

# Healing Post Abortion Grief

*If I knew then  
What I know now,  
You never would have died.  
I'd have held you close  
And nurtured you  
And kept you by my side.  
I'd have sung you songs  
And treasured you  
More than silver,  
More than gold:  
But this song is all I'll give  
To a babe I'll never hold.*

*I've never written poetry  
That hasn't been praise  
To the Lord who wept with me  
And held me through those days.  
Jesus, now I'm asking  
I know You hear my plea  
Won't You take that child in Your Hands  
And hold my Babe for me.'*

*Terri Lynne-Hurst*

## **Abortion can be a Deeply Wounding Human Experience**

Perhaps you have a vague ache somewhere in your being, that is frequently referred to as the heart. Perhaps it is worse than that. Your abortion may have left you psychologically incapacitated. Your self-esteem may be at an all time low. You may be suffering depression, anger, unrelenting fears, nightmares, preoccupation with the baby's would-be birth date, its age or a need to have another baby, often called an atonement child.

Many women and men undertake self-destructive behaviours ranging from drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders to suicide attempts. Many believe that they are going 'out of their minds', or that there is something wrong with them.

### **The Importance of Hope**

Many women and men describe abortion as a death experience. Death confronts us to explore more fully our deeply held beliefs. If you do not have a spiritual framework in which to process your pain, you may wish to go through the motions outlined anyway. And then, over time reflect on your own responses. It may help you to gain deeper insights into yourself.

*'...I have felt reluctant to expose my deepest feelings only to have you deny or dismiss them.*

*This probably sounds rather paranoid, but is a reaction I have experienced often enough to make it a real fear.'*

*Catherine*

### **1. Your healing is within you**

Give your baby human status...

denied to him/her when they called it 'a few cells adhering to the uterine wall' or 'the product of conception' or a 'blob of jelly' by -

- giving him/her a name
- calculating her/his age if she/he were alive
- committing him/her to God's care in prayer.

### **2. Reflect on what led up to the decision**

The reasons for the abortion decision being carried through are often very complex. For some, the decision was made after careful consideration of all available information believing it was the most responsible choice but were unprepared for the debilitating pain and guilt.

For others, it was a crisis decision. Fears of rejection, or feeling unable to cope, panic, confusion, loss of self confidence and a greater dependence on others in a time of crisis, contributed to their vulnerability.

Many are pressured into the abortion by boyfriends, husbands, family, friends and even by health care providers. Deception and manipulation during that time of crisis, when the need for help and support from others is paramount, only adds to the trauma experienced.

Some women are so overwhelmed with responsibilities for loved ones that they are 'disconnected from self'. Many women have abortions still in a state of indecision, and have found themselves powerless to stop or 'get off' the abortion process, trusting in the judgement of health providers.

The very nature of women and their expected roles can make many women vulnerable to being pressured into aborting for the convenience of others.

So many influences come into play that can even date back to childhood. It takes time and mature reflection. Sharing with someone you can trust, or working through with a trained counsellor can be very helpful.

*'I cannot truly speak for you...all I can do is to be loyal to a certain still voice within me, a voice that I believed was betrayed when I had my abortion. Perhaps only one thing makes such courage possible: my love for someone I never saw or knew and for whom I have experienced a grief that seems fantastic, almost absurd, particularly since his or her very existence, and certainly importance, is almost universally denied. That love has a clarity and conviction that, finally and too late, I believed enough to act on.'*

*Catherine*

### **3. Accept grief as normal**

Grieving is a normal response to a significant loss. When grieving people find their right to grieve denied or not recognised, they feel rejected, devalued and their integrity denied. Often, they too then reject their grief, but act it out in different and frequently unhealthy ways. Just because our social environment does not recognise the loss or how profound it is, this does not negate it, but rather adds to the pain. Acknowledge that you are responding normally to a tragic loss.

## **There can be many griefs with abortion:**

loss of the unborn child  
the thwarted innate need to protect  
loss of the mother / father I could have been  
loss of the person I was  
losses as a result of the abortion trauma  
    relationships, careers, opportunities,  
    health, joy of living ...  
spiritual wound

Knowledge will empower you, but **grief needs to be expressed**. For healing, one needs to reconnect with feelings, the emotion and the pain. These need to be experienced. This is enormously difficult for those who have had to develop a life of being disconnected from their feelings.

### **4. Delegate responsibility**

It is important to take responsibility and also delegate responsibility honestly. This usually takes time and perspective to fully explore, and re-explore. It is not easy. It takes a great deal of personal courage and self honesty.

**‘Choice’ does not absolve health providers of their responsibilities. When a woman says afterwards ‘I wish I’d seen past my panic’ it represents a failure of health care providers to protect people in crisis from being exploited.**

It is important to ‘take ownership of the act’, to acknowledge your part in the abortion and its consequences.

