

# 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

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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).

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** listed on the back of this booklet. Now it's time to take a pen or pencil to begin the first action part of this key.

### Common Feelings Following Abortion

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| • Anger      | • Guilt       |
| • Anxiety    | • Mood Swings |
| • Depression | • Fear        |
| • Loneliness | • Optimism    |
| • Despair    | • Shame       |
| • Relief     | • Exhaustion  |
| • Numbness   | • 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."

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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

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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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## Support After Abortion

### Actions

- Journal why you are working through this booklet.
- Journal what you have found helpful about **Key 1: Acknowledge Where You Are Now**.
- Take two to three minutes to recall and be grateful for some of the things in your life.

### Points to Review

- I need to be aware of what I'm thinking and feeling.
- Self-honesty is an important key that will lead me to experience hope and healing.

### Final Thought and Meditation

In this key, you may have discovered some challenging or painful emotions—well done in persevering. Until you have time to begin the second key, keep your eyes on your goal of healing and why you are going through this process. Recall some of the things you've discovered about yourself. You are stronger than you know.

*“I'm growing in self-awareness, and each feeling I have is valid.”*

### What to Expect in the Next Key

You've identified some of your emotions, and this is a huge step toward healing. **Key 2: You Are Not Alone** will help you begin working through the feelings you've identified. Please try to remain hopeful about why you are working through this booklet.