The Power of Your Story
For Men
Facilitator Guide
Version 2

THE POWER of Your Story for Men

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Version 2

Rob Fischer & Perry Underwood

SRT
AbAnon™
ABORTION ANONYMOUS

The Power of Your Story For Men
Facilitator Guide
Version 2

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FOREWORD

Recently, while meeting with a friend in a coffee shop, he shared his abortion experience. He had tried to "stuff" his memory of it, but it came back to haunt him now in an unexpected way, 21 years later. He expressed profound sorrow, grief and shame over his abortion.

My friend is not alone. Our society is very divided when it comes to abortion, especially considering approximately one in four men in America has had a role in an abortion. On the one hand, abortion has been legalized, euphemized and its consequences downplayed. On the other hand, millions of men and women find themselves— sometimes many years later— deeply ashamed and remorseful over their abortion.

As a result of these mixed messages, most men and women are silent about their abortions, choosing to bear its shame and pain alone. Often, men and women choose to address their pain from an abortion in self-destructive ways. What many are discovering, however, is that the only way to remedy the pain and shame of abortion is to share their stories with others.

In doing so, men and women discover that they are not alone. The weight of guilt and shame that they carry is not unique to them, but

actually very common. It's just that our culture has discouraged and even made it taboo to share their stories.

For this reason, sharing your abortion story will require great courage on your part. We challenge you to be brave and tell your story to others in your AbAnon group who will understand and identify with you. This step is crucial for your healing—and theirs.

We're grateful to the many men who have shared their stories, without whom we could not have written this curriculum.

Because this curriculum is the joint work of many men, we've chosen to identify with you using the plural personal pronoun "we." Please accept our attempt to draw ourselves into your experience in this way.

We invite you to fully enter into this curriculum and the eight sessions you'll spend with other men like yourself. We're confident you'll meet some wonderful people and make some good friends in your AbAnon group.

Our hope and desire is that you will experience healing and a newfound hope through this curriculum!

Perry Underwood & Rob Fischer

TAKING STOCK

It can be difficult to sort out what you are feeling and why. A good way to begin naming those feelings, facing them squarely and working through them is to identify specific areas in which you may be struggling. Then you can begin to move forward, healing, into a life that is more healthy and productive. Please take a few minutes to address the following statements to "take stock" of where you are right now.[1]

Please circle your response to each statement:

1. I have made more than my share of impulsive decisions that I later regretted making.

   Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. I have usually had the self-control I needed to keep me from doing things I later regret.

   Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

1 Morgan, Hampton, "Choosing Integrity: The Structure of Character," *Choosing Integrity*, 2014 https://www.choosingintegrity.org/

3. I stay angry longer than I think is healthy for me.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I have forgiven the people who have done the most harm to me.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I struggle with addictive substances.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I struggle with addictive behaviors.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I have achieved the goals I expected to reach by this point in my life.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I feel hopeful about the future.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I have at least one trusted and reliable friend I can turn to in times of need.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I take responsibility for being where I am today, and I do not blame anyone else.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. I have suffered serious trauma in my life and feel I have not really gotten over it.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. I wish I had a deeper spiritual life or connection with God.

Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. I feel like I keep making the same mistakes and bad decisions again and again.

    Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. I have a strong sense of right and wrong that I think most people would agree with.

    Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. I have had an experience in my life that still causes me to feel shame when I think about it.

    Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Write your answer. One response that surprised me was:

_____

_____

_____

INTRODUCTION FOR FACILITATORS

Welcome to the Abortion Anonymous (AbAnon) curriculum for men. Thank you for volunteering to serve as a facilitator for an AbAnon group. We believe that your personal story and interaction with the men in your group will have a profound impact in their lives and beyond. As you embark on this experience, we are praying for your protection and for God's favor and wisdom as you lead.

YOUR ROLE AS FACILITATOR

Please view your role as that of a *facilitator* rather than a teacher or counselor. Your primary goal is to help facilitate the healing of men who have had a role in an abortion. Skills of a good facilitator include:

- Leading by example and sharing transparently
- Getting others to open up and speak as soon as possible
- Asking great, open-ended questions
- Listening intently
- Managing group dynamics

- Keeping the group on task
- Managing time
- Being present and engaged

To a great extent, we have tried to design the curriculum in such a way that makes it easy for you to follow through with those facilitation skills. Below are some warning signs to watch for that may indicate that you've slipped from facilitating into teaching or counseling. Please try to avoid these:

- Talking too much
- Lecturing, preaching or instructing
- Reading the story or material aloud unless prompted
- Correcting or shutting down a participant
- Advising participants
- Assuming that your experience should be theirs
- Losing control of the group
- Asking leading or closed-ended questions
- Trying to "fix" people

We've attempted to design the curriculum to help you avoid the pitfalls above, so please follow it to the fullest extent possible. Because you are representing AbAnon, we trust you to conduct yourself and each of the sessions in a Christ-like manner and according to the guidelines we've provided.

We want facilitators to build relationships with their group participants. At times this requires conversations outside of the group meetings. However, experience has taught us that it's best for facilitators not to meet regularly with participants outside the group until it has

ended; otherwise, it is liable to damage the trust in the group which is so vital to its success.

Since you will be co-facilitating with another man, learn to work together humbly and harmoniously. Never contradict one another or usurp one another's authority as facilitators. Nothing will destroy the trust in a group faster. Instead, pray together beforehand, support one another and trust each other. Allow the Holy Spirit to use both of you in the special areas of your gifting and experience.

Finally, in the course of the 8 weeks, participants may hear the stories of men who not only had a role in an abortion but were also sexually abused. Abortion and sexual abuse are often found in the same story. However, a man may not recognize his need for healing from sexual abuse until he hears about it from someone in the group. Please be prepared to empathize with them and point them toward a SAVAnon group.

HOW TO USE THIS FACILITATOR GUIDE

In order to facilitate the AbAnon curriculum, you will only need the Facilitator Guide. Everything contained in the Participant Manual is also in this Facilitator Guide, with the exception of the journal page at the end of each session.

As you use this Facilitator Guide to lead you through the agenda for each session:

- Text for you to read is presented as normal text that may sometimes be bolded for emphasis.
- Text in ***bold italics*** is intended as instructions for you and should not be read aloud to your group.

- Remind participants to familiarize themselves with each session before the group starts, especially if they read it at the beginning of the week.
- Look over "The Feeling Wheel," Grounding Techniques, Forgiveness Support, "Helping A Woman Who Suffers." Sample Memorial Service and Additional Resources listed in the Appendices before you begin your group.

SESSION ONE

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session One so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Review "Taking Stock" beginning on page 9.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

START THE FIRST SESSION HERE:

WELCOME

Facilitator Note - Greet participants and read the following aloud:

_____ and _____ will be your facilitators for the next eight weeks. You are very courageous

for taking this step toward processing your role in an abortion. We're glad you're here.

If you'd like to open your Participant Manual to Session One, you can follow along with me.

INTRODUCTIONS

Facilitator Note - Read the following to the group and go first, modeling what you want them to do.

At this time, let's introduce ourselves. For now, let's start with:

- Name
- Where you are from
- What would you like to take away from your experience over the next eight weeks?

Continue reading…

OVER THE NEXT EIGHT WEEKS, WE WILL TALK ABOUT:

- Your abortion story and the role you played
- How your role in an abortion may have affected you
- Ways you may have coped with your abortion involvement
- Your relationships
- Your child
- Common emotions surrounding abortion
- God & faith

- Healing & forgiveness

ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

Continue reading…

We like to establish group norms or ground rules by which we agree to conduct our meetings together. This way we all have the same expectations and can get the most from this experience. Some group norms we see as essential are:

Facilitator Note - Ask each participant to take a turn reading a group norm found on pages 14-15 of the Participant Manual.

- **Keep confidences**—What we say here stays here. We pledge to keep confidences and ask the same of each member of the group.

- **Be present and ready**—Attend all the sessions (except in an emergency). Your presence here is not only important for you, but for the other participants as well. Being present includes keeping up with the light reading or homework between sessions and being ready to share your thoughts. If you have to leave the group, please explain why, so others are not left with the possibility of having been the reason.

- **Be respectful**—We agree to respect each other: our individual situations, our ethnicity, our faiths, the choices we've made, the things we may say, and how we each process our abortion experience.

- **Function as a team**—We agree to function as a team: no one dominates the conversation; we listen to each other; we're here to assist, encourage and care for each other.

- **Be humble**—Sometimes the way we suppress our own needs is by trying to fix others . Resist judging or attempting to fix each other.

- **Embrace your unique story**—Resist comparing your experience with those of the other men in your group. Let each man's experience stand on its own.

- **Believe and trust one another**—All the stories printed in this curriculum are factual. We commit to being truthful with each other as well.

- **"Check-ins"**—Allow each other to check in and ensure we're okay through any pain the healing process may prompt.

- **No "sharing hangovers"**—Resist regretting what we've shared with each other.

- **Always end on a positive note.**

- **What else** would you like to set down as a group norm?

Facilitator Note - Ask participants to put their books down as you read the next two sections.

INTRODUCTION — *THE POWER OF YOUR STORY FOR MEN*

Welcome! We are so glad you've chosen to join us for this eight-week session designed to help you process your abortion experience. Be assured that we will maintain confidentiality as you participate with this small group of men.

For most women who have had an abortion there is a man in the picture who played some role in the abortion process. A woman's involvement in an abortion is all-encompassing; abortion impacts her physically, relationally, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and psychologically. A man can be impacted in many of these ways as well, but his involvement in the abortion experience may play out in unique scenarios.

At one end of the spectrum is a man who fathered a child that the mother aborted without his knowledge. In fact, he may not have even known she was pregnant. At the other end of the spectrum is a man who pressured the mother of his child into abortion. Between these two there are a variety of others. Each situation, every man's story, and how abortion has affected him is different. The way each man processes his role in an abortion will also be different.

You may not see your particular experience in this curriculum because the stories shared within this book are specific to the storytellers' situations. However, each session uses aspects of the story to explore general, powerful principles for healing that can be applied to many scenarios. Do the work to extract these principles and put them into practice.

Whatever healing you seek with regard to your role in an abortion, some sort of change is inevitable. Change can be difficult and intimidating but necessary if we want different outcomes than we're currently experiencing. Some of what we'll be addressing may be difficult to discuss, but remember, we're all in this together.

Continue reading…

DISCLAIMER

We recognize that every person is different, and working through issues surrounding your role in an abortion usually occurs over time. Our sincere hope is that you will achieve some measure of healing through this 8-session experience.

Our volunteer facilitators come with their own abortion stories and are in various stages of processing their role in an abortion. Not functioning as professional counselors or life coaches in this group, they have personally experienced a man's role in an abortion and are passionate about providing a safe, supportive environment for others.

Any profits from the sale of the Participant Manuals go to cover the cost of printing, shipping and the support and expansion of AbAnon. Abortion Anonymous (AbAnon) is part of SRT Services, a registered, 501c(3) not-for-profit organization financed primarily through the generous contributions of donors.

AbAnon does not represent a particular religious denomination. Anyone who has had a role in an abortion, whether they claim religious beliefs or not, is welcome to our gender-specific programs.

We freely acknowledge that part of our 8-week program involves discussion about God, faith and forgiveness. Abortion impacts the whole person: physically, emotionally, mentally, relationally and spiritually. Many people have found change and healing through faith and SRT Services would be remiss in our responsibility if we failed to include God and faith in our curriculum. However, to make every participant feel welcome and comfortable, our meetings will not include prayer.

If you are actively harming yourself or having suicidal thoughts, please seek the help of a professional counselor immediately. We can

discreetly help you locate a counselor if you like. This support group is not intended to replace professional counseling or therapy. You can find a comprehensive list of resources, including 24/7 hotlines, at srtservices.org/resources.

Facilitator Note - Invite participants to pick up their books and follow along from page 18 as you continue to read.