You may wish to approach others also responsible for your abortion. However, unless they are people you can trust to listen to you openly, with maturity and to respond with sincerity, we recommend professional support. The outcome, while in the long-term beneficial, can be in the short-term very painful, even traumatic.

Note: Repeat abortions are often an indication that very deep damage has occurred. Do not be too hard on yourself or others who have had multiple abortions.

## 5. Forgiveness

One of the most serious consequences of not being able to forgive is that we become 'bonded' to those who have deeply hurt us.

To say 'forgiveness isn't easy' is a gross understatement. It is a truly demanding and difficult work of the heart.

Genuine forgiveness

is not excusing,  
is not forgetting  
nor is it reconciliation.

It is a gift, (regardless of whether or not it is appreciated)  
it is unconditional  
it is an act of strength.

Genuine forgiveness releases us from the past and from the control of those who have hurt us. It enables you to enter into new relationships without a lot of emotional baggage. It prevents your past from sabotaging your future.

Make a decision to forgive, and then let it happen.

Making a decision can be as simple as saying 'I want to forgive myself and others involved' then wait.

**Resurfacing anger** is an indication that more thought and work needs to be done in the area of delegating responsibility and forgiveness.

### Do You Really Want to be Healed?

For some, 'the pain', is their only connection with the little one they have lost. A kind of thwarted maternal (or paternal) instinct clings to this pain. It is all they have left to know their little one even existed. The abortion experience was a betrayal of trust. To say good-bye to the pain and to trust again can be daunting.

**'When people will not or can not acknowledge anger, they may think they have forgiven when actually they have merely traded anger for resentment.'**

## **6. Accept and Trust in the Completeness of God's Forgiveness**

- say you are sorry to your baby and to God
- accept your child's forgiveness through God's love
- love your child
- let your unborn child love you
- and begin to love yourself again

### **Letting Go**

When you have worked through your feelings and have come to terms with what has been and what now is. give up guilt, grief, remorse and regret.

Letting go grief and guilt, forgiving others and self and finally letting your baby go to eternal rest, all require individual and separate decisions. This takes time.

### **Don't Go It Alone**

Human grief needs the support and validation from others whom we trust and look to. (Because of your vulnerability, be wise in whom you choose to share your pain with). For those who have support and affirming love this process will be difficult enough. For those who were not loved, affirmed or validated as human beings of dignity, the journey is especially difficult. You may need professional support.

**From one who has healed.....**

**'For me the miracle of life,  
somehow still exists within death.  
So I commit to live,  
because I believe in love,  
and forgiveness,  
and I will never forget,  
you,  
my little one'.**

## Seeking Professional Help

Over past decades the resistance to acknowledging abortion trauma, because of political implications, has made it very difficult for health professionals. However, progress is slowly but surely being made.

On a small scale, counselling, group therapy, retreats and ritual services are being offered in various states around Australia. For details, contact Abortion Grief Australia Inc. on the numbers listed below.

If you are unable to access a counsellor skilled in abortion trauma, other therapists, for example, grief /trauma counsellors or psychotherapist may be able to help if they are open to abortion trauma.

We suggest phoning first, to enquire if the counsellor is experienced in abortion trauma. Their tone and response will give an indication of their ability in this area. If they have no experience, but genuinely seem open to abortion grief/trauma, take our information with you. If they understand the principles involved and have good skills, they should be able to help.

**Note:** Abortion referral agencies and institutions, because of their role in facilitating denial, have a conflict of interest and are quite inappropriate venues for abortion grief therapy.

## Information Empowers

Although this brochure is a guide only, keep it and other information on abortion grief in a safe place. There will be times when you will want to deal with the pain and times when you will need to put the grief work 'on hold'. Finally, be patient with yourself and be kind to yourself.

This grief process takes time.



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Website: [www.abortiongrief.asn.au](http://www.abortiongrief.asn.au)

AGA is a tax deductible charity

# *A fathers grief*

*To my brave and beautiful boy, Sam*

*Letting go of you is hard, but like you, I have to be brave and let you go and fly freely in heaven.*

*As you were a gift here on Earth you are a gift up there in heaven.*

*I am sorry from the bottom of my heart that you are not here.*

*I am sorry I wasn't there to support you and your mother during that beautiful time of her awareness of your presence.*

*And I forgive your mother for not allowing me to be aware of your presence on Earth, but I thank her from the bottom of my heart for telling me of your presence in Heaven.*

*You are a true spirit.*

*A free and loving child and that spirit is embodied in my heart.*

*And you are with God as I am.*

*We are both in His arms.*

*And I rejoice in that!*

*So now Sam, all I have to do to know you're resting peacefully is remember God and His acceptance of my love and then I see you there still resting in peace as always!*

*Goodbye my boy.*

*Be free.*

*Love always*

*Your Dad*

