

If you have tried a particular therapist or support group, and you still regularly experience one or more of these symptoms in relation to abortion:

- Flashbacks or nightmares
- Compulsive thoughts and feelings that started after the abortion
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Depression or anxiety
- Lack of attachment to your children
- Feelings of self-hatred
- Feelings of shame
- Social isolation
- Relationship difficulties
- Compulsive or addictive behaviors that started after abortion

Then I would urge you to try a different program or therapist. As they say in 12-step programs, "You're not a failure until you fail to try." Here's a link to a good article on reaching out for help: [http://www.nacronline.com/dox/library/dalew/dw\\_help.shtml](http://www.nacronline.com/dox/library/dalew/dw_help.shtml)

—Leslie Graves



## COUNSELING & OTHER RESOURCES



*Pregnancy- and abortion-related help, information  
and resources for individuals and families.*

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### HELP FOR THOSE BEING COERCED TO ABORT

#### **Center Against Forced Abortions**

(210) 614-7157

[www.thejusticefoundation.org/cafa](http://www.thejusticefoundation.org/cafa)

Provides legal resources and help for pregnant teens or women being coerced or forced into unwanted abortions. Also offers pregnancy center training.

support for women facing crisis pregnancies. Offers help in finding employment, dealing with school, medical and legal help and more.

#### **Mom, Dad ... I'm Pregnant**

Available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Book helps families facing the unplanned pregnancy of their teen/young adult daughter or son.

### PREGNANCY ASSISTANCE

#### **Bethany Christian Services**

1-800-238-4269

[www.bethany.org](http://www.bethany.org)

Offers pregnancy counseling, foster care, housing for pregnant women, family and marital counseling, and adoption services.

#### **Birthright**

1-800-550-4900

[www.birthright.org](http://www.birthright.org)

Offers pregnancy testing, clothing, parenting classes, adoption services, medical care, family counseling, and referrals for legal assistance.

#### **Caret/Option Line**

1-800-395-HELP (4351)

[www.optionline.org](http://www.optionline.org)

Offers pregnancy tests, maternity clothes, medical and professional services, and care for single mothers. Trained consultants take phone calls and email 24 hours a day.

#### **Heartbeat International**

1-888-550-7577

[www.heartbeatinternational.org](http://www.heartbeatinternational.org)

Offers pregnancy assistance, maternity homes, and adoption counseling.

#### **The Nurturing Network**

1-800-866-4666

[www.nurturingnetwork.org](http://www.nurturingnetwork.org)

Nationwide network of volunteers provides

### HELP AFTER ABORTION

#### **Abortion Recovery International**

1-866-1-866-469-7326

[www.abortionrecovery.org](http://www.abortionrecovery.org)

Provides information and counseling for those suffering after abortion through a network of counselors and ministries. Find counselors by zip code on their web site.

#### **Caret/Option Line**

1-800-395-HELP (4351)

[www.optionline.org](http://www.optionline.org)

Refers for individual or group peer counseling throughout the country. Trained consultants take phone calls and email 24 hours a day.

#### **Hope Alive USA**

(479) 855-0072

[www.HopeAliveUSA.org](http://www.HopeAliveUSA.org)

Group treatment programs for survivors of abortion or child abuse, siblings of aborted children, and those hurting after pregnancy loss.

#### **Lumina: Hope & Healing After Abortion**

(877) 586-4621

[www.postabortionhelp.org](http://www.postabortionhelp.org)

Offers group programs, retreats, and referrals to professional therapists, ministries, and clergy members trained in post abortion stress.

#### **National Memorial for the Unborn**

1-800-505-5565

[www.memorialfortheunborn.org](http://www.memorialfortheunborn.org)

Memorial for parents and families to remember

children lost to abortion. Offers referrals to post-abortion ministries nationwide.

**National Office of Post Abortion  
Reconciliation & Healing**

1-800-593-2273

[www.noparb.org](http://www.noparb.org)

Project Rachel program offers support to women and men of all faiths through a network of clergy, spiritual directors, and therapists.

**Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**

1-877-467-3463

[www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org)

Offers post-abortion support groups and weekend retreats in the U.S. and abroad. See the web site for a schedule of upcoming retreats.

**Ramah International**

(941) 473-2188

[www.ramahinternational.org](http://www.ramahinternational.org)

Provides Christian counseling and support for post-abortive women.

and families after abortion. Find counselors by zip code on their web site.

**Lumina: Hope & Healing After Abortion**

(877) 586-4621

[www.postabortionhelp.org](http://www.postabortionhelp.org)

Offers group programs, retreats, an referrals to professional therapists, ministries, and clergy members trained in post abortion stress.

**Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**

1-877-467-3463

[www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm)

Offers help through weekend retreats and one-on-one email support.

**Reclaiming Fatherhood Site**

[www.menandabortion.info](http://www.menandabortion.info)

A site helpful with articles and healing resources for men who have lost a child to abortion.

*Find more information and resources for men at [www.theunchoice.com/men.htm](http://www.theunchoice.com/men.htm).*

## SUPPORT FOR MEN AFTER ABORTION

**Abortion Recovery International**

1-866-1-866-469-7326

[www.abortionrecovery.org](http://www.abortionrecovery.org)

Provides information and counseling for men

## OTHER RESOURCES

*Many groups listed here also offer support for grandparents, siblings and others hurt by abortion. Learn more at [www.theunchoice.com/helpforothers.htm](http://www.theunchoice.com/helpforothers.htm).*

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

This is just a partial list of the many national organizations that offer referrals or support for those facing pregnancy-related challenges, being coerced or forced into an unwanted abortion, or struggling with a past abortion. Local pregnancy centers and post-abortion support groups may also be listed in the Yellow Pages or online under "Abortion Alternatives."

While efforts were made to check out all of the organizations listed here, inclusion in this list does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by the Elliot Institute of any organization, their philosophies, or their practices.

Post-abortion ministries may offer a variety of different formats and approaches. Some are staffed by volunteers who offer peer counseling or other types of support, while others are staffed by professional therapists or counselors. An organization may offer support in a group setting, a Bible-study format, or one-on-one with a counselor or spiritual director. Individuals, couples or families seeking help should ask lots of questions in order to find a group or counselor with whom they feel comfortable. **Counseling services are confidential and, in many cases, free.**

Some people, especially those with a history of psychological problems or other trauma that may complicate healing, may need the help of a professional counselor. They should be put in touch with a therapist who has experience and training specifically in the field of post-abortion counseling. A post-abortion counseling ministry may be able to refer clients to a professional counselor if they do not have someone on staff.

Learn more about post-abortion counseling ministries at [www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm](http://www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm)

## **Additional Notes & Resources**

Use this page to list local groups that offer help during pregnancy or after abortion, or any additional information that may be helpful.