HOW THE PARTICIPANT MANUAL WORKS

Each chapter has pre-work that you need to complete before the next session. If you turn to Session Two on page 25 in your manual, you'll see that after a review of our group norms and a personal abortion story from your facilitator, the session begins with Jim's story, accompanied by some discussion questions. These stories are followed by readings that focus on healing actions with their own discussion questions. At the end of each session, you will find a journal page. Feel free to use this space, journal electronically, or write your thoughts in a separate notebook.

Some of the chapters also contain practical steps. Please do this homework early in the week so that you're not scrambling at the last minute to finish. It may benefit you to break the preparation up over multiple days. Take your time and seek to gain all you can from this experience. The more you invest, the more you'll take away.

Facilitator Note - Ask for volunteers to read 2 paragraphs each through the end of this section, beginning on page 18 of their Participant Manual.

MEN AND ABORTION

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 21 percent of all pregnancies end in abortion in the US. [2] More than 60 million abortions have been performed in our nation since the federal government legalized it in 1973, averaging a million abortions every year.[3] Since one-fourth of the women in the US today have had at least one abortion,[4] it is safe to assume that the number of men involved in an abortion is similar.

A professor of sociology at Drexel University, Arthur Shostak spent ten years studying the abortion experience of men. Shostak, who had been deeply disturbed by his own role in an abortion, said:

> *Most of the men I talk to think about the abortion years after it is over. They feel sad, they feel curious, they feel a lot of things; but usually they have talked to no one about it. It's a taboo.... With a man, if he wants to shed a tear, he had better do it privately. If he feels that the abortion had denied him his child, he had better work through it himself. He does not share his pain with a clergyman, a minister; he does not share it with a close male friend. It just stays with him. And it stays for a long time.*[5]

Men have reported a large number of problems that were a result of their abortion experience:[6]

2 "Pregnancies, Births and Abortions in the United States, 1973–2020: National and State Trends by Age" Guttmacher Institute https://www.guttmacher.org/report/pregnancies-births-abortions-in-united-states-1973-2020.

3 "Pregnancies, Births and Abortions in the United States, 1973–2020: National and State Trends by Age" Guttmacher Institute.

4 One in Four US Women Expected to Have an Abortion in Their Lifetime, April 17, 2024 https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2024/one-four-us-women-expected-have-abortion-their-lifetime.

5 Thomas Strahan, "Portraits of Post-Abortive Fathers Devastated by the Abortion Experience," Assoc. for Interdisciplinary Research in Values and Social Change, 7(3), Nov/Dec 1994.

6 Strahan, "Portraits of Post-Abortive Fathers Devastated by the Abortion Experience."

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Please read silently the first list on pages 19-20 of your manual and check any box that you have experienced.

Please check all that apply to you:

- ☐ broken relationships
- ☐ sexual dysfunction
- ☐ substance abuse
- ☐ addictions
- ☐ self-hate
- ☐ risk taking
- ☐ suicidal behavior
- ☐ increasing feelings of grief over time
- ☐ feelings of helplessness
- ☐ guilt
- ☐ depression
- ☐ greater tendencies toward becoming angry and violent
- ☐ a sense of lost manhood.

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Would anyone be willing to share an item you checked?

ABORTION IMPACTS RELATIONSHIPS

A guilt-ridden, tormented male does not easily love or accept love. Because abortion affects both women and men, it has an impact on couple and family relationships. Most research supports the conclusion that the vast majority of unmarried couples who participate in an abortion end their relationships within a year, often within weeks.

While the outcome for married couples is mixed, many report that their abortion led them to divorce. [7]

Abortion has never been known to solve any relationship problems. The only time couples report feeling closer after an abortion is when they have shared with each other feelings of grief or regret about having aborted their child. The relief of being freed from an unplanned pregnancy seldom binds a couple closer together, but honest, shared remorse can.

Men may feel bound by a code of silence. They are likely to believe it is their responsibility not to complicate their partner's emotional recovery with any expression of their own doubts or grief. Relegated to "something we don't talk about," there can be a need, as individuals and as a couple, to fiercely cling to the belief that the abortion was the right choice.

The man and the woman involved are each likely to be experiencing different levels of regret, guilt or resentment. If one appears to be coping relatively well, this may not sit well with the partner who is saddened or depressed. On the other hand, signs of depression may cause the seemingly less affected partner to feel unfairly blamed for the abortion.

Typical grief responses you might recognize include:[8]

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Please read the second list on page 21 silently and check off any item relevant to your experience.

7 E. M. Belsey, et al., "Predictive factors in emotional response to Abortion: Kings Termination Study, IV," *Social Science and Medicine* 11:71-82 (1977).

8 Vincent Rue, "The Effects of Abortion on Men," *Ethics & Medics* 21(4):3-4, 1996.

Please check all that apply to you:

- ☐ remaining silent and grieving alone
- ☐ doubts about your ability to protect yourself and those you love
- ☐ depression and/or anxiety
- ☐ compulsive behavior
- ☐ controlling or demanding behavior
- ☐ rage or hostility

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Would anyone be willing to share an item you checked?

We are here to acknowledge and empathize with you as you process your role in an abortion experience. You are not alone.

Facilitator Note – Ask participants to put their books down. The facilitator NOT sharing his story will be the Leading Facilitator for the next part.

FACILITATOR STORY

Read this introduction to the group: This curriculum is called *The Power of Your Story For Men* because there is great healing in sharing our abortion stories in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. As facilitators, we want to model what we will be asking you to do. So today, your facilitator will be sharing his story. As you listen, please think about how you could provide support and encouragement. Then consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Facilitator shares his story.

Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support, in a way that would model future responses from the group.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What's your reaction to your facilitator's story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the facilitator who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you have shared your story?

Facilitator Note - Invite participants to pick their books back up and follow along from page 22 as you continue to read the next three sections.

JOURNALING TOWARD HEALING

Many therapists encourage us to journal our healing process. There is no right or wrong way to do it. Record both the pain and the strides you're making toward healing. Your journal is for your eyes only, and we encourage you to occasionally reread it and note the progress you've made toward healing.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Some of you may be thinking, "I've been trying to put my role in an abortion behind me for years. Why would I want to revisit that experience again? I just want to move on and forget about it." Others may be processing an abortion in a different way that's difficult to describe at this time. That's okay.

In the following seven weeks of *The Power of Your Story For Men*, we want to join with you in processing your abortion. We'll provide you with tools and strategies for doing so. We want to help you find answers, support you, and offer you hope.

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please complete the following tasks before our next session.

1. Self-assessment. Please take a few minutes and go back over the two lists of possible responses to abortion found on pages 19-21 in this chapter. Check off any additional responses that you have experienced in the past or are experiencing now. Be prepared to share some of these with the group.
2. Please read Session Two: Jim's story, the impact of losing our voice and Healing Action 1: Acknowledge Our Pain in Community. Write your answers to the corresponding questions. We will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week.
3. Write down your answers to the questions about your abortion experience so you can begin assembling your story.
4. Start your journal by making a note of your thoughts about this first session.
5. We'll meet here each week for seven more weeks at _____ (time).

CLOSING

Facilitator Note - Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. ***If you have extra time:*** Beginning on page 9 of your manual is a section called "Taking Stock." How did you answer the final question on page 11?

   You may have to wait for the participants to read through this section if they didn't do it ahead of time.

2. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?

3. Each week we want to try to end on a positive note. What is one positive thing you are taking away from the session?

4. The group norms refer to a "check-in" to support you. How could we do that for you during the week? ***Depending on facilitator preferences, this could include texting, emailing, calling or meeting with participants.***

Thank you for coming!

SESSION TWO

The real freedom we seek is often found in the vulnerability of the secrets we least desire to talk about.
– Lee Hudson

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Two so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Review Appendix A and Appendix F.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME AND REVIEW GROUP NORMS

Facilitator Note - Welcome participants back and lead discussion reviewing group norms: Welcome back! Thank you for being here.

Let's briefly review our Group Norms. Recall as many as you can without looking. ***(To the extent possible, let them state these.)***

- **Keep confidences**—What we say here stays here. We pledge to keep confidences and ask the same of each member of the group.

- **Be present and ready**—Attend all the sessions (except in an emergency). Your presence here is not only important for you, but for the other participants as well. Being present includes keeping up with the light reading or homework between sessions and being ready to share your thoughts. If you have to leave the group, please explain why, so others are not left with the possibility of having been the reason.

- **Be respectful**—We agree to respect each other: our individual situations, our ethnicity, our faiths, the choices we've made, the things we may say, and how we each process our abortion experience.

- **Function as a team**—We agree to function as a team: no one dominates the conversation; we listen to each other; we're here to assist, encourage and care for each other.

- **Be humble**—Sometimes the way we suppress our own needs is by trying to fix others . Resist judging or attempting to fix each other.

- **Embrace your unique story**—Resist comparing your experience with those of the other men in your group. Let each man's experience stand on its own.

- **Believe and trust one another**—All the stories printed in this curriculum are factual. We commit to being truthful with each other as well.

- **"Check-ins"**—Allow each other to check in and ensure we're okay through any pain the healing process may prompt.

- **No "sharing hangovers"**—Resist regretting what we've shared with each other.
- **Always end on a positive note.**
- **Any additional norms your group came up with.**

FACILITATOR STORY

Facilitator Note – Explain to the group: From this point on, our personal stories will be shared at the beginning of our group time. This allows the person sharing to fully participate in the rest of our time together, instead of being nervous during the entire meeting.

Ask participants to put their books down. The facilitator NOT sharing his story will be the Leading Facilitator for the next part.

Read this introduction to the group: Today we will be talking about the process of writing your story. To model what you will be working toward, your facilitator will be sharing his abortion story. As you listen, please think about how you could provide support and encouragement. Then consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Facilitator shares his story.

Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support, in a way that would model future responses from the group.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What's your reaction to your facilitator's story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the facilitator who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you have shared your story?

Read to the group: Each week, we'll spend some time discussing what we read. This week we asked you to read Session Two. Please do the reading each week so you can enter into the discussion.

Facilitator Note - Do not read the stories during the group meeting, and avoid summarizing them; some may use a weekly summary as an excuse not to prepare. Group members can be encouraged to briefly review the stories on their own before the meeting if they read them early in the week.

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 32 and talk about Jim's story.

Facilitator Note - Like all the stories, the following is contained in the Participant Manual.

JIM'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

After high school I didn't really have any concrete goals. I worked full time for a grocery store and owned a few rental properties and a self-service laundromat with my brother. Otherwise, I drank beer with my buddies and was open to various one-night stands. I considered myself a Christian but was not walking with the Lord.

I met Bethany by chance at a small-town parade while she was home from college for the summer. Pretty, kind and fun, she was crazy about me and I have to admit that I enjoyed that. I only had two short-term girlfriends in high school, and the second one broke my heart. I liked how Bethany liked me!

We dated the whole summer and became sexually active on our very first date. It's a miracle she didn't get pregnant. We were having fun, but I knew I did not want to be her boyfriend when she went back to college. I went to her house a couple of days before she was supposed to leave to tell her that I did not want a long-distance relationship but lost my nerve. She was not feeling well that day and I didn't want to hurt her feelings. Since she would be living five hours away and I would not see her every day, it was easier to continue to be her boyfriend than to break up with her.

I think I stayed with her out of guilt because we were intimate. I convinced myself that I should love her since we were sleeping together. I hoped I would miss her while she was gone at school and would come to the realization that I really did want her in my life, but my feelings did not change. In retrospect, knowing how I felt, my inaction was very selfish and cowardly.

Even though I wanted to break up, I visited her at college and we continued to have sex. We had a hunch that we were eventually going to get "bit." We talked about the possibility and agreed that we would get married if she became pregnant. Knowing I didn't really want to marry her, I convinced myself it would never come to that, and I had better

break up with her soon. Truth be told, I had met someone else and was cheating on her.

Then she let me know that her period was late, so I drove her to a clinic to get a pregnancy test. At that time, we were counseled concerning our options. She called me a few days later to tell me the test was positive.

