

Key 5

Walking in Confidence and Hope

You Are! *You are an amazing woman who has already chosen to take four necessary steps toward healing. Spend thirty seconds thinking about the things you are grateful for.*

Key 4: Moving through Grief opened the door to help you release some of your grief and sorrow. You did this by acknowledging, accepting, connecting, and adapting to your life today. Of course, it is so important to remember that grief looks different for everyone.

STEP 1

Confidence is believing in yourself. *Having hope* is believing that a positive outcome is possible. Take a few moments to check on your *confidence* and *hope*. How many “light bulb” moments have you experienced since you began this booklet? Transformation does not have to be a drastic change—it is often as subtle as a different way of thinking. Take a moment to write any shifts or other ways of thinking in your journal.

A challenge for some women after abortion is how to continue to walk in confidence and hope for continued healing.

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This may include you, which is why this key will lay out a plan to find and keep your confidence.

Recognizing your thoughts. Try thinking of nothing for just a few minutes, and you'll see that it's impossible. Thoughts roll in and out of our minds—good, bad, and indifferent.

It is especially important as you continue your healing process to be aware of your thoughts and decide which ones to entertain and which ones to reject. That's because not everything that pops into your head will further your journey of healing. Of course, it's impossible to completely stop your thoughts, but it is important to recognize negative thoughts and discard them.

Pausing throughout your day. A helpful way to protect the ground you have made in your healing is to begin to take short breaks throughout your day and ask yourself, "What have I been thinking?" Be sure to look for encouraging or motivating thoughts—not just the negative ones.

Thoughts that steal hope. The more you become conscious of your thought patterns, the easier it will be to acknowledge the discouraging thoughts that often arise from your subconscious and steer you off course: thoughts that cause you pain, sadness, anxiety, irrational fears, or are negative or self-defeating, or those thoughts that rush in and overwhelm you. Then there are the "what if" thoughts about your child and your abortion experience. These can flow out of regret for your abortion. It's important to grieve the "what if" thoughts and lost potential and opportunities for both you and your child, but it's not healthy to stay there.

Many people in various support programs have found power in accepting the things outside their control and the things they cannot change. There is relief in allowing this concept to travel from your head to your heart. It is helpful to remind yourself that you cannot control other people's thoughts or actions.

You might want to journal any extremes in your thought patterns, noting when you had them and where you were. Other notes might include why you gave them your time and consideration, how powerful they were, and why they were so hard to resist.

Under a microscope. When you catch one of these stray discouraging thoughts—as well as the situation that triggers it—your next job is to examine it. Is it true? Does it mesh with the truths about what you now believe about your identity and self-worth? What emotions does it evoke?

Get out. If the thought doesn't belong in your mind, send it away by choosing to replace it with **positive thoughts**. Perhaps reread some of the *You Are* affirmations at the beginning of each key or recall some of your other strengths—they are numerous. Then watch the unhelpful thoughts lose their power.

By frequently examining her thoughts, a woman healing from an abortion experience can keep herself from getting derailed by distractions and lesser concerns. These lead her away from the fullness of life that she wants for herself and others.

Yes, you can! Isn't it exciting that you really can walk in confidence and hope? It takes time and practice to be aware of your thoughts. I hope you are up for this new way of thinking.

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Actions

- Journal about some of the ways you are walking in confidence and hope.
- Consider reading your entry to someone who knew how you were feeling.

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

Chelsea's Hope Story

My boyfriend, Stephen, was a lawyer, and I was climbing the corporate ladder of a well-known company. After a busy week, there was nothing we enjoyed more than going on a hike, cooking together, watching movies, and just hanging out.

Stephen and I had been together for a year and a half when I became pregnant. I was horrified and couldn't believe this bad luck. Knowing how this would affect my career, I immediately looked up an abortion clinic. Although Stephen asked several times, "Chelsea, are you okay?" I decided not to tell him, reasoning that he already had enough stress in his life at work, and after all, I believed that it was my problem.

I purposefully scheduled the abortion for the long Labor Day weekend and asked my sister to take me. I'll forever remember that Friday afternoon. The nurse gave me not only sedatives but laughing gas, and I remember laughing during the procedure. How could I laugh when I was killing my baby? Afterward, I felt guilt, shame, and horror at what I'd done.

Memories of the procedure and my laughing were frequent and vivid. I'd never heard of the adverse effects of an abortion.

Work absorbed my mind much of the day, but I was hit with negative self-thoughts when driving alone or at night. I felt powerless in controlling them. I also began to have problems making decisions at work and at home—I'd already made one terrible mistake and dreaded making another.

One positive decision I did make was to tell Stephen about his child. I don't know where I got the courage, but his compassion showed me another side of him. He encouraged me to seek counseling, which helped me begin the healing process, initially over the phone and then face-to-face.

What Do You Think?

- What are you taking away from Chelsea's story?
- How did she try to hide her memories?

STEP 2

Now we're taking a step further, from thoughts to memories. There is a difference between the two. Memories are more long-term than thoughts and are based on events that happened in the past. Memory is stored information that we can recall.

A woman may have many stored memories surrounding her abortion: the day she discovered she was pregnant; the reactions of the child's father, parents, and friends; the dilemma of making the decision to go to the abortion clinic; the actual procedure; and the days following.

These memories can keep her from being able to walk in confidence and hope. Sometimes the flashbacks resurface at

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night and replay like a video, zapping her tranquility and robbing her of sleep. These memories and flashbacks are like chains that can hold her back from moving on and living with confidence and hope.

If painful memories like these are frequent or are impacting your quality of life, or if you are experiencing nightmares or constant flashbacks related to your memories, please seek help from a professional. These are painful but common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and must be handled in cooperation with a healthcare provider. If new memories surface—which is part of the healing process—don't become despondent. Rather, quickly get support by telling someone. For immediate, real-time support, contact **Support After Abortion**. Contact information is at the back of this booklet.

The story below may help you understand how controlling memories can be.

An elephant trainer was showing a visitor around the zoo. The visitor noticed an enormous elephant with a small chain around one ankle. The chain was staked to the ground, and its links were thin. "I'm curious," said the visitor. "How can such a weak chain hold such a large animal?" The trainer replied, "Well, it doesn't." He explained: "When an elephant is born, we place a chain like this one around his ankle. No matter how much the baby elephant pulls, he can't break the chain or pull out the stake. At some point, he stops trying. By the time he's fully grown, he's still being held by that same chain. It's not the chain that holds him, though. It's the memory of the chain."

Question Following the Elephant Story

What are you taking away from this story?

As you already know, the power to break the chains of distressing memories about your abortion lies in sharing your story. I hope you have already experienced dramatic healing by doing so.

At the beginning of this *key*, you read that *hope believes that a positive outcome is possible*. I am sure you've seen many positive results since the first key. A remarkable trait of hope is that it has no end. You can believe that you will continue to experience more and more healing from your abortion. One woman who shared her story said, "I'm excited by the thought that there's no end to my journey of healing!"

What hope requires is courage and perseverance. Allow the memories of transformations spur you on to seek more! Keep your hope alive by being grateful for the healing you have already received. Congratulate yourself for even the smallest steps forward and remember that healing is a process. Focus on your goals and not on any setbacks or failures, find supportive friends, accept what you can't change, and look for ways to laugh!

Actions

- Journal your answer to the elephant story question.
- Journal your thoughts about this key. Remember that you could include poems, sketches, etc.