

How Women Cope after an Abortion

The vast majority of research on post abortion emotions shows that abortion is NOT an event that causes severe repercussions for most women. The majority of women report feeling positive about their decision, relieved and able to move forward with their lives. These positive feelings can sometimes be mixed with troublesome feelings of sadness, loss, regret, anger or guilt, which may be related to the abortion or other personal issues.

It is important to remember that your body has undergone certain changes after an abortion. Crying during and post recovery can be due to different factors that can contribute to your feelings such as:

- ◆ Relief and releasing tension
- ◆ Feeling physically uncomfortable
- ◆ Emotional feelings due to the pain relief medication/ anaesthesia
- ◆ The drop in the amount of hormones in your body
- ◆ Change in the type of contraception now using
- ◆ Relationship changes
- ◆ Lack of support, eg family, friends
- ◆ Societal stigma about abortion

SADNESS

Sometimes people think they are experiencing guilt or regret when actually they are feeling sad. Try to explore what you are feeling sad about so it isn't just a vague feeling, when you are specific you can do more about it. It is important to trust in yourself in regard to making a decision to have an abortion. Remember you can still feel sad and know in your heart the decision was for the best. Good decisions can be hard to make and cause sadness. Try and look at what you have gained from the experience (eg control over your body and decisions) and not just dwell on what you may have lost.

Loss

When people experience a loss, they may need to grieve. When you grieve actively you may go through stages of denial, depression, anger, and acceptance. These feelings will generally come at their own pace. It is a painful but necessary process in order to achieve peace of mind. It is common to move forward and then find yourself stumbling back through the stages, if so don't think you aren't doing well, this is part of the 'normal' grieving process.

GUILT

Guilt is a feeling that results from believing you have done something wrong. Guilt can be the

result of not listening to yourself or acting in a way that is right for you but goes against what others wanted. The feelings of guilt can be useful if it motivates you to decide what you can do to take better care of yourself in the future. Once you make this decision, continuing to feel guilt only drains damages and defeats you. Remember you have the ability to control your feelings. Self-acceptance depends on what you say to yourself and do.

ANGER

Everyone gets mad, and feels hurt and angry at times. When people refuse to acknowledge their anger they may turn it on themselves and feel depressed. It is more constructive to admit you are feeling angry and discover what it is you feel angry about and then cope with these feelings. Talk to someone who will listen and get it off your chest. If you are mad at yourself then you need to forgive yourself and avoid hurting or punishing yourself or others.

REGRET

In the context of abortion the word regret may mean many different things such as regretting being in the situation of having an unplanned pregnancy and having to make a decision.

People who regret their decision may think about the “if only’s” and then use these thoughts as punishment and suffering. ‘If only’s’ come from hindsight and rather than being used as valuable learning tools, they can keep you feeling disappointed in yourself. Talking these feelings over with someone who is non-judgmental can be helpful. It is important to reassure yourself that you made the best decision with the information you had at the time.

The most important thing to remember is that you may experience various emotions after the abortion, but that does not necessarily indicate that you made the wrong decision. If you are ever unsure, or unhappy with the level of coping after your abortion, please feel free to contact the PAC as we do provide counselling services for women post abortion if needed. Counselling services can be provided both face to face and over the phone by appointment by phoning the PAC during office hours.

REFERENCES:

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De Puy, C. & Dovitch, D. 1997 “*The Healing Choice*” Hodder & Stoughton.

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