We were both in shock and froze at the idea of what to do. For some time, she had evidently sensed my lack of interest in her and she wanted me to want her enough to marry her. I was only twenty years old and felt unable to support myself, let alone a baby and a wife.

Eventually, I brought up the idea of abortion. I just could not marry her. I felt like a caged animal. What had I been thinking? I offered to pay for the abortion, a hotel room for recovery, and any other costs.

Nearing the end of the first trimester, I think she reached the conclusion that she had to go ahead and do it. She had to have an abortion. I also believe she thought this decision might keep us together.

She scheduled the appointment and I drove her there. I accompanied her with the understanding that I would stay with her through the entire procedure. That was my idea. I felt I owed her that.

I remember sitting in the lobby of the clinic feeling absolutely sick. Everything in me said to grab her and run, but I didn't. I was just kind of numb and I think she was, too. We had a little bit of quiet conversation, assuring each other this was the right thing to do. Then we waited. When the nurse came to get her for the procedure, I went with her because I had committed that I would be with her through the whole thing. I remember her undressing from the waist down. She was so scared and sad, and I felt terrible. We were alone in the room, waiting for the doctor. She was lying on the table and she was softly crying. I had a moment where I almost said, "Get dressed. We are leaving. We're not going to do this." But I didn't.

When the doctor came into the room there was no turning back. I remember that he seemed nice but did not have any comforting bedside manner. He just got underway. His first step was to explain the use of some surgical instruments that looked like long, very skinny metal tubes to dilate her cervix. As he did this, I just remember feeling numb. The whole thing was surreal. I was torn between a sense of relief and a sense of horrible guilt.

After the dilation was complete, he used a surgical vacuum to remove the "products of conception" as he put it …our baby… from her body. The image of this part of the procedure is burned, seared into my memory. I watched as the "products of conception" as the doctor regarded them were sucked through a clear tube and into a closed, white, sterile-looking bucket that reminded me of a five-gallon paint can with a tight-fitting top. And these "products of conception" did not come out in one piece. It was hideous. Fortunately, Bethany could not see this and I never told her about it. The memory is deeply disturbing.

After the procedure we went to a nearby hotel where I had reserved a room for the night so she could recover. I lived with my parents and Bethany lived in a dorm room so neither of us could go home. She slept through the afternoon. I kept the cash payment receipt from the abortion for many years. I felt like I needed this reminder to remain in a state of guilt and the receipt helped with that. I also never forgot the date of the abortion. Each year it comes back to me.

We were still together after Bethany graduated from college and moved back home, but the situation was crazy. I felt like she stalked me and I resented her because she would not give up on our relationship. I could never get away from her. She was really struggling emotionally, and my guilt kept me with her. Finally, I went to college six hours away, partially to get away from her.

Bethany eventually married someone else and I heard through the grapevine that she could not have children. I was racked with guilt over

this for years. Did the abortion I encouraged her to have cause damage to her body so she could never have any children at all? I lost track of her until recently when we became online friends quite by accident.

When I set up an online profile, I searched for Bethany because I wanted to know what her life had been like. I found her profile and in the process of looking at it, I accidentally "friended" her. She must have been online because she accepted within minutes. She sent me a note that said, "Hi stranger!" but I did not respond for a whole year. However, I did see that she had given birth to two boys. I was wrong about her being unable to have kids and I felt relieved. With my wife's knowledge and approval, we have since chatted online and have a cordial relationship. We have never discussed the abortion.

For many years, I could count on one hand the number of people I told of the abortion. I did not tell my wife, who I married 8 years after my abortion, until a year and a half into our marriage. I was sure she would be utterly ashamed of me. The only reason I revealed it to her is because we had such a rocky first year of marriage, we were planning to get divorced.

She commented that it explained so much about me, making sense out of some of what she saw in me. I had an anger problem at the time, and I think she believed my unresolved guilt was part of it. Fortunately, our marriage survived and thrived.

I kept my abortion story buried inside me for decades. The initial spark of hope came from joining AbAnon. But on the first night of the group, I decided that I wasn't going to go through with it. I didn't know these men and this was a vulnerable topic. My apprehension had grown: "What are you doing, Jim?" "This is crazy, Jim!" "You don't know these guys." I remember being at my computer and almost not calling in. But I did.... and I'm so glad I did.

I came to feel a bond with the men in my group. I was part of a "band of brothers" who had been through an abortion and helped each other

settle it and make peace with it. I did not have to keep the dark secret anymore. Healing with these men and knowing I was not alone was powerful and freeing. We talked about our stories and, most importantly, not only acknowledged but mourned our babies.

I had convinced myself that if people at church found out about my role in an abortion, I would be ostracized. But the healing I received led me to volunteer with a pregnancy resource center, which resulted in opportunities to speak at churches, including my own. I'm not going to lie; I was very nervous about exposing my secret! But after one service a man approached me who had been keeping his secret for 15 years. Because I shared, he decided he was ready to talk about his role in an abortion in a healing group. If I can help this one man come to terms with his abortion, to no longer be trapped by it and buried under the weight of it, and to experience God's grace, mercy and forgiveness, then I can honestly say that the vulnerability that I felt when I shared my story was completely worth it.

DISCUSS JIM'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways can you identify with Jim's story?

2. What feelings do you share with Jim?

3. In what ways might discussing his feelings have helped Jim?

Facilitator Note- The material after each story is copied from the Participant Manual. Group members should have already read and reflected on this information, so you do not need to read this text

out loud unless prompted. Use your own judgment and the questions in the "Debrief" section to review and discuss this material.

HOW WE HEAL

It's important to acknowledge the feelings we have surrounding our abortion experiences. At AbAnon, we name them, take a close look at them, then explore some healing actions to aid in processing those emotions. The following Seven Actions can be helpful in your healing process. These actions aren't intended as a sequential to-do list. Instead, seek to integrate all seven into your life as you face your past and move forward toward healing.

Try to resist the temptation to minimize or ignore a particular action because they work best in conjunction with each other.

We will introduce all seven actions this week but only examine the first one in depth. Then, we'll delve deeper into each of the remaining actions in the weeks that follow.

SEVEN HEALING ACTIONS:

1. Acknowledge our pain in community.
2. Admit to poor choices and abandon unhealthy coping methods.
3. Release what you cannot change.
4. Healing requires forgiveness.
5. Confront fear through connection.
6. Reclaim your identity.
7. Honor your child.

In this session, we'll focus on Healing Action 1: Acknowledge our Pain in Community.

WHY IT'S SO VITAL TO SHARE YOUR STORY

When guys get together they talk about many things. Men will talk about things like sports, hunting, their jobs, their wives and kids. If their relationships are strong enough they might even dare to venture into the topics of religion or politics. But even daring to discuss religion or politics usually requires some understanding as to where the other guy stands.

Even more taboo than politics or religion is the subject of abortion. Men just don't talk about it. Yet, one in four men has played a role in an abortion and for many men abortion is a traumatic experience of loss. Whether this loss is conscious or shoved away in the back of their "man-vault", it is very real. Just like women, men can experience despair, regret, guilt, fear, anger and shame from their involvement in an abortion.

Depending on the role played by the father of the aborted child, the extent of these emotions may vary. The man who pressured his girlfriend to get an abortion may feel more shame than anger. The man who learned about the abortion of his child after the fact may feel more anger than shame. You may have never talked about your role in an abortion with other men. Even if you have, you probably have never talked about the loss you felt or the emotions that linger. But everyone in this AbAnon Group has had a similar experience. Talking about your experience is a crucial first step in processing your role in an abortion.

LOSING OUR VOICE

Men are born with the instinct to provide and protect, and men who fail to do so are viewed with contempt. Yet when it comes to men's role in abortion, this instinct is discouraged by today's culture. The same culture that expects fathers to provide and protect has stripped men of this responsibility when it comes to abortion. Many men who have fathered an aborted child have expressed that they felt "voiceless." To be voiceless is to feel powerless and vulnerable.

There are at least three ways that your abortion experience may have left you without a voice. First, some men might have demanded or were responsible for encouraging the abortion and may feel deeply ashamed for doing so. Shame causes us to hide what we've done. We live in fear of being found out or exposed. This fear prevents us from speaking the truth about our past and may even prompt us to lie about it. In this way, we feel gagged in terms of talking about our role in an abortion.

Second, some men feel that their opinion didn't matter, that they had no power in determining the future of the baby they fathered. His child was taken without his input, consent, or possibly even his knowledge. There wasn't anything he could do or say to prevent it. In cases where the father could have prevented the abortion, many men felt pressured to go along with it by the mother, her parents, his parents, a sibling, well-meaning friends, a doctor or social worker. In these cases, someone else spoke on his behalf and made the decision for him.

Finally, the voice of our culture speaks out in favor of abortion so loudly and pervasively that it can overwhelm or drown out our voice. For instance, much of the media and many people assert:

- "Abortion is a good choice."
- "You're doing the right thing to abort."

- "You have no other choice."
- "It's her body, her choice. No uterus, no voice."
- "You're just not ready for children."
- "You can always have children later."

Because the voices that promote these things are so loud and prevalent, we can be made to feel ashamed if we feel differently, pressured into silence and stripped of our voice.

HEALING ACTION 1: ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAIN IN COMMUNITY

You cannot heal or be set free from something you hide, suppress, or deny. A physical wound or cut will fester and become infected if you choose to ignore it. Instead, you must acknowledge it, clean it and dress it. In the same way, you must acknowledge your feelings surrounding your role in an abortion, confront them, and take steps to heal them.

The fact that you are in this group indicates that you're already moving in the direction of healing.

HOW WE GAIN BACK OUR VOICE

To gain back our voice, we need to address each of the three ways that may have left us voiceless.

First, there is a universal principle that helps us here: *Hiding our shame magnifies it and prolongs our agony. But when we reveal and renounce our shame, we find forgiveness and healing.* When we take the initiative to "come clean" and talk about what we did, we regain our voice.

It is said, "Confession is good for the soul." This is so true. One of the key steps for gaining back our voice and beginning our healing

process is to share our abortion story with each other. We are not suggesting that you tell your story to just anyone, for not everyone will receive it well.

Many men feel that they need healing following their role in an abortion, but that feeling sometimes does not surface until years after their abortion experience. Whether your feelings surfaced quickly, or over time, by sharing your story in a safe, caring environment, you will likely find release and a measure of healing.

Often, *the process of remembering is the beginning of healing*. This is because you are forced to recognize exactly what you're dealing with. Denying or ignoring any pain you might be experiencing from your role in an abortion will only prolong that pain.

Revealing the secret of your role in an abortion can free your spirit. What has been hidden is now in the open. Now you can speak. Getting your story "out in the open" (in the context of your AbAnon group) takes away much of the power from the guilt and shame you may have been feeling.

Second, if you feel you were in some way ignored or without input in the abortion decision, you must reject any victim mentality that remains. As long as we view ourselves as "victims" we remain powerless and voiceless. Victims remain victims and cannot rise above their circumstances.

Third, recognize that although the voice of our culture may be loud, this does not make it right. What the media or others declare does not necessarily express what you believe or are experiencing. You know what you feel. No one can argue with your experience.

Take your voice back. **Read over this list of declarations once more. In the spaces provided, express your own beliefs by rewording**

any of these statements based on how you feel about your abortion role today.

Facilitator Note - Participants may not disagree with every statement below.

- "Abortion is a good choice."

  _____

- "You're doing the right thing to abort."

  _____

- "You have no other choice."

  _____

- "It's her body, her choice. No uterus, no voice."

  _____

- "You're just not ready for children."

  _____

- "You can always have children later."

  _____

By telling your story, you give validity to the fact that your abortion experience significantly impacted your life. This is very important when so many are telling you to shake it off and forget about it. Others might say, "It's no big deal," but if it has been troubling to you, then sharing your story will validate what you've been feeling.

SHARING YOUR STORY IN COMMUNITY

There are several other reasons to share your abortion story— especially in the context of a safe, caring environment like we seek to provide in your AbAnon group.

