



Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

513 Madison Avenue, 3rd Floor Covington, KY 41011 859-431-1077 or www.mhanky.org

What is Post-Abortion Syndrome?

Post-Abortion Syndrome (PAS) is a form of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). PTSD is the result of having suffered an event so stressful and so traumatic that the person is taken beyond his/her ability to cope in a normal manner. Victims of PTSD are unable to simply resume their lives where they left off before the traumatic event. Instead they experience a variety of reactions that do not go away merely with the passage of time. Although the symptoms of PTSD (and PAS) are varied, and although they may not surface for years after the trauma, they are nonetheless real and should be dealt with.

Although abortion is legal in the United States (and other countries), the events leading up to and including the abortion itself are often of such a traumatic nature that PTSD is often the result.

Following are some of the symptoms of Post-Abortion Syndrome:

- Depression and Thoughts of Suicide:
- Sad Mood
- Sudden and Uncontrollable Crying
- Deterioration of Self-Esteem
- Disruption in Interpersonal Relationships
- Sleep, Appetite, and Sexual Disturbances
- Reduced Motivation
- Thoughts of Suicide
- "Anniversary Syndrome" (An increase of symptoms around the time of the anniversary of the abortion and/or the due date of the aborted child.)
- Re-experiencing the Abortion
- Preoccupation with Becoming Pregnant Again
- Anxiety over Fertility and Childbearing Issues
- Disruption of the Bonding Process with Present or Future Children
- Survival Guilt: ...the decision boiled down to a sorrowful conclusion: "It's me or you, and I choose me."
- Development of Eating Disorders
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Other Self-Punishing or Self-Degrading Behaviors: abusive relationships, promiscuity, failing to take care of yourself medically or deliberately hurting yourself emotionally and/or physically
- Brief Reactive Psychosis: an episode of drastically distorted reality within two weeks of the abortion

If three or more of the symptoms listed above describe what you have recently experienced in relation to an abortion, it is likely that you are experiencing Post-Abortion Syndrome.

Steps to Healing :Work Through the Denial by Re-experiencing the Abortion

Work through this exercise two or three times-until you feel you have answered each question thoroughly. It is normal to answer them superficially the first time or two you go through them.

1. Write down every detail you can remember about the experience from the day you learned you were pregnant through the day you aborted.
2. Who was the father?

3. Did you consult him about the pregnancy? What was his reaction?
4. Had you previously discussed the possibility of pregnancy and the outcome?
5. How did you come to your decision?
6. Did anyone influence you?
7. What were your feelings throughout the decision-making process?
8. Did you ever want to keep your baby?
9. Did it go against your moral/religious beliefs?
10. How did you get to the clinic? Did someone take you? Did you go alone?
11. What were you feeling on the way to the clinic?
12. What was the clinic like?
13. What sights, sounds, smells do you recall?
14. What was the attitude of the counselor? the nurse? the doctor?
15. What was your emotional response to each of these?
16. Did you feel you were properly informed?
17. Did you feel rushed? Manipulated? Angry? Scared? Panicky?
18. At any time (in the clinic) did you feel like leaving without having the abortion?
19. During the preparation and actual abortion procedure, how did you feel?
20. What sights, sounds, smells do you recall?
21. What did you feel physically? Emotionally? during the procedure?
22. What did you feel afterwards? Relief? Regret? Physical pain? Panic? Remorse?
23. Was there someone to take you home?
24. What was their attitude afterwards?
25. What was your response to their attitude?
26. Describe the following 24 hours.
27. If you were in the same circumstance today, would you make the same choice?

- Deal with the issue of guilt. Realize that your feelings of guilt are quite normal and natural. But realize also that total forgiveness is available for those who seek it through Christ. God loves you and because He does, He made it possible for all your sins to be forgiven. Understand that you can not earn forgiveness through good behavior, nor by sacrificial giving, nor by punishing yourself. Because of Christ none of that is required.
- Accept God's forgiveness.
- Realize that through your acceptance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross all your sins are forgiven. Tell God in your own words how sorry you are for your sin, and thank Him for providing a way of forgiveness. Choose to believe that He has forgiven you and that He has removed your sin from you-as far as the east is from the west.
- Face your feelings of anger toward yourself and others.
- Write out the names of those with whom you are angry. Tell God specifically why you're angry with each person.
- Forgive those who participated in your abortion.
- As an act of your will choose to forgive them, acknowledging that you don't feel like forgiving them. Ask God to change your feelings from anger to total forgiveness and give Him time to do it.
- Grieve the loss of your child/children.
- Either privately or with those close to you, hold a memorial service. Allow yourself to form a mental picture of your child. Give your child a name. Then picture your child in God's hands-safe, happy, and having forgiven you.