

SUPPORT

AFTER ABORTION



KEYS TO HOPE AND HEALING

A joint resource from The Word Among Us Partners
& Support After Abortion

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& *Support After Abortion*

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Introduction to This Booklet

I am very grateful to share this *Support After Abortion* booklet with you. I am so sorry if you are hurting right now. How you feel is very real, and I know many women who have suffered like you. But there is hope: many have healed or are on the path to healing. And you can be too.

After your abortion, you may have experienced a range of emotions, from initial relief and confidence in your decision to regret, grief, guilt, or shame. You may even now be having flashbacks or bad dreams or experiencing a mix of emotions that surface from time to time. Perhaps you have thoughts such as:

“I did what I thought was right at the time, but . . . ”

“I wasn’t given an alternative option, but . . . ”

“I want to move forward with my life, but . . . ”

“I want to stop thinking about what happened, but . . . ”

If you’ve had any thoughts like these, please be open to what this booklet can offer you: keys for healing and hope. These *keys* will open up doors for anyone who has had an abortion or may have participated in an abortion. Will they take courage and willingness? Yes. Will they take time and openness? Yes. Will they possibly change your life? Yes!

I became involved in writing this booklet because I am passionate about helping women who have experienced an

abortion find healing. I've known or heard from women who have suffered for decades because of an abortion—one woman until the last weeks of her life. I'm happy to share that others learned there was support available and began the healing process much sooner. There is a need for healing material for women like you, and, in my heart, I want the good news of healing to be globally known.

As not everyone is looking for the support offered through personal or group counseling—and perhaps that's you—this booklet will hopefully meet you where you are at.

If your abortion is recent—perhaps within the last 24-48 hours—now may not be the time for you to work through this booklet. Instead, I'd like to ask you: Are you sleeping? Are you eating? And do you have someone to talk to? If you feel the need for immediate support and someone to talk to, please reach out to **Support After Abortion**, a wonderful organization that offers real-time assistance. Their contact information is on the back of this booklet.

A lot of information at once is not always helpful. Therefore, each key is broken down into two parts and followed by action steps to help you personalize and journal what you've read. I think you will find the stories of women who have had an abortion and who are now on their own path to healing very encouraging.

Don't feel the need to rush through each key in one sitting. Take a break if you need to: go for a walk, watch a movie, exercise, distract yourself somehow. Stay with a key until you feel you are ready to move on. One key builds on the next, so it's best to read them in order. Revisit any of the six keys

Introduction to This Booklet

as often as you need. You are a unique and special person on your own individual journey.

A suggestion I'd like to offer is that you journal your thoughts through this journey. Treat yourself to a paper journal or use your phone, laptop, or tablet. There are also blank pages in this booklet you can use to journal your thoughts.

So, are you ready to turn to the first key and open the door to begin your journey to hope and healing?

My thoughts are with all who will seek after abortion support through the keys offered in these pages.



Angela

Angela M. Burrin
The Word Among Us Partners

Key 1

Acknowledge Where You Are Now

You Are! *You are worthy of having a life that is happy and fulfilling. Spend thirty seconds recalling some fulfilling times in your life.*

If you are anything like me, I often skip the introduction at the front of books. Sometimes I make an exception, and I hope you will with this booklet. It is beneficial for navigating the booklet as well as understanding why each reflection is called a key. It isn't a long read—it should take you less than two minutes!

STEP 1

Most of us are asked at least once a day, “How are you?” We might smile and respond, “I’m fine,” even if it’s far from the truth. It’s a safe answer that usually doesn’t require us to share too much information, and we quickly move on.

Key 1: Acknowledge Where You Are Now is inviting you to stop and check in with yourself by asking, “How am I really doing following my abortion?” Identifying and acknowledging

Acknowledge Where You Are Now

your emotions is a crucial key to working through your abortion experience. Many overlook this critical step.

Right now, you might be ready to look at how you're feeling. On the other hand, maybe you're hesitant to start because you know it will be a painful exercise. Or perhaps you just don't see the value in acknowledging your emotions. If you identify with the last two groups, please don't talk yourself out of it. It is a choice that you won't regret.

This exercise is no small feat, and if you've picked up this booklet, I know you have great strength in you. Go at your own pace, pick up where you left off or restart a key. Everyone's needs are different. Try to remember that you are brave and worthy of healing. Keep your hope alive.

After an abortion, women may try to hide or repress their emotions. These emotions are different for everyone—they could include guilt, shame, despair, or a combination of all of these. Everyone is unique. It may seem like hiding or repressing emotions will help you heal. They may feel too overwhelming, and it may seem like addressing them will be uncomfortable. However, these emotions need to be acknowledged. An abortion does change you, and very few women are not affected in some way by their abortion.