First, hearing other men's stories may encourage you because you're not alone. There are many other men who have experienced similar emotions. They understand what you're going through and can empathize with you. They've experienced confusion, inner turmoil, shame, guilt, grief and pain.

As men, it is often difficult to name our emotions. You will find a tool to help in Appendix A. Please refer to "The Feeling Wheel" frequently as we process our experiences together. Appendix F (Additional Resources) lists books, online guidance and healing experiences that can help you sort through your emotions.

Facilitator Note - Appendix F includes "The Voice of the Heart: A Call to Full Living" by Chip Dodd which helps men identify and process emotions.

Second, as you hear others' stories, you may realize things that you hadn't thought of before. Hearing their experiences may help you identify past (and perhaps present) behaviors that may be harmful.

Third, hearing other men's stories may awaken compassion in you, allowing you to extend understanding toward them and receive it yourself. While being transparent and kind toward each other, we learn to be kind in our other relationships as well.

Finally, as you share your story and hear the other men in the group tell their stories, you will experience the power of standing together. We were never meant to struggle through life alone. We need each other. Take advantage of this tremendous support system being made available to you.

DEBRIEF: ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAIN IN COMMUNITY

Facilitator Note - Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 39 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions.

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

Our first healing action stresses the importance of sharing our abortion story with others who understand.

1. To what extent do you feel you lost your voice in connection with your abortion experience?

Circle one of the following:

Not at all *Perhaps a little* *More than a little* *To a great extent*

2. What struck you as a good reason to share our stories with each other?

Facilitator Note - Possible answers include:

- ***Hearing other men's stories encourages us because we're not alone.***
- ***We can realize things we hadn't thought of that may help us identify harmful behaviors.***
- ***Hearing other's stories may awaken compassion in us and allow us to extend understanding toward each other and ourselves.***
- ***We will experience the power of standing together.***

3. What would happen if you continue to view yourself as a victim?

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Who would like to share how you reworded some of the statements on pages 37-38?

HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Facilitator Note – Say to the group: The Participant Manual, beginning on page 40, gives some general guidelines to help you prepare to tell your story.

Read the following paragraph aloud and discuss the importance of writing down answers to the questions.

There is power in sharing your story, so we strongly encourage you to do so and to endure any temporary discomfort it may cause. Your story should be written down and take between 10-30 minutes to read out loud. The following questions will help you establish a framework.

Write your responses to these questions to help you prepare your story:

1. How old were you when you were involved in the abortion?
2. What factors led to your abortion?
3. Describe the relationship you were in that led to the pregnancy.
4. What were your goals and aspirations at that time?
5. Who made the decision to abort your child?
6. What role did you play in the actual abortion procedure?

7. If involved, what do you remember about the abortion procedure itself?
8. How did you feel immediately following the abortion procedure or immediately following your learning about the abortion? Where did you go? What did you do? Who were you with?
9. In what ways has the abortion affected your life since it occurred?
10. What else would be helpful for you to either get off your chest or share for someone else's benefit?

Facilitator Note - Take time to schedule when each participant will share his story and record commitments here:

Session	Date	Participant
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Encourage participants to record their commitments in their manuals on page 42.

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Session Three: Mike's story, the impact of despair and Healing Action 2: Admit to Poor Choices and Unhealthy Coping Methods. Write your answers to the corresponding questions and

come ready to discuss your responses during our group meeting next week. Record some thoughts in your journal.

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

SESSION THREE

What do we do if our responses to our problems become the problem?
– Anna Katharina Schaffner

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Three so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Review Appendix B.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME

Tell the group: How was your week? Has anyone begun to journal?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Let's turn to the discussion questions for Mike's story on pages 47-48.

MIKE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

My story is one that is probably not all that unusual. I came from a military family; my Dad spent his career in the Navy and my Mom was Japanese.

I was dating a girl in high school who was from a large Catholic family which included thirteen siblings. Although her family was Catholic they weren't what I would call "devout."

After dating for a while, my girlfriend and I became sexually active, but we were young and thought that all we needed to do for birth control was the rhythm method. This method seemed to work for everyone else. Well, as you can imagine, after a few months my girlfriend was pregnant.

We were very embarrassed to tell our parents…tons of shame. But both sets of parents handled the news with surprising calmness and maturity. They simply wanted to know, "Now what?"

As we processed our situation we approached things in a very business-like manner. I was seventeen years old and was pursuing an Army career. We both felt it was important to finish high school and we were both too young and immature to be parents. Our decision was easy: have an abortion, get rid of the "mass of tissue" before it became a real person. Having the baby was never an option.

We told our parents that we were going to have an abortion. Both sets of parents expressed some disappointment, maybe even some minor objection, but it was our decision and neither set of parents objected very strongly. There was no one defending our child's right to live.

A couple of years later my girlfriend and I got married and are still married today. I spent ten years in the Army and we have three children. Like many men, I put the abortion behind me and moved on. I didn't think that it had haunted me or affected my marriage. But at the same time I can't help but wonder if the abortion played a role in a miscarriage that my wife had later on. I also wonder if the abortion had anything to do with my infidelity

or my years of addiction to drugs and alcohol. Apparently, these are common reactions to having had an abortion.

I started attending church and carried on this pretense for many years. I was a Sunday morning Christian with no real relationship with God. But a few years ago, with the encouragement of a friend, I had a spiritual encounter. I asked God to forgive me of my sins and invited Jesus into my heart. I can't explain what happened, but the next morning when I got up I could tell I was different. A huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders and I now felt free from all the guilt and shame I had carried for years. And for some reason, I now found it very therapeutic to talk about the abortion.

The abortion is not something that my wife and I had talked about very often, but we were forced to talk about it when our son's girlfriend became pregnant. We vigorously defended that child's right to live and, thankfully, it resulted in an open adoption.

The advice I would offer men who have been involved in an abortion is this: like me, you probably don't realize it, but don't think for a minute that your abortion is not affecting you and your behavior. Talk about your abortion and the role you played and you'll find it to be quite healing.

DISCUSS MIKE'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways could you identify with Mike's story? What were you feeling?

2. In what ways did Mike's role in an abortion affect him?

3. In what ways did Mike's poor choices impact the lives of others?

Facilitator Note- The material after each story is copied from the Participant Manual. Group members should have already read and reflected on this information, so you do not need to read this text out loud unless prompted. Use your own judgment and the questions in the "Debrief" section to review and discuss this material.

DESPAIR

Many men encounter a loss of hope or feeling of deep discouragement, also known as despair. For men involved in an abortion, this often has, at its root, two very different experiences: feeling emasculated or feeling trapped.

Not only does a man have no legal say in an abortion decision, often he is silenced or completely left out of any discussion. When the decision to abort was made without his input or over his objections, men commonly describe themselves as feeling emasculated, powerless or helpless. In many cases this has led to despair because he believes that the child was just as much his as the mother's. Many believe that they had the responsibility to protect their child, but were denied their right to do so.

Despair is also a common emotion in cases where the father of the aborted child had input or voice in the decision, but because of the circumstances surrounding the situation, he felt trapped – that there was no way out. So, ultimately, it came down to the desperate choice of destroying his life or the life of a nameless, genderless, faceless child.

Whether it was through emasculation or being trapped, despair can torment him with thoughts such as: "You are such a horrible person!

Look what you've done, taking the life of your child! You are worthless, good for nothing and fit for no one!"

Buying into this self-condemnation, he may feel unworthy of love, thinking, "No one could ever forgive me. I was a coward and put my needs above those whom I had a duty to protect. I don't deserve anything good." And he might begin living out his despair, resorting to poor choices or unhealthy coping methods which could include:

Please check all that apply to you.

- ☐ Impulsive behavior/ lack of self-control
- ☐ Repeating actions obsessively
- ☐ Self-medicating (drugs, food, alcohol)
- ☐ Escape (pornography/fantasy/social media)
- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Risky sexual behavior
- ☐ Escaping into a busy career or some extreme hobby
- ☐ Self-destructive behavior
- ☐ Contemplating suicide
- ☐ Angry outbursts
- ☐ Failed relationships

Reading this may be very painful for some. If despair led to the abortion, or if it is what you felt because of being powerless, then despair may prevent you from healing. The question is: how do we replace despair with hope?

HEALING ACTION 2: ADMIT TO POOR CHOICES AND ABANDON UNHEALTHY COPING METHODS

Refuse to believe that your past actions determine who you are as a person. Even though you may now believe your abortion was wrong, the abortion does not diminish your worth as a man. Your worth is not measured by what you've done or haven't done, but by who you are. You are a valuable person of great potential.

Identify and reject self-destructive behaviors. Unhealthy coping methods worsen and prolong your pain. You cannot "pay" for what you did or what you allowed to happen to your child. Your child would not want you to hurt. Instead, seek those habits, behaviors and thoughts that are wholesome, healthy and promote hope. Finding freedom from self-destructive behaviors is an integral part of your healing. Here are four steps toward freedom from unhealthy coping methods:

1. Your first step is admitting or acknowledging that you are engaging in an unhealthy coping behavior. Acknowledging this to others, like this group, can help you resolve to abandon this practice.
2. Next, seek the necessary help, perhaps from a counselor or life coach, to remove this behavior from your life, following the steps they prescribe to help you break free. Some positive coping skills AbAnon participants have experienced include:

    - Getting out in nature
    - Journaling
    - Talking to a trusted friend or mentor
    - Reframing negative thoughts
    - Reading
    - Finding a hobby

- Proper nutrition and exercise
- Prayer or meditation
- Grounding techniques (explained in Appendix B)

Facilitator Note - Grounding techniques are simple exercises to calm and focus the mind, managing stress or anxiety.

These are not intended to replace professional counsel.

3. Stay with it and watch yourself heal. Make yourself accountable to one or more individuals who care about you and will stand by you.

4. Replace lies with truth. During the trauma surrounding pregnancies and abortion decisions, there may have been lies spoken over us by others or even by ourselves. Some of these lies might include:
   - My choice to abort defines who I am.
   - I am being punished for the abortion.
   - I don't deserve happiness or anything good.
   - No one will ever truly love me.
   - Anyone who learns of my abortion will reject me.
   - My aborted child would hate me.

The best way to demolish a lie is to replace it with truth. You might think this is primarily a logical, intellectual exercise, but it is not. Overcoming the lies produced by your abortion experience is largely a matter of your will, but the problem is that your emotions may betray you. Your feelings may seem to actually confirm some of those lies.

Emotions are fickle. You can be depressed one moment and angry the next. But by engaging your will you can begin to control and shape your emotions to behave the way you want them to. You accomplish

this by speaking truth to yourself and also by hearing the truth from others and accepting it.

The best way to overcome the lies your emotions may awaken is to speak truth to yourself--out loud! This may seem awkward, but engaging your mind and voice, hearing it in your own words, embeds these truths in your heart so you can begin to live them.

Some of these truths might include:

- What I have done in the past does not define me.
- My life has great value.
- I deserve a chance for happiness and good experiences in my life.
- God is in control and He loves me.
- There are many kind people who would not judge me.
- My aborted child lives in Heaven without any tears.

As you journal, list any lies that you've believed surrounding the pregnancy or abortion and replace them with truths. Begin speaking truth to yourself to demolish those debilitating lies.

You can learn to be patient with yourself and do things that help rather than harm you. A great way to instill hope in yourself is to provide hope to others by serving them. Perhaps you could look for ways to help other men who had a role in an abortion, volunteer at a charity, or help the homeless. Serving others may seem like the last thing you'd want to do right now. But experience shows that serving others is very therapeutic. Build your life around positive, healthy people and practices.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 2: ADMIT TO POOR CHOICES AND ABANDON UNHEALTHY COPING METHODS

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 53 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

1. In what ways might despair have played a part in your own involvement in abortion?

Facilitator Note - Ask for a volunteer to read the list of self-destructive behaviors found on page 49 of the Participant Manual.

