

## Key 4

### Moving through Grief

**You Are!** *You have the gift of adjusting to different demands made upon you. Spend thirty seconds recalling some of the times when you've successfully done just that.*

**Key 3: Freedom from Anger through Forgiveness** opened the door to acknowledging areas of anger, releasing it through forgiveness, as well as a decision to forgive, not just acting on emotions. You were asked if you had forgiven yourself for your abortion. Many emotions may have come up for you—from anger to sadness to relief. **Key 4: Moving through Grief** will once again bring up many emotions. Please take your time when going through it.

While you may have worked through the previous three keys on your own, my suggestion is to go through this key with a friend or support group.

### STEP 1

#### What Is Grief?

“Grief is a feeling of deep sorrow and sadness. Grief is painful and emotionally exhausting. Grief can leave a person feeling empty and numb. And grief is normal after a loss.”

—Alcoholics Anonymous

**Time Out:** *Every woman—including yourself—moves through her grief differently. But I want to highlight here that if you find yourself struggling with grief (about your child or any loss) or feel stuck, it would be vital for you to seek professional help. Support After Abortion will connect you to a local resource.*

A loss can be many things. It can be the loss of your employment, your reputation, or your place to live. It can be the relocation of a family member or friend, the end of a relationship, or the passing of a loved one.

After an abortion, a woman may grieve the loss of her child during or immediately after the procedure. It can also occur days, weeks, months, or even years later.

If you’re reading this and haven’t experienced grief over your abortion, please don’t close this booklet. I invite you to think more broadly. Perhaps you are grieving over the loss of a relationship as the result of your abortion. Whatever you’re feeling right now, you’re not alone—there are so many other women who have felt this same way or have been in your

same situation. Please continue with this key as you may find it helpful in the general processing of loss.

We will look at four steps in the grieving process: acknowledge, accept, connect, and adapt.

It is first necessary to *acknowledge* where you are with the loss to move through grief. Acknowledging the loss of a child and any other related losses will allow you to express how your grief is making you feel. It is a crucial step to experiencing peace amidst your pain and grief. You will show strength by not avoiding these feelings or sweeping them under the rug. In **Key 1: Acknowledge Where You Are Now**, you were encouraged to identify your emotions. These emotions might include deeper feelings such as: feeling lost, feeling empty, stress or anxiety, disbelief, or helplessness.

- Take a moment to ask yourself, “Where am I with acknowledging the loss of my child?”
- Take a moment to ask yourself, “Where am I with acknowledging any other losses I have experienced (e.g., the end of a relationship)?”

The next step in coping with grief is to *accept* the loss of your child to abortion. One of life’s hard truths is that we cannot change our reality, however much we may want. It is not easy, but it is important to stay in the present. This doesn’t mean you cannot be sad or relieved or have other feelings. It means that you embrace the truth about what happened and live in the now.

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- Take a moment to ask yourself, “Where am I with accepting the loss?”

### Actions

- Make yourself feel comfortable and safe. Put on music that relaxes you and sit in a comfortable position.
- Journal about acknowledging and accepting your loss.

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

### Chloe's Hope Story

Jack and I were just about making ends meet when we found out I was pregnant. Our reaction was the same: “There’s no way we can afford a baby. We’ve got to get some savings behind us first. We are just not ready to be parents.”

Then followed one of the most uncomfortable conversations we have ever had. Without discussing other options, we agreed to “take care of the problem.” The next few days of waiting were terrible. I had such a hatred for what I was about to do. Deep down, I knew that abortion was just not the answer. Jack got me through those days by assuring me, “This is the right decision for our marriage and future.”

I cried through the whole process. Not due to the physical pain, but because of the overwhelming grief I had over the loss of my baby. I remember shouting out, “What am I doing?!” At work and with friends, I kept up appearances that I was okay. But when I wasn’t filling my day with being busy, I was bombarded with thoughts of self-hatred,

especially, “You have no right to grieve or cry because it was your decision.”