While emotions may lessen over time, they won't just go away. They will always be just under the surface. Refusing to face emotions surrounding a loss such as an abortion can lead to unhealthy behaviors, as you will read in Lucille's story (on page 17 in next lesson "Key 2").

I want to remind you that every woman experiences a range of emotions that may come and go. They may get weaker or

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stronger when you are having thoughts or memories about your abortion experience.

There are a host of triggers to our emotions. If you find yourself becoming overwhelmed, it will help to reach out to **Support After Abortion** (www.supportafterabortion.com). Now it's time to take a pen or pencil to begin the first action part of this key.

Common Feelings Following Abortion

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Despair
- Relief
- Numbness
- Guilt
- Mood Swings
- Fear
- Optimism
- Shame
- Exhaustion
- Regret

Actions

- Circle the emotions in the box above that apply to you.
- Add others not listed that come to mind.
- Highlight or put an *asterisk next to your three strongest emotions.

The emotions you've just acknowledged are real and valid. It's where you are right now. Please give yourself permission to cry, especially if you haven't done so before. Crying is very healing.

If you're thinking, "I don't know what I'm feeling," that is also a very real and common experience. You've started the healing process! Other women have become numb and don't know what they are feeling. Be kind to yourself and read over the "Common Feelings Following Abortion" box again. Emotions come and go, and you may identify with some of these in time.

Now it's time to read Jessica's Hope Story.

Jessica's Hope Story

Mike and I had been dating for about two years when I got a *positive* on a home pregnancy test. We really loved each other, so I was confident that together we could talk through our options—keep the baby or place it up for adoption. What I hadn't anticipated was Mike's reaction of shock, fear, panic, and his refusal to talk about my being pregnant with his child.

The very next day, Mike made an appointment for me at an abortion clinic. When he told me about this, I was hurt that the man who said he loved me would do such a thing without talking to me first. I felt desperately alone as I didn't have anyone to talk to. That night I couldn't sleep. The thought of having an abortion kept going through my mind over and over again. It was a situation I never thought I'd find myself in.

By morning, I had bought into the claim that my baby was just tissue. But another part of me questioned whether this was true. While driving to the clinic, Mike tried to console me with, "You're doing the right thing." I cried throughout the procedure. I left that place feeling empty and broken and was in shock and in mourning. But I plastered on a fake smile and told everyone I was "fine."

Mike and I did get married, but we never talked about my abortion. I suffered in silence, but inside, I screamed anguish, anger, and deep regret almost every day, until one day, after sharing my story with a close friend, I said to Mike, “We have to talk about the abortion.”

I was grateful that Mike was open to talking and seeking professional help. We went to our first counseling session, which was such a huge decision for both of us. It was the first step toward seeking healing.

Years later, I decided to tell my story to a few women at a support group. When I cried, they cried with me and reached out with hugs. I left feeling loved and encouraged—another step toward healing.

What Do You Think?

- What did you take away from Jessica’s story?
- Can you relate to any of the emotions she felt?

STEP 2

Have you ever had a thought and then moments later you couldn’t remember what it was or recall what you were thinking at all? This happens to me all the time. That’s why I’d like to suggest that you keep a journal of your journey through the six keys in this booklet because I can assure you that you’re going to have a lot of thoughts, and some of them will be powerful. You will not want to forget them!

No one will see what you journal unless you choose to share it. You can be one hundred percent real and honest in what you

write. This includes any negative thoughts towards yourself: *I can't move forward*; *I won't heal*; or *I can't forgive myself*. There is no right or wrong way to keep a journal. It's all about what you want to express. Write or type as much or as little as you want. It's a good idea to date each entry. Poetry, a sketch, or a picture are all great additions and entirely up to you.

The very act of describing your emotions may help you become aware of your abortion's impact on your life. Together with reflection and meditation, it is a profound and impactful tool. As you journal, some emotions may come to mind that perhaps were hidden in your subconscious. Writing can also be incredibly helpful if you're feeling numb or finding it hard to acknowledge your emotions.

Women are often so adept at multitasking, but this is your time for healing. So please find some ways to relax and be mindful of *your* needs. When you journal, try to put away your phone and find some personal space. Sit outside in the fresh air, if that is comfortable for you, play some music, or do some deep breathing exercises—whatever helps you relax.

The benefits of keeping a journal while going through these keys are limitless. A journal is an excellent record of the transformation that is going to take place in your life in the coming days and weeks. It helps you keep track of where you are now and is so encouraging to read in the future!

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