2. Please check the box next to each self-destructive coping behavior on page 49 that you have experienced. What led to your participation in these behaviors?

Direct the group to the four steps to freedom from unhealthy coping behaviors on pages 50-51 of the Participant Manual.

3. Please review the four steps to freedom on pages 50-51. With which of those four ways do you resonate most?
4. Which one or ones did you decide to put into action?

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Kevin's story, the impact of regret and Healing Action 3: Release What You Cannot Change. Answer the corresponding questions and we will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week. As you journal, try to identify any lies you have been believing. What truths can you substitute?

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

SESSION FOUR

It's not about managing your emotions.
It's about managing your reaction to your emotions.
– Yung Pueblo

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Four so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! How are you doing?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 58 and talk about Kevin's story.

KEVIN'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

Not long ago, I received a message on social media from a former girlfriend: "Hi, Kevin this is Debbie. I was just thinking about you and wanted to catch up. Quite often I think about our child. If he had been born, he'd be 21 years old today."

Debbie's message hit me like a ton of bricks! Our abortion was an incident that I had stuffed for over two decades. I had completely packed it away. But hearing from Debbie and sensing her regret totally took me by surprise. Out of nowhere, our abortion became heavy on my heart.

I had grown up in a religious family and as a kid attended church with a close family friend. When I was around 11 years old, I went to church camp and accepted Christ into my heart, but during my high school and college years I stopped going to church.

In college I pursued a science degree, majoring in physiology and anatomy. I proceeded to live a very promiscuous life, jumping from girlfriend to girlfriend. One such girl was Debbie. She was a bartender, and that's where I met her.

Debbie and I had been seeing each other for about six months when she announced that she was pregnant. She already had a three-year-old son from a previous marriage and shared 50/50 custody with her ex-husband. Together, Debbie and I decided that neither of us was ready to take on another child. I was very selfish, not wanting to commit to her or the baby.

The abortion was a mutual decision. She set up the appointment and I drove her to the clinic, but did not go in with her for the procedure. After the procedure, she was sad for some time. We dated perhaps another six or seven months before she moved out of state and we broke up.

Years passed and I met my wife, Carol, and we married three years later. She seemed to be surrounded by Christian women in the hospital ICU unit where she worked as a nurse. She didn't come from a Christian

background, but her Christian co-workers convinced her to at least listen to the message of Christ so our kids would be exposed.

A short time later, we joined an evangelical church where many of the police officers I worked with attended. There, Carol and I committed our lives to Christ again. Christ has made a huge, positive difference in our marriage and family as we raise our children.

But when Debbie reconnected with me, it turned my world upside down. I confessed to her that if I could do it over again, I would not choose to abort our child. She responded, "Neither would I."

Since Debbie's message regarding our abortion, I've experienced a lot of sadness and regret. For some reason, Debbie and I both think of our baby as a boy. I constantly wonder what he would look like—what he would be like. While the abortion seemed like the right thing to do at the time, it has only made both of us very sad and full of regret. I'm greatly disappointed in myself today for choosing the path that we did.

Reflecting back on this incident made me realize that I'm probably responsible for at least one other abortion with another woman. This has only intensified my feelings of sadness and regret.

Since the abortion, I have served as a firefighter, emergency medical responder, and police officer. During those years, I witnessed a lot of really bad stuff. I saw things that most people can't even imagine. The automobile accidents, knifings, shootings, and especially the child abuse and neglect were awful! I've seen so much death and have come to cherish how precious life is.

On numerous occasions, I've performed CPR on a child who was in the throes of death. Those faces and memories are indelibly engraved on my mind. As a result, I've become a passionate protector of children. I can't stand to see a helpless child suffer at the hands of an adult's stupidity and poor choices. I don't think you can really value life until you've seen it so devalued.

During all the years I've worked as a first responder, I've made it my goal to save and preserve life. This makes my involvement in my past abortions even more abhorrent to me. Without Christ's mercy and forgiveness, I honestly don't know how I'd cope with the guilt!

DISCUSS KEVIN'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways can you identify with Kevin's story? What were you feeling?
2. In what ways did the abortion impact Kevin's life?
3. What feelings of regret for you are brought up by Kevin's story?

REGRET

Regret is another emotion that many men manifest to express the pain of their involvement in an abortion. We all have past regrets, sorrow over things we've done that we wish we hadn't, and over things we didn't do, but wish we had.

Men commonly express a number of regrets as a result of their role in an abortion.

Please check all that apply to you:

I regret that…

☐ I dated her.

☐ I had sex with her at the time.

- ☐ I got her pregnant in the first place.
- ☐ We listened to those who urged us to get the abortion.
- ☐ We didn't listen to those who tried to dissuade us from having the abortion.
- ☐ Our friends, parents, siblings or someone else close didn't keep us from aborting our child.
- ☐ I had anything to do with having the abortion.
- ☐ I couldn't do anything to prevent my child from being aborted.
- ☐ I don't know my child, its gender, or anything else about him or her.
- ☐ Other: _____

One reason that regret is so debilitating is that it is based on something that happened in the past. Since we cannot change the past, it is futile to continually live in regret over our role in the abortion, caught up in the whirlpool of "what ifs." Eventually, regret spills over into our relationships and can cause us to beat ourselves up emotionally.

We carry regret around like too much baggage. This baggage encumbers us and weighs us down. No matter where we go, we find ourselves dragging this heavy load with us. Sometimes the emotional strain we feel under this burden is unbearable, yet we feel torn. On the one hand, we wish we could discard this great burden, and on the other hand we feel that we just might deserve it!

The regret we feel is often tied directly to our child. Before the abortion, our culture and others around us may have led us to think about our child in the following terms:

- Depersonalized
- Dehumanized ("It's just tissue")
- Removed or distant
- Unreal

But at some point after the abortion we may face:

- Reality setting in about our child—it was a human being, a person
- A desire to know about our child—gender, hair and eye color, etc.
- Speculation about our child and what he or she would have been like

HEALING ACTION 3: RELEASE WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE

Regret, sorrow and grief are all forms of emotional pain. Pain plays an important role in letting us know "something is wrong" and there are only two primary responses to pain: we can either suppress it, or take steps to cope with it.

While suppressing the pain may be a coping mechanism, it's not a good one, because it doesn't solve anything. Suppressing or ignoring regret and sorrow, though common, is an irrational response that may result in behaviors leading to more regret.

Instead, we must take steps toward coping effectively with our regret.

1. **Lay down the baggage of "what ifs" and second guessing.** You cannot change the past no matter how badly you wish you could. Settle that in your mind and unload that burden from your shoulders.

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
– Reinhold Niebuhr

2. **Discard the baggage of things you could not control.** No doubt there were circumstances around your abortion over which you had no control. If so, you are carrying someone else's baggage. Release it and be free from it.
3. **Move the echoes of your past abortion experience to your mind's spam folder.** Those tormenting memories may include conversations, people you'd rather forget, driving your partner to the clinic, the noises and smells. Mentally send them to your spam folder, trash, and DELETE! Be done with it.
4. **Begin to accept that you are not defined by mistakes in your past by doing the following exercise:**

Go where you can look into a mirror, quiet and alone. Look beyond the reflection you see and identify at least ten positive attributes about yourself. List these positive attributes here and state them in this fashion: "I am: …"

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10._____

If you are struggling to come up with ten, here are a couple to get you started:

— I am capable of making good decisions.

— I am strong.

Yes, there will always be a reasonable amount of regret attached to your role in the abortion, but you can learn to lighten the load.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 3: RELEASE WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE

Facilitator Note - Say to the group: In your Participant Manual on page 59, there is a list of common regrets. If you feel comfortable sharing these, which ones did you check? What other regrets did you add to the list?

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 63 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

1. In what ways have you felt weighed down by regret?

2. Regret is often connected directly to our baby. And even though our culture has tried to depersonalize and dehumanize our child, at some point along the way, the truth set in that our child was a human being—a person. When and how has this happened for you?

3. Beginning on page 61 are steps for coping with the baggage of regret. With which of those steps could you most identify and why? How did it feel to finally put the weight of that extra baggage down?

4. There may be instances where you realize that you've picked up this old baggage again. What can you do in such cases?

Facilitator Note - Direct the participants to the mirror exercise on pages 61-62 and ask the group: What are some positive attributes you identified in yourself?

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- I am defined by my actions in the past.
- There is no escape from despair.
- _____(fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

- Who I am is not a sum total of what I've done.
- I can dispose of the baggage I'm holding for myself or someone else.

- _____(fill in your own).

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Jerry's story, the impact of anger and Healing Action 4: Healing Requires Forgiveness. Answer the corresponding questions and continue writing in your journal. We will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week.

Facilitator Note - Ask participants to turn to Session 5, #1 on page 74 in their Participant Manual (page 83 in this guide) and stress the importance of casting a wide net for the list of names they write down.

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

SESSION FIVE

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover
that the prisoner was you.
– Corrie Ten Boom

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Five so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Review the Forgiveness Support activities in Appendix C for possible use in this session.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! How are you doing?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 70 and talk about Jerry's story.

JERRY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

My girlfriend and I had been living together for two or three years. We were heavily engaged in a party lifestyle that included drugs, alcohol and sexual involvement with another couple. Consequently, when my girlfriend got pregnant, we didn't know for sure who the father was.

Besides the fact that a baby would have cramped our party style, not knowing whose it was played a major role in our decision to get an abortion. The abortion was a mutual decision. My girlfriend was very pro-women's rights, so she saw the abortion as her prerogative and I was in full agreement.

I accompanied her to the abortion clinic and stayed with her during the procedure. It was a horrible experience. She was very upset and cried through the whole thing. I was helpless to do anything for her.

In the days following the abortion, both of us experienced mild depression—certainly she did more than I. Then we tried to move on from the abortion. We didn't really go through a grieving process at the time, nor did we talk about the abortion. But as time went on, we often wondered, "What if we had kept the baby?"

Meanwhile, we continued living our party lifestyle. We had been living together for five years when we chose to get married. After our wedding, we decided to have kids and that decision took our minds back to the abortion. I think that's when it first hit us that we had aborted a person and we began wondering a lot more about that baby.

During those next months, my wife had two miscarriages and we couldn't help but wonder if they resulted from the abortion. Finally, she was able to carry a baby to term and our boy was born. After the birth of our son, I went into a 12-step recovery program to get off drugs and alcohol. My perspective started changing and I began thinking about God.

The recovery program caused me to look back in my past, ask forgiveness from people I had hurt and to make amends. During this time, both my

wife and I turned to Christ. We put our trust in Him for forgiveness of our sins and chose to follow Him.

My wife hesitantly decided to attend a recovery group for women suffering due to abortion. As she did, my sensitivity toward our abortion and abortion in general heightened. We both really began feeling remorse over our abortion. I wept bitterly over what we'd done.

Not until then did I think back to a girl I had gotten pregnant at camp when I was in high school. We had lived in different towns and she contacted me after camp telling me she was pregnant. It was easy to just send her money and let her take care of her "problem."

But now, with my new perspective on abortion, I looked her up, called her and asked her to forgive me. She wasn't ready for that and was angry with me for suggesting that it had been wrong.

Today, I still deal with regret over my abortions. There are so many reminders: seeing a child, a TV commercial, or a billboard brings it all back. I wonder what could have been had we let my two children live. I know that I have God's forgiveness, but the regret never goes away.

After our boy was born, my wife had an ectopic pregnancy (outside the uterus) and had to have major surgery to save her life. In all, she was pregnant five times, but we only have one child to show for it. The abortion affected her profoundly both emotionally and physically and I still grieve and feel sad over it.

Today, I am very grateful to God for our son! He's an amazing young man who graduated from high school with honors and earned a full scholarship to a private college. We're very proud of him. I thank Jesus Christ for His abundant forgiveness and grace in our lives! In spite of our mistakes and sins, He loves us and has given us so much!

DISCUSS JERRY'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways can you identify with Jerry's story?

   What were you feeling?

2. What was the role of forgiveness in Jerry's healing?

3. What part of Jerry's story might make you wonder if he has forgiven himself?

Facilitator Note - The presence of emotions such as regret or anger can sometimes indicate more work is required, but it does not always mean you haven't forgiven yourself.

ANGER

Anger is a natural and normal emotion, but there are different kinds of anger. Sometimes it is a healthy response to injustice or imminent threats. Passionate feelings make it clear to ourselves and others what is important to us, forcing us to be honest. However, it can also be a secondary emotion, which means it covers up other emotions such as shame, guilt or fear, requiring us to stop and consider what is happening inside our hearts and minds.

Don't be afraid of your anger; allow its presence to encourage you to be truthful with yourself about its source. Many men react to their role in an abortion with anger that may be directed at themselves, at the women who may have ignored their wishes and pursued an abortion, at those who participated or those who failed to intervene. Circumstances leading up to or resulting from their role in the abortion are also common targets, as is God.

If we fail to heed this warning sign, we risk some severe pitfalls. Many men who have had a role in an abortion respond with anger, but have no idea why they are angry or what they could do about it. They may never have even associated the anger they feel with their abortion experience. Unresolved anger can lead to many consequences:

Please check any you have experienced:

- ☐ Damaging relationships because you lash out at someone who just happens to be nearby
- ☐ Damaging relationships by going silent or ignoring those around you
- ☐ Feeling unworthy of love so you push others away, rejecting their love and denying them yours
- ☐ Imploding instead of exploding, subconsciously directing your anger toward yourself as punishment for what you have done or failed to do
- ☐ Justifying your frustration and agitation
- ☐ Blaming, hiding or denying
- ☐ Engaging in self-destructive behaviors contrary to your conscience and moral standards (drinking, drugs, sexual recklessness, gambling, pornography)

Anger can be a desperate attempt to regain control over a situation in which you believe you may have lost control. If you struggle with antagonism toward others over the hurt or frustration that you feel, if you lash out at yourself or others or entertain irrational and unhealthy thoughts, words or behaviors, you may need to take a close look at

your anger. When anger is in control, you can injure others and cannot heal, because it's like acid that eats away at the person holding it. The damaging things you think and say about yourself become self-fulfilling prophecies.

If unrestrained, it can consume your life, weaving strong patterns that are difficult to break. If you're subconsciously angry over your role in an abortion, you are likely to look for things around you to justify and feed your anger. For this reason, you may need to face the hard truth that whatever you are angry about at the moment may not actually be the source or root of your anger—the abortion is.

HEALING ACTION 4: HEALING REQUIRES FORGIVENESS

In order to break the patterns of anger in our lives, we must identify its root cause. Anger is a very relational response. What that means is that even if we are upset over a situation or an event, we invariably direct our anger toward people. This may be ourselves, God, anyone else who was involved in our abortion, or we may take it out on those around us who have nothing to do with our abortion. Anger expresses itself toward people.

Because of this relational aspect of anger, the only way to truly rid ourselves of anger is to forgive those who have offended us—including ourselves. When we're angry with someone, we tend to put the responsibility on them to change, not realizing that we need to change. We must take the initiative. Forgiveness is vital, because it removes the reason for our anger and helps us work through it. For most of us, forgiving others and ourselves may be extremely difficult.

First, we may think that if we forgive someone for their role in the pregnancy or the abortion that we are somehow condoning their actions. This is not true. In reality, the act of forgiveness validates that there is a real offense which warrants forgiving.

Second, we mistakenly think that by withholding forgiveness from someone, we exercise control over them. This is a form of revenge. The irony is that withholding forgiveness from others harms us more than it harms them. Refusing to forgive someone is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.

Finally, just getting used to the concept of forgiving people involved with your pregnancy or abortion, including yourself, can take time. When an animal is injured in the wild, it often crawls off to die alone. Because we feel wounded, we may be tempted to do the same. Being angry and bitter toward others drives us into isolation and loneliness. This thinking is part of the folly of anger, allowing it to control us. It's like keeping a rabid dog in the basement that we continue to feed, even though we're afraid of it. But we will only find relief when we remove the basis for our anger.

Forgiveness is **NOT:**

- justifying our behavior
- justifying other people's behavior
- forgetting
- an open door for more wrongdoing
- reconciliation

Forgiveness **IS:**

- a choice
- a process
- feeling the hurt and then releasing the hurt

We cannot go back and erase the abortion, but we can forgive others and ourselves for our role in it. Doing so will help us release the burden of anger in our lives.

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS:

1. **Identify those with whom you are angry**. Write down the names of everyone who played any role in your abortion experience. Include anyone and everyone that was even remotely involved: before, during and after, including yourself, your partner, or even God. Even if you don't FEEL anger toward someone involved, it is best to include their name and really think about it. Feel free to include people with whom you are currently angry, even if they are unconnected to your abortion. Appendix C includes a "Responsibility Pie" which may help you assign levels of responsibility.

   _____

   _____

Facilitator Note - The "Responsibility Pie" in Appendix C may be helpful, especially if participants blame only themselves.

It may be beneficial for the participant to "forgive" God in the same way they forgive the individuals they name in this session, even though God is perfect and never needs to be forgiven. There is nothing wrong with expressing anger toward God.

2. **Forgive each of these individuals.** We are not suggesting that you actually go to each of these individuals or even call or write to them. (In some cases, you may choose to do so, but be careful about opening yourself up to additional trauma.) There are two parts to this step:

   a. **Prepare a short statement that you will actually speak aloud.** This statement may be something like: "___(person's name)___, I choose

to forgive you for your role in that abortion experience and I release my grudge against you."

b. **Speak these words of forgiveness for each person on your list.** Find a private space where you feel safe and free from distractions. As you work through your list, say each statement of forgiveness out loud. This may feel awkward at first, but verbalizing forgiveness engages your brain as well as your heart, helping you process your thoughts more deeply. Hearing your own voice can lead to new insights and emotional connections, even if you're not fully ready to forgive yet. It also reinforces the seriousness of the exercise and can gently begin to boost confidence, clarity, and even self-esteem as you give voice to your healing.

Facilitator Note - For participants who have difficulty letting go of anger, assign them the "Burden of Unforgiveness" activity in Appendix C.

c. If the statement in (a) is something you are just not ready to say, consider backing it off to something like: "___(person's name)___, I **want** to forgive you for your role in that abortion experience and release my grudge against you. I no longer wish to carry the burden of anger."

3. **Next, understand that anger is a two-way street.** People have offended us but we may have offended others as well, through our role in the abortion or by the way we've treated them. If we have offended others, we can find refreshment and freedom by going

to them and asking their forgiveness. By taking the initiative to ask their forgiveness, we also offer them freedom from their anger.

You must approach this step using some common sense:

a. **Make a list.** Who have you offended? Go to them and ask them to forgive you. Be careful, however, to avoid opening yourself to relationships that have been toxic.

_____

_____

b. **Choose your words wisely.** Words like, "Sorry if I offended you," are insincere and hypocritical. Say something like, "I'm sorry for _____. Would you please forgive me?" If you feel you need to provide the person with the context for your apology, then do so.

4. **Consider asking God to forgive you.** As you read this, you will know whether this step is right for you now. If you would like to ask God's forgiveness for your role in an abortion and other actions that have followed as a result, simply talk to Him: tell Him you're sorry and ask Him to forgive you. God loves it when we come to Him like this. He will not turn you away or deny you forgiveness.

5. **Be prepared for reappearances of anger.** It's important to record what you have done: whom you've forgiven and what you said. Then, when anger does show up again, come back to what you did in this

exercise. You may need to do this from time to time. Some people experience an immediate and complete sense of release and freedom in forgiveness. With others it occurs over time. If you're one of those who continues to struggle with anger and forgiveness, don't be discouraged or frustrated, but keep at it. Repeat the actions you initiated in this exercise. Keep rehearsing the truth of what you know.

FORGIVING YOURSELF

Sometimes you might struggle to forgive yourself. Perhaps you carry guilt over the abortion, poor coping choices or anger directed at people uninvolved in your abortion. Whatever your reason, if you struggle with forgiving yourself, there are ways to move forward.

We encourage you to look at yourself as you would view another man who might be in a situation similar to yours. Would you be able to have compassion on him, accept him as he is and extend forgiveness to that man? If you think you could, then consider doing the same toward yourself.

It can be very helpful to repeat step 2a on page 75 (of the Participant Manual, page 83 of this guide), putting your name in the statement and releasing the grudge against yourself.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 4: HEALING REQUIRES FORGIVENESS

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 78 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

Ask the group to turn to the "anger consequences" checklist on page 71 of the Participant Manual, page 80 of this guide.

1. Review the list of the consequences of anger on page 71. To what extent is any anger you have identified related to your involvement in an abortion?
2. In what ways can you see that anger has hurt you or others around you?

Facilitator Note - Ask the participants to look at Forgiveness Steps 1 and 2 on pages 74-75 in their manual; pages 83-84 of this guide. Discuss the number of names identified; be prepared for those who only list themselves. Encourage them to dig deeper. Ask if anyone would care to share how they did on Step 2. Ask: Who are some people you have identified that you've been angry with and need to forgive?

3. Why is it often so difficult to forgive others? How about ourselves?
4. How does it benefit you to forgive someone who hurt you?
5. In the future, what can you do when you realize that anger has reappeared in your life?

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- I am not able to forgive.

- There is no forgiveness for me.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

- I choose not to carry anger and bitterness anymore.
- Forgiveness is available to me.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Dave's story, the impact of fear and Healing Action 5: Confront Fear Through Connection. Answer the corresponding questions and continue writing in your journal. We will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week.

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

SESSION SIX

A lot of our explosive emotional reactions
aren't actually a response to the present moment.
They're a build-up of all the times we were in a similar dynamic and did
not stand up for ourselves,
use our voices or express our emotions.
– Hailey Paige MaGee

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Six so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Review Appendix D.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! How are you doing?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on pages 87-88 and talk about Dave's story.

DAVE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

When I was 22, I reconnected with Dianne, a childhood classmate with whom I went through most of elementary school. We began dating one spring as she was on the mend from a broken engagement. We soon became inseparable and seemed to have a lot in common. I was eager to move our relationship forward, especially when it came to a physical relationship. I was convinced that we loved each other and rationalized that we would eventually marry anyway.

In the fall of the following year, Dianne broke the news to me that she was pregnant. I immediately panicked! I went into self-preservation mode. While Dianne's parents and I got along well enough, I was intimidated by them and I always felt inadequate around them. I was certain they thought that I wasn't good enough for their daughter and an unexpected pregnancy would certainly prove them right.

I had been raised in a church where image was everything. I had always tried to make sure that no one from church ever saw the rebellious, sinful me. I was ashamed of my predicament and was desperate to protect my image. I was very fearful of what others would think of me.

As I was contemplating my situation, I met with a customer of mine who happened to be an infertility doctor. After we completed our business, I pulled him aside and asked him if he did abortions and what his fee was. I made and paid for an appointment for Dianne.

Immediately, I felt guilty for not stepping up to do the right thing and marry Dianne. Instead, I told her that I had talked to a doctor and had already made arrangements for an abortion. I called her to tell her my plan. I simply and coldly told her, "This is what we should do."

I was in no way equipped for marriage and even less equipped to be a father. I felt very uncomfortable with the idea of having a child "out there" if she decided to keep the baby and we ultimately didn't stay together.

I was in denial about the consequences of the choice to abort, but I had made up my mind that keeping the child was not an option and was dead-set on making her see it my way. I only talked about the bad things a baby would bring into our lives at that point. Dianne was devastated when she realized I wouldn't consider other options.

I knew that I had let her down. My rationale was all messed up. I reasoned, "If she has the abortion and ends up hating me for it, at least there's no baby in the picture if she ended the relationship." In other words, my image would still be intact as far as everyone else was concerned.