These lies continued off and on for the next ten years and through the births of two beautiful daughters. That all changed when I went with a friend to a grief counseling session following her young nephew’s accidental death. Everything talked about, I applied to the loss of my child. I cried with my friend for her loss, but I was also weeping for mine. I learned that I am entitled to grieve. And yes, I can release the tears that I had held back for so many years.

With the help of a therapist, I was able to work through the grieving process. Now, whenever I think of my “first” child, I have peace.

### **What Do You Think?**

- What did you take away from Chloe’s story?
- Why was identifying her loss healing for Chloe?

### **STEP 2**

I want to begin this step with what I hope will be two comforting thoughts. First, the pain of grief that a woman experiences days or weeks after her abortion will lessen. Second, future pain—perhaps months or years later—triggered by attending a baby shower or the wedding of someone around the age her child would have been will also lessen.

Some women have chosen to express love for their child by finding ways to *connect* with the loss by honoring their child. For others, they have heard about doing this, but it just wasn’t

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something they wanted to do. Perhaps they were even advised that it wouldn't be helpful to their healing. I have found that this is vital to having closure over the loss.

### Honoring Your Child

There are different ways to honor your child. Choosing a name for your child is something some women have found helpful. Think of what name you would like to give your child. You could even chat with a friend about your favorite names. After deciding upon a name(s), take a moment to say to your child, "I'm naming you \_\_\_\_."

Another suggestion would be to write a letter to your child, compose a poem, or draw a picture in your journal. Only you will see it. Write whatever is on your heart. Or perhaps give your favorite charity a gift, plant a tree in your child's honor, buy yourself a bunch of flowers, or light a candle from time to time. If you like jewelry, perhaps treat yourself to a special ring, necklace, or pin. Do whatever brings you peace, comfort, and joy as you think about your child.

**A Memorial Moment:** Some women have found it comforting to have a *memorial moment* dedicated to their child. At a meaningful place—a quiet garden, a beach, a scenic overlook, or beside a beautiful waterfall—she expresses her thoughts and words of love for her child, and perhaps reads a poem, or plays a favorite song. She may choose to lay flowers or to let off a balloon on which she has written a message to her child. These are such precious intimate moments for a mother and her child.

The fourth point to coping with grief is to *adapt* to the loss of your child to abortion. Connecting with your grief and honoring your child doesn't mean that you are going to forget your child. Adapting your thought patterns, entering fully into the flow of your life, and caring concern for others do not mean you will forget your child. The love you have for your child won't lessen: if anything, your new serenity and ways of thinking will help your love to grow deeper.

My friend Karin, who experienced an abortion, beautifully illustrates how she views her grief: "It wasn't until I went through an abortion healing program that I found out how much healing I needed. Grief is hard. It's not an easy process to go through. Grief is one thing you can't go over, under, or around; you must go through."

### **Actions**

- Journal any other thoughts about this key.
- Make a plan to meet up with a friend(s) to do something fun—a movie, a meal, a hike, or any other positive activity you enjoy!

### **Points to Review**

- Grief is a natural response to my loss. Everyone grieves differently; there is no right or wrong way for me to grieve.
- The four points for lessening the pain of grief are to: acknowledge, accept, connect, and adapt.

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### Final Thought and Meditation

This may have been a heart-wrenching key for you to work through. But be encouraged by this quote: “Grief is like a ball of string. You start at one end and wind. Then the ball slips through your fingers and rolls across the floor. Some of your work is undone, but not all. You pick it up and start over again, but you never have to begin again at the string’s end. The ball never completely unwinds. You’ve made some progress.” —Anonymous

*“I trust that I am safe and supported to begin walking through my grief.”*

### What to Expect in the Next Key

Moving through your grief is a process, and you are so strong for taking steps to begin this process. **Key 5: Walking in Confidence and Hope** will give you positive steps to reframe negative thoughts that are common for everyone.