

Key 3

Freedom from Anger through Forgiveness

You Are! *You have an inner strength that may surprise you. Spend thirty seconds recalling when you did something that you thought was impossible.*

Key 2: You Are Not Alone opened the door to sharing the story of your abortion. By choosing to be vulnerable, you came to the realization that you are not alone and that other women have walked in your shoes. You were also invited to take some time just for you, which I hope you did. **Key 3: Freedom from Anger through Forgiveness** includes three steps, so take your time going through it!

STEP 1

Did you circle *anger* in the “Common Feelings Following Abortion” box in **Key 1: Acknowledge Where You Are Now?** Would you say you are more prone to anger since your abortion? If so, once again, you are not alone. Many women respond to their abortion with anger and may not realize there’s a connection.

One woman shared, “After my abortion, I had violent outbursts of anger that frightened me. And I didn’t know why.”

Anger is personal for everyone, and it’s not always easy to put the feelings it gives into words. It is very often the result of being displeased about things that we cannot control. For example, we may not like other people’s actions toward us, events that happen around us, or a host of different situations outside of ourselves that we cannot change.

Often, we can hold on to things that have already happened. We can become resentful or embroiled in anger over the past. This anger can cause us to be upset and snap or lash out at others or ourselves.

Sometimes, after an abortion, a woman can be resentful toward herself, the child’s father, family members, friends, or healthcare providers. This anger can show itself in many ways and destroy relationships, her way of life, and her peace of mind.

Have you ever done something fueled by anger and immediately regretted it? Anger can cause you to react or act out in ways that you usually wouldn’t. It can cause you to hurt yourself or others. The actions that hurt you are known as self-destructive behaviors. These can look like excessive drinking, drug use, gambling, unwanted sexual behaviors, or worse. In these cases, the primary person you are hurting through these self-destructive behaviors is yourself. This anger is punishing you and not helping the situation.

Sometimes, the easiest anger to hold on to is when you or I feel that we are justified in being angry. People hurt us for no reason or events happen that cause us real pain—but our part is that we let anger begin to be the master over us. It can

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reign over our lives, and our self-destructive behaviors can become consistent patterns. Perhaps you're angry as a result of your abortion and find you are letting anger control a lot of your decisions.

Countless women have come to understand the universal truth that *the only way to get rid of your anger is forgiveness*. This concept may seem contrary to what you are feeling, but it is true. Forgiveness can be for yourself, your child's father, family members, or healthcare providers.

While it may seem easier to point your finger in blame, the way through *anger to peace* is through surrendering to *grace and forgiveness*. It is a beautiful and straightforward action,

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and it is important to know that you don't always have to *feel* like forgiving. But the act of forgiveness is necessary to heal. We are not in control—but we can let go of our anger through forgiveness.

Actions

- Journal any thoughts from what you've just read on anger.
- Write down what went through your mind when you read the word *forgive*.
- On another page, write the names of those with whom you are angry. You'll refer to this list in the next step.

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

Vivienne's Hope Story

I had a traumatic childhood, growing up in an alcoholic home with physical and sexual abuse. I skipped class throughout high school, cheated on tests, and eventually dropped out before the eleventh grade. Looking for a new start and excitement, I moved out of state and began living with my boss—a man fifteen years my senior. I desperately sought fulfillment and value from this sexual relationship.

Within months I was pregnant and immediately decided to abort. I wasn't ready to be a mother, had no wish to be tied to the father, and knew I couldn't provide a good lifestyle even with programs like food stamps. I believed the lie that an abortion was the socially responsible thing to do.

The one vivid memory of my first abortion was the doctor saying, "Everything will be okay." But I knew in my heart that it wasn't going to be okay. During my second abortion, I felt the very life of my baby being eliminated inside of me. I felt stripped, and this hardened my very being.

After my abortions, I became very self-destructive through drug abuse and alcoholism. I eventually changed this lifestyle and got married, but I raised our children out of anger, shame, and guilt. There were times when I couldn't control my anger. I had no idea where it was coming from and I could see that I was hurting my children, but I couldn't stop.

Anger is one of the worse occurrences after abortion because you don't know where it is coming from. It is so very damaging. My anger would burst over the simplest things: "You didn't answer my text right away." I'd go off the handle and completely lose it.

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I remember thinking to myself, “What is wrong with me?”
“Why am I doing this?”

I got my answer when I came across the website for a support group. I made a phone call that saved me from a life of destruction and shame and guilt. Once I saw the connection between my anger and forgiveness, I began to take steps. I identified those whom I held in unforgiveness, including myself. I’m forever grateful for the understanding person at the end of that phone.

What Do You Think?

- What did you take away from Vivienne’s story?
- What did you relate to?