I knew she was afraid of her parents' reaction to her pregnancy as well, so I was pretty sure she wouldn't run to them. I used that to my advantage. I put her in a no-win predicament.

On the day of the abortion, I took off work early and drove Dianne to the doctor. Neither of us spoke a word to or from the doctor's office … just deafening silence. I was afraid she would talk herself out of going through with it. I knew I had let her down in a major way. I felt ashamed that I had knowingly placed her in a dangerous situation to satisfy my selfish motives.

Both of us lost all of our self-worth that day. What I believed would protect my outward image began to kill my masculinity on the inside. From that day I began to attempt to prove my value as a man, boyfriend and eventually, husband. I was an empty shell of a man.

I pretended that the abortion never happened. But the more I ignored it or tried to make myself forget it, the more the abortion became an ever-present toxin in our relationship.

My coping strategies were completely irrational and futile. I felt compelled to make myself worthy of Dianne's love. I went out of my way to be someone I wasn't and to buy her love with gifts I couldn't afford. I really did love

her. But at the same time, I avoided her, because when I was with her my shame reminded me of what I had done to her.

I threw myself into my work, spending long hours there. Then, on the way home I would often stop at a bar to hang out with the guys. I was drinking a lot back then.

I lived in constant shame for getting Dianne pregnant and then forcing her to abort our baby. With the abortion and hurt I had caused Dianne on my conscience, I thought, "Why even try being a good guy?" Indulging in even more destructive behaviors was a way to both punish myself and try to mask the shame. I felt numb and worthless.

Before we got married, I partied a lot and tried to forget the abortion by filling my life with distractions. But no matter how far away I tried to push the abortion, a simple glance at a billboard, seeing a child, or some commercial on TV would dredge it all right back up again. If I saw Dianne without a smile, I feared she was thinking about the abortion.

In spite of my religious upbringing, I felt unworthy of a relationship with God, with Dianne, or with anyone else. I became more and more distant and closed off from everyone around me. I went to great lengths to try to cover my pain and shame. I couldn't interact normally with people and only engaged in shallow ways. I couldn't let anyone know the real me.

I proposed to Dianne and she said yes. As odd as it sounds, neither Dianne nor I can remember when or how I proposed. We got married and our first child came along soon after.

During this period, I lived at work. I was very selfish with my time. Soon after our first son was born, I got a new job that took me out of town three to four days a week. I remember feeling guilty because I was relieved not to be home much. I didn't have to be reminded about the abortion every day when I looked at my wife and young son.

It wasn't that Dianne brought up the abortion. In fact, we never talked about it. Just seeing them was a daily reminder of what I had done. I loved her, but was utterly ashamed of what I'd done to her. Therefore, I got good at avoiding being close, especially when it came to real, intimate conversation. I avoided the things that a strong marriage needs in order to survive.

We moved to another city and hoped for a fresh start. Again, I threw myself into my job, routinely working 60-70 hours a week, in order to avoid going home. Then, after work, I'd stop for a couple of drinks with the guys for an hour or more. I usually drank vodka so Dianne wouldn't smell it on my breath.

Dianne was very frustrated with our marriage and we always argued. I remember the night that I was forced to see just how low I had sunk. I was at a bar with the guys, drinking. All of a sudden one of the guys elbowed me and gestured toward the door. There was Dianne, making her way to the table as my young son watched from the doorway. I was forced to confront my selfishness. It was now time for me to choose where my life would go from there.

That was really a wakeup call for me. I realized how truly selfish I had been. As a result of that night, I began to try to be more of a husband. I made more of an effort to take the family to church each week. I also cut out my regular stops at the bar after work.

But I remember Dianne telling me, "We're not going to make it. I had an abortion and if we don't talk about it, our marriage won't make it." In an attempt to save our marriage, Dianne scheduled an appointment with someone from church and we went to counseling a couple times. The counselor was direct and while she talked of forgiveness in a generic sort of way, she never dealt with our anger, resentment, or mistrust resulting from the abortion.

Counseling ripped the scab off and made us deal with our wound. We argued a lot about issues caused by the abortion. Dianne hated what I had done to her! It was the first time I had heard her verbalize just how deeply I had hurt her. We still hadn't experienced forgiveness, but slowly the ability to dialog opened up between us. Our relationship had a path to begin to change.

Because of my shame, I had always neglected to take a leadership role in the home. How could I be a spiritual leader after the things I had done? I had made a terrible choice by insisting on the abortion and not protecting Dianne and my baby. It left me feeling emasculated. as if I were not qualified to be a husband.

As we continued to struggle in our marriage, my perception of Dianne's view of me was, "What kind of guy would force me to kill our baby? Why am I even married to him?!" I never felt that I was good enough for her. The topic of divorce was regularly on the table during our struggles and fights. The abortion made great ammunition.

From Dianne's perspective, poor decisions I made or character flaws I had were all magnified through the lens of the abortion. I believed I would never be good enough to be her husband. Our marriage seemed to be based on performance, and because of the abortion, I never quite measured up.

Eventually, Dianne attended a class to address the issues from the abortion. Then she went through a second abortion recovery Bible study. She was finally able to experience God's forgiveness and healing. She also began to extend forgiveness to me through her actions. I, too, had asked both Dianne and God to forgive me, but I also felt I needed help to process the abortion with other like-minded men.

The Bible study Dianne had experienced also had a curriculum for men involved in abortion. I decided to attend. Five of us met in an airplane hangar to work through our abortion experience.

I was amazed to hear that the other guys in my group had all experienced the same things I had after their abortions: excessive drinking, being a workaholic, toxic fights at home, and the need to perform to prove their worth. Again, I saw how deeply I had hurt and scarred Dianne. I had strayed so far from God's ideal as a man, a husband, and a father.

But the abortion recovery program put me back on a track to seek God's forgiveness through Christ's death for me on the cross. I began experiencing forgiveness and gaining back a sense of worth through Christ. For the first time, both Dianne and I felt that with Christ at the center of our lives, we could find healing from the abortion and healing in our marriage.

God has continually bound us together in our marriage and helped us extend grace and love toward each other at times when we felt none. Through Christ, we have experienced forgiveness of sin, but we still struggle at times with the consequences of our sin.

By God's grace, we are happily married. We've raised three boys and now enjoy three adorable grandchildren. Dianne and I love each other and recently have found tremendous help by praying together daily. Spending time together with God draws us nearer to each other and gives us His perspective to daily live in His love and forgiveness.

DISCUSS DAVE'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways can you identify with Dave's story? What were you feeling?
2. In what ways did the abortion impact Dave's life?
3. What fears led to the abortion?

FEAR

Anger focuses on what is past, but fear is anxiety about what could happen in the future. Like anger, fear is an emotion to which we relinquish power. When we yield to this emotion, we grant it permission to rule over us and control us.

Fear can be crippling and paralyzing, preventing us from making good decisions or making any decisions at all. If fear played a role in our abortion involvement, it drove us to do something that we may now deeply regret. Our role in the abortion also created a situation that could cause us to experience fear in a variety of ways.

Please check anything that has produced fear in your life:

- ☐ Being found out
- ☐ The long-term consequences resulting from the abortion
- ☐ Whether people will reject me
- ☐ Being punished for what I did
- ☐ Whether I would ever be able to have children
- ☐ Whether my children will repeat the same mistakes I've made
- ☐ Other: _____

Keep in mind that there are different kinds of fear. For instance, we may cultivate a healthy fear of failure that motivates us to show up at work on time and perform our jobs well. A soldier experiences a

rational fear when going into battle and overcomes that fear with courage and training.

But the kind of fear we're talking about here is neither healthy nor overcome with safeguards. It's unhealthy, destructive and prevents our healing; it haunts and cripples us. Fear may have played a role in our decision to abort our child in the first place. We might fear being found out, what others might think of us, or the possible repercussions if this dark secret gets out. However, many men have expressed another kind of fear that we must take a moment here to address.

No man alive wants to be thought of or labeled as a coward, but that is exactly how many men describe their role in the abortion. As harsh as it may sound, there is no other way to describe how they feel; they were *cowardly*. As men, when we realize that we acted like a coward, it is an affront to our manhood and can eat us up on the inside. And cowardly actions in our past only accentuate our feelings of guilt, shame and fear.

Perhaps in moments of personal, quiet reflection you believe that:

- You put your fears, desires or plans above the feelings of your partner and the life of your child.
- You didn't do all you should have done to protect your child.
- You were more concerned about your reputation or what others might think than with doing what you knew to be right.
- You ran from your responsibility as a man.

In the movie, *Open Range*, Kevin Costner plays the gunslinger turned cowboy, Charlie Waite. In the saloon scene where the locals are offering excuses for not standing up to the town bully, Costner says, "You're

men aren't ya? You may not know this but there are things that gnaw on a man worse than dying!"

A feeling of cowardice is one of those things that can gnaw on a man worse than dying. But what's done is done. And looking back at what's been done and allowing it to gnaw on you will serve no purpose other than to keep you in bondage to guilt and shame. Do not despair; history is loaded with stories of men who acted cowardly at first then went on to become heroes in battle, faith or social justice.

HEALING ACTION 5: CONFRONT FEAR THROUGH CONNECTION

An antidote to fear is the confidence that comes from being fully loved and accepted by others; a connection that empowers positive action.

When I was a little boy, I had a very active imagination. I was convinced that when the lights went out at night, there were alligators under my bed. I'd call my dad in and ask him to remove the alligators. He'd feign a great struggle, man-handling those alligators out from underneath my bed and dragging them outside. After watching his display of courage and love, I could then fall asleep. Confident of my dad's love and with his courage as my example, my fears melted away.

While little boys have little fears, grown men can have big fears. Stealing our joy and paralyzing us, fear keeps us from taking risks and entering new relationships. Left unchecked, it begins to influence our every decision. Fear can run and ruin our life.

Defeating fear or feelings of cowardice begins by being genuine and transparent and by allowing others to love who we truly are. This may feel "feminine" to some men, but everyone, regardless of gender, desperately needs love and acceptance.

Our fearful thoughts work like this: when people express love and acceptance toward us, we refuse to believe that they are being genuine.

We argue that they're only loving the person that they think we are and not our true self.

We often fail to be real because we fear being rejected by others. Ironically, our fear of being rejected often causes us to push them away because we feel so unworthy. Or perhaps we've been burned so many times we fear being hurt again, so we withhold our love.

It is true, every time we love someone and allow them to love us, we run the risk of being disappointed, abandoned, or hurt. Still, even we, as men, desperately need the love of others in our lives. To love and be loved is a basic human need. When we allow fear to keep us from love, it keeps us cowardly. Fear cripples our ability to take action and function courageously.

We must deal with our irrational fears rationally, facing them with courage. We must decide to take a risk and allow others to love us and risk loving them. When we allow fear to prevent us from trusting others, we'll never experience their love—the very thing that will dispel our fear. This is one reason we discussed forgiveness last week. By forgiving others and asking their forgiveness, we have opened the door for reconciliation, trust and real love. With genuine trust and real love there can be no fear or cowardice.

A second route to connection is to focus on showing empathy for the feelings of the mother of your aborted child. For women, the decision to abort and the abortion itself generates many of the same fears faced by men: being found out, rejected, punished or unable to ever have children. And if she did have children someday, how would she feel about them? Troubled by the prospect of judgment from others, being unable to provide for a child, losing her independence, and facing the end of all she's expected and hoped for, a woman with an unplanned pregnancy desperately wants things back "the way they were."

These fears often collide with the deep, conflicting maternal instinct that has already begun to flourish. For many women, the decision to abort is not made lightly, but out of a sense of hopelessness or isolation. No woman desires an abortion the way she wants an ice cream or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap needs to gnaw off its own leg. Worrying about the potential consequences for her career, relationships, or personal identity, she fights an internal struggle that no one who has not experienced an unwanted pregnancy can fully understand.

In this time of extreme emotional turmoil, showing empathy is important for both of you. Accepting that her decision, difficult and painful, comes from fear and not from a desire to harm or abandon you or her child can help you appreciate her perspective. It's important to acknowledge the complexity of her feelings even if they seem foreign to you, offering support and compassion instead of judgment. Only then can meaningful dialogue and connection begin, allowing for healing and a deeper understanding of the turbulent emotional journey you both have traveled.

If you find yourself frustrated connecting with or supporting your partner, we have included some explanations of her experience and perspectives with practical suggestions for action in Appendix D: "Helping A Woman Who Suffers."

STEPS FOR OVERCOMING FEAR THROUGH CONNECTION:

1. **Make a list of people who truly love you just as you are.** These people love you unconditionally with no strings attached.

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. **From that list of people who love you, identify a person you could choose as a confidant.** This friend is someone you can trust; you could tell him anything. You might be inclined to consider your spouse, but we suggest you opt for another man in whom you can confide. Be very selective in your choice of a confidant. Look for someone you admire. Choose a man who doesn't necessarily have it all together, but is also not on the brink of disaster.

   Ask this person if he would start meeting with you regularly. Share the characteristics of a confidant with him so you're both on the same page. Commit to confidentiality and transparency. Then establish when and where you'll meet.

   Confidants:

   a. **Spend time together.** Whether in person or online, let your confidant into the whole of your life. You have to be able to be authentic with this person and be yourself without condemnation.

b. **Care for each other.** Look for ways to serve each other that will clearly demonstrate the genuineness of your esteem.
c. **Challenge each other boldly.** We are often timid about pointing out negative behavior in another person. But if given permission to do this at the outset of the relationship, you will experience a much richer, more meaningful relationship that helps both of you grow as individuals.
d. **Encourage each other in their spiritual journeys.** Wherever you are in your journey regarding faith in God, you want someone who will move you forward.
e. **Celebrate one another's joys and victories.** Avoid spending time with each other complaining, criticizing others, or gossiping.

3. **Seek out a healthy group of like-minded people.** We need a small group of individuals with whom we can be ourselves and not be guarded all the time. We need people with whom we can have fun, love and be loved.

   Stay clear of groups who find pleasure in gossiping, back-biting, or living shallow lives. You might find a healthy group of people to spend time with in:

   a. A recovery group like this
   b. In a common-interest club or association
   c. A group of peers from work
   d. A church

For some, the painful reality may be that you couldn't think of any names to write down in Step 1. Or perhaps you wrote down a few names, but there is no one on the list who could be your confidant.

If this is the case for you, we encourage you to step out and take a reasonable risk; keep trying until you find the right person or persons. There is still hope.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 5: CONFRONT FEAR THROUGH CONNECTION

Facilitator Note - Tell the group to turn to pages 88-89 in the Participant Manual and ask: What fears did you check off? Did you add any?

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on pages 95 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

1. In what ways can you tell that fear has hindered your healing?
2. How could you overcome the fear of trusting others and accepting their love?
3. Beginning on page 93 of your manual, there are three action steps for freeing ourselves from fear. The first step is to make a list of people who truly love you just as you are. How did it go for you in making this list?
4. The second step asks us to identify a person who we could have as a confidant. Who is or could be a confidant in your life? ***(Share your own experience to reinforce how vital this step is.)***
5. The final step is to seek out a healthy group of like-minded people. Where have you found a group like this?

If you have not yet attached yourself to such a group, where are you most likely to find this group?

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- I am a coward.
- I am unworthy of love or anything good.
- I can't trust anyone with my secrets.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

- I acted cowardly in the past, but can start being brave today.
- I can give love and receive love.
- There are people who will not judge me and will keep my confidences.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Terry's story, the impact of shame, and Healing Action 6: Reclaim Your Identity. Answer the corresponding questions and continue writing in your journal. We will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week.

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

SESSION SEVEN

Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars.
You have to let go at some point in order to move forward.
– C.S. Lewis

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Seven so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Leave time at the end of this session to discuss the opportunity to honor their children at the next meeting.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of each man.***

WELCOME

Say to the group: Welcome back! How is everyone doing this week?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 102 and talk about Terry's story.

TERRY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

My story is one I believe that possibly millions of men can relate to. I grew up in a middle-class family; my father had served in the military and provided for our family by working a blue-collar job most of his working years. I was the youngest of four children including a much older half-sister from my mother's first marriage. My parents taught us the value of giving back to our community, being foster parents for a dozen or so children throughout the years, and even adopting a fifth child when I was in my teens.

Like any family, we were far from perfect, but I think others viewed us as good people. We attended church semi-regularly and I was baptized as a child. My moral compass may not have been set on "true north" but it was pointing generally in the right direction.

As I grew out of my teenage years and into my twenties, I gradually moved away from what I knew in my heart to be right. Basically, what I was taught as a child was not strong enough to suppress my raging hormones, a common experience with young men.

In my mid-twenties I began a career in the Fire Service and met a woman during EMT training. After dating a few months we moved in together; she was a few years older than me and brought a six-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter into the relationship. Our relationship was not a strong one because it lacked commitment on my part. For me our relationship was one of convenience; I provided her the emotional and child-rearing support she needed and she provided what I needed.

After living together for about a year she discovered that she was pregnant and informed me that she had made the decision to abort the child. Who could blame her? She already had two kids and was in the physical testing phase as she prepared for a job in public protective services. But I think the true reason for her aborting our child was that she felt trapped. She was pregnant with a third child and I didn't offer support or encouragement of any kind. She had no confidence in our relationship and I said

nothing, neglecting my God-given duty to take responsibility for my actions and to be the protector of my family.

After the abortion I remember feeling guilty about it…I understood that what we had done was wrong. I say "we" because deep within my soul, even though it was her decision, I knew I failed to stop it when I had the opportunity to do so.

A year later and newly hired at a job she had spent years training for, she was pregnant again. Unfortunately, nothing had changed within me or within our relationship. This time we both decided to abort the child. The guilt I was carrying from the first abortion was not yet bad enough to change my behavior.

After the second abortion I couldn't stand it any longer… I wanted out and I told her so. She was devastated. She tried to kill herself by taking a lethal dose of very powerful medication. Because of my medical training I recognized what was happening and rushed her to the emergency room in the middle of the night; she was only minutes away from dying, but the team at the ER saved her.

We never talked about it, but I can't help thinking that the two abortions had something to do with her mental state, as they certainly affected mine. I attempted to break up again, but this attempt also failed. Looking back, maybe I should have just walked away, but I couldn't just leave her after all we'd been through. However, I did take off for a month because I had to get away for a while. During that month I was constantly stoned or drunk.

Eventually we did part ways and each of us moved on with our lives.

In my late 30's, I started attending church again in an attempt to fill the huge hole in my heart. I can't say that I've ever had one of those "God encounters" but several friends and Pastors have prayed with me, helping me ask God's forgiveness for my role in these abortions and for many

other things I've done. I'm still a work in progress but I know that my moral compass is once again pointing in the right direction.

I don't think about my involvement with the two abortions every day. I know that I'm forgiven, but those abortions still sit at the top of the heap of my self-condemnation. In retrospect, I wonder how I could ever have gotten to the point where my own selfishness caused me to ignore my spiritual and emotional values. The truth was that my partner was carrying my children, and I was willing to kill those children. As a paramedic, I'm in the life-saving business. I know what I did and there is no intellectually honest way to rationalize it. Except for my daughter from a marriage years later, there is nothing that I wouldn't give to go back and change what I've done. And I hope that by telling my story I may be of some help to others who have suffered from the same regret and shame as I have.

DISCUSS TERRY'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways did you identify with Terry's story? What were you feeling?
2. In what ways did the abortion impact Terry's life?
3. What fueled Terry's shame over his role in the abortions?

SHAME

Shame is a painful emotion caused by a sense of guilt. The purpose of guilt is not to torment us, but to cause us to change. Guilt says, "I DID something bad," but shame says, "I AM something bad." People have a variety of responses to shame. Some may try to stuff or cover it, while others beat themselves up because they feel they deserve it.

Shame is a very common emotion endured by men who have played a role in an abortion. Like some of the other emotions we've covered, shame can cause us to hide, deny, blame others, or rationalize our role in aborting our child. It can be debilitating and prevent us from healing.

Shame breeds a sense of unworthiness. Many men express feeling unworthy because of their abortion.

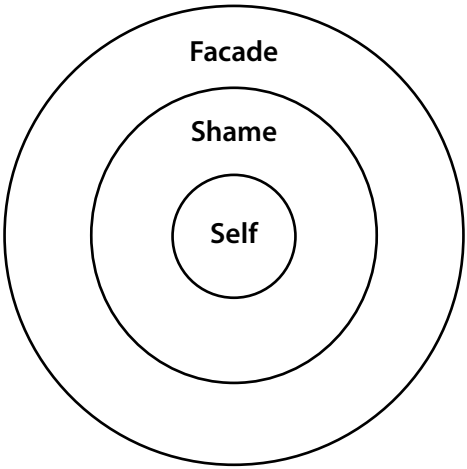
Please read the list and check all that apply or have applied to you:

I feel unworthy of…

- ☐ Having children
- ☐ Being loved by a good woman
- ☐ Experiencing love and acceptance from others
- ☐ Being respected
- ☐ Receiving or experiencing anything good in life
- ☐ Other: _____

One way to look at shame and recognize what it does to us is by examining the following diagram.[9]

9 Donald Miller, *Scary Close—Dropping the Act and Finding True Intimacy* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2014), pp. 20ff.



At the center of these concentric circles is our "self" – who we really are. But our shame causes us to hide. We hide our true self, becoming a different person, and now we cannot be known by others. But in order to establish and maintain relationships, others need to get to know us. So we put up a façade—a false self—to present to others in hopes of being loved and accepted.

The problem is that we usually know when someone is putting up a false front; we sense that what they're showing us is not genuine. Others see this in us too, and the result is shallow relationships built on pretense. Having lost our identity, shame literally prevents us from loving others fully or being loved by them, derailing our ability to establish meaningful relationships.

The key is to reclaim our identity, so we can drop the façade and let others in. In this way, we can begin to love again and be loved. Only by working to overcome shame can we hope to build good relationships. At AbAnon, we have found that many men deal with their shame and find healing from their role in an abortion through a relationship with God. God is ready and willing to forgive. For this reason we would be falling short if we did not share with you this important remedy for finding freedom from guilt and shame.

We really only have two choices when it comes to shame. We can either bear its weight and destruction for the rest of our lives; or we can seek forgiveness. When we seek forgiveness, we own up to the wrong we've done, exposing what we've tried so hard to hide and removing its power over us. We can become our real selves

A great example is the true story from the Bible of a man named David. Because of some poor decisions, David suffered tremendous failures. But his story demonstrates the power of forgiveness to overcome shame. David went on to be among the most influential men in history.

THE STORY OF DAVID

David was one of the great kings of ancient Israel. But he did not come from a royal family. The youngest of eight boys, his job was to care for the family's herd of sheep. But David was no ordinary youth. On two different occasions, he killed a bear and a lion when they came after his sheep. Each time, he chased after the beasts, took the sheep from its mouth and killed the predators!

Later, as a man, David's experience with the lion and bear had prepared him for even bigger victories when the enemies of Israel attacked. King over Israel, David was not only a fierce warrior, but led his people with integrity and wisdom.

However, at the peak of his reign, instead of going out to battle with his army, he decided to stay home. One evening he went up to the roof of his palace and, looking down from his vantage point, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. As king, he misused his power and sent for her.

David slept with the woman and then sent her back home. But a short while later, she sent a message to David telling him she was pregnant. Now David had a serious problem, because it turned out that the

woman's husband was one of David's chief fighting men. Since her husband had been away at war, there was no way the child could be her husband's.

Because he had the authority to do so, David sent a messenger to the battle lines and called the woman's husband home. David hoped that he would come home, sleep with his wife and assume the baby was his.

But when her husband reported to his king, he was so focused on his mission that he refused to enjoy the comfort of his home and his wife's embrace while his comