

Key 6

Giving Hope to Others

You Are! *You have much to offer others, and your abortion doesn't define you. Spend thirty seconds thinking about when you did something positive for someone else and how that made you feel.*

You have now used five keys to open doors to further your own hope and healing. Now you are about to take up **Key 6: Giving Hope to Others**. As you will see, your story and your experience can be the key to helping other women start their own healing journey.

STEP 1

Here's a story about sharing hope and healing that I think will make you smile. (Adapted from *The Star Thrower*, by Loren Eiseley)

A man took his morning walk along a beach when he noticed hundreds of starfish washed up just above the waterline. He didn't think much about it until a little farther along, he saw a young girl throwing starfish one at a time back into the ocean. "Why are you doing that?" he asked, somewhat

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cynically. “Because,” said the girl, “I want them to have the chance to live.” “Oh, don’t waste your time; there are so many, you won’t make any difference,” he said. But the girl bent down, picked up another starfish, and with a big swing of her little arm, tossed it back into the ocean. Then turning to the man, she said, “It made a difference to that one.” The man stopped, thought, and joined the girl in tossing starfish into the ocean. Others saw what they were doing and soon joined in.

Question Following the Starfish Story

- What are you taking away from this story?
- How did the girl’s response, “It made a difference to that one,” make you feel?

It is such a great feeling when we realize our words or actions have made a difference in someone’s life. I’m sure you can think of ways you’ve been touched by another’s thoughtfulness and how others have been touched by your words or actions.

Just like the girl throwing starfish back into the ocean, you have an opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life—one person at a time.

Often, opportunities to make a difference in someone’s life come in unexpected ways. Remember how I mentioned in the second key how other women know something of what you were feeling because they had walked in your shoes? Well, you may find opportunities to *pay it forward* by saying, “I know how you feel; I’ve been there—you’re not alone,” to a woman who

opens up to you about her abortion. Think about all the comfort, reassurance, and hope she will receive through your care.

One woman, Susan, had an opportunity to give hope and care while having coffee with a friend. Suddenly her friend said, “Please stop, Susan. What I’ve got to say may shock you. Two months ago, I had an abortion.” Another woman, Grace, was waiting for a delayed flight at an airport. When she eventually boarded, a woman with whom she had briefly spoken sat next to her. By the end of the flight, the woman had shared her heart about her abortion.

For each woman that Susan and Grace encountered, her abortion was her *dark secret*. They hadn’t told anyone because of reasons that you know only too well. They didn’t know that healing begins with sharing their stories with a trusted friend—or even a stranger.

You now hold a key that could change a life. You know that no woman needs to suffer alone. You can be there for them—in person or through social media. You also know of **Support After Abortion** staff that can help them process their emotions. And you can even give a copy of this booklet to them.

You don’t have to talk about your abortion if you are not ready. It is crucial so that you don’t cause further harm to yourself and others. You’ll know when the time is right for you. Someone initially may just need a friend who understands—listening may be the best thing you can do!

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Actions

- Journal about some of the ways you have been touched by another's thoughtfulness. You might even want to send a text or make a phone call to thank someone. By reaching out in this way, you could make their day!
- Journal about how you feel about *paying it forward* and bringing hope one-on-one to a woman suffering from her abortion.
- Is there anyone suffering from an abortion that you know you could support by your understanding and compassionate listening?

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

Paige's Hope Story

It's still hard for me to share what happened to me. But often, when I do, someone will say, "You just told my story."

It begins with my love for the US military and my excitement to be deployed overseas for two years. I was fascinated by the differences in our cultures and took advantage of any leave to go explore.

On that fateful evening, I had almost reached the barracks when a group of men came rolling out of a bar. Before I knew it, one of them grabbed my arm and dragged me into a side alley where I was violently raped.

How I got back to my room, I'll never know. I felt so violated and cried uncontrollably on and off for weeks. After three months, my pregnancy showed. This was around the time

that my niece, Gwen, flew out for a two-week vacation. She was horrified and begged me to report the rape, but I refused.

Although I didn't want an abortion, I just couldn't go through with the pregnancy. I knew telling my parents that I had a child by rape would have devastated them. It had to be my dark secret.

I traveled back to the US on planned leave and went to the clinic for the procedure. My heart was broken at the thought of what I was doing to my baby. I left there in a daze and was plagued with guilt, what ifs, loneliness, and no self-worth.

My responsibilities were changed, and I stayed stateside. Five years later, I found a flyer in an airport restroom about support and healing from abortion. Amazing. The healing I longed for was a phone call away. As part of my ongoing healing, I now wear a necklace with two small hearts intertwined. I continue to share my story and how I'm feeling with my therapist and my new sisters in my support group.

What Do You Think?

- What did you take away from Paige's story?
- What are some things you related to?

STEP 2

Just like you read in Paige's story, many women begin sharing their stories in small groups to give others hope that they are not alone. In small support groups, the confidentiality of "What is shared here, stays here" is always stressed. But outside of that arena, if sharing your story with friends, ask them

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to respect your confidence by not mentioning it to others. It is your story to communicate with each person who is trusted to hear it.

You'll know when you're ready to begin telling your story. Be willing to be vulnerable and to be yourself. There is no right or wrong way to share. You'll know what to say and how much to say.

This brings me to an important question that you may or may not feel ready to consider. If you are not prepared to answer it, do not put pressure on yourself. The question is:

- *Who is there that should know about your abortion?*
Perhaps the father of your child, your present spouse or partner, or a family member?

Take a moment to think about this question. Perhaps write in your journal the names of people who come to mind. Consider how you would want to approach them. You could seek input about doing this from a trusted friend or counselor. Remember:

You'll know when you're ready to begin telling your story. Be willing to be vulnerable and to be yourself. There is no right or wrong way to share. You'll know what to say and how much to say.

if this thought makes you feel uncomfortable, then perhaps now is not the time to move on to it.

If you're invited to share with a broader audience, you may well be revealing others' stories. Your story is their story too. A question to ask is, "Would sharing my story cause anyone harm, loss of reputation, or cause listeners to

make judgments?” If it does, you can always decline the invitation to protect the interests of others.

Another point: if you are accepting an invitation to share beyond a small support group setting, you ought to mention it ahead of time to anyone involved in your abortion.

That said, are you ready to begin thinking about *paying it forward*? Have you ever thought of the positive impact you could have on another woman’s life? It is such a privilege to bring hope to another person. It will give you such joy and even further your own healing.

Isn’t it incredible to think that your story could be the key to open a door for another’s healing? How we all need each other on this journey of life! You’ll be amazed at how opportunities will come to share your story. Remember the stories of Susan, Grace, Paige, and the girl tossing starfish back into the ocean? They were changing one life at a time. And I’m confident that when the time is right, you will be too.

Actions

- Take a picture of the resources and support organizations starting on page 55. Then you’ll have it at your fingertips to pass onto others.
- Think of where you can share a PDF or print copy of this booklet for others to view.

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Points to Review

- I can change one life at a time for any woman suffering from her abortion. Because she knows that I've walked in her shoes, I will assure her that she's not alone.
- There are different platforms on which to share my story.

Final Thought and Meditation

“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”—C. S. Lewis.

“I choose to move forward with my life and offer hope whenever I can.”

There Is More for You

Please don't think of this as the final key. That's because I hear the rattling of many other keys that will open more and more doors for you on your healing journey in the coming days, weeks, months, and years. You'll know what they are. Please pick them up for yourself and share them with other women recovering from an abortion.