STEP 2

Forgiveness is a necessary key to experiencing freedom from anger and inner peace. It is also essential to help you move on with your life. It removes the reason for the anger surrounding your abortion by lessening the grip that the action and those involved in it has on you.

It’s easy to make excuses to not forgive, especially if you’re experiencing a lot of self-justified anger. A woman who has been deeply hurt by others involved in her abortion experience could well say: “I could never forgive him,”; “She doesn’t deserve my forgiveness,”; or “I’m waiting for an apology.”

If you have negative thoughts like these about one or more persons involved in your abortion, including yourself, you are not alone. Other women have struggled and couldn’t initially imagine ever offering forgiveness. If that’s

you, perhaps you will find it helpful to know what forgiveness is and what it isn't.

Forgiveness is a choice: it is something you do. It is an action, not a feeling—a letting go of negative emotions toward others and perhaps self-hatred and self-condemnation toward yourself.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with how you feel. Remember, it is a choice. Don't wait for your feelings to change because that may never happen. You can choose to forgive even while feeling angry, resentful, cheated, or abandoned. Forgiving doesn't mean denying or justifying the actions of others. Or in the case of yourself, it does not mean that you don't accept responsibility for your abortion and are shifting the blame. It does mean that you relinquish the hold that anger has on you.

The beautiful thing about forgiveness is that it is a gift! If the person is undeserving of forgiveness in your mind, you can choose to give them the free gift of your forgiveness.

Actions

- Refer to the list of people that you wrote down with whom you are angry.
- Find a quiet place and do the following:
 - Read each person's name aloud and choose to give them the gift of your forgiveness by saying, "I forgive you (name the person) for (name their action)."
 - Let all the unforgiveness in your heart go.
 - Sit quietly and reflect.
 - Be grateful that you had the strength to forgive or to begin to forgive.

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STEP 3

Once you've forgiven the people on your list, you've taken a really important step toward healing. There may, however, be one—or more—people you find it impossible to forgive. If there is someone you can't forgive, seek support from someone who knows your story. Together, try to do the impossible and take the first step in forgiving. Remember, it is a choice, not a feeling. It can be helpful and healing to write a letter (that you won't send to the person) expressing your anger and other emotions.

Your anger may be so intense and your hurt so deep that you may need to forgive that person more than once to experience complete freedom.

Up until now, we have focused on forgiving those who have hurt us. Now I'd like to revisit the question: *Have you forgiven yourself for your abortion and other actions related to it?* Perhaps you've never thought of or known the importance of forgiving yourself.

How does that question make you feel? Take a few moments to check in with what emotions you are feeling. Write in your journal if it's helpful.

Let me assure you, forgiving yourself is possible. As with forgiving others, it is a decision. It's not denying your abortion. It is a gift that every woman deserves to receive and one that your child would want you to give yourself.

Women who have been able to forgive themselves have experienced relief and serenity.

For some women, forgiving themselves happens over time. For example, I had a powerful conversation with my friend

Kerri, who experienced an abortion. I remember Kerri saying to me, “I can’t forgive myself.” The regret, self-hatred, and self-loathing over what she had done was paralyzing her. But slowly over time, she would say, “I’m beginning to forgive myself.” Kerri has still not entirely forgiven herself—she still battles different emotions—and has days of two steps forward and one step back. But Kerri has allowed herself to take that first and most challenging step of beginning the process.

The action for this step will give you some suggestions to forgive yourself. Repeat them whenever you feel a need until one day you say, “I’m free! I let go of unforgiveness! I now have peace!”

Actions

- Alone or with a friend, say aloud, “I forgive myself for my abortion(s) and . . . (mention anything else).” You may not be able to forgive yourself for everything—start small if you need to.
- When standing in front of a mirror, after putting your makeup on or doing your hair, you can say, “I’ve given myself the gift of forgiveness.”
- Find a quiet place to reflect and meditate.

Points to Review

- Freedom from my anger is through forgiveness, which is a decision.
- Forgiveness is not based on my feelings.

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- Forgiveness is the key to my serenity and joy, and a vital key to my hope and healing.

Final Thought and Meditation

If you Google forgiveness quotes, you'll be amazed at how many there are! Here's just one: "Forgiving is not forgetting. It's letting go of the hurt" (Anonymous).

"I've carried anger for too long; I'm ready to forgive and to let it all go."

What to Expect in the Next Key

As with my friend, Kerri, the actions of forgiveness are a process. But it is essential to take that first step. **Key 4: Moving through Grief** will help you through your grief—not around it. As you will see, that is an important and powerful distinction. You may want to review this with a friend or staff member at **Support After Abortion** listed on the back of this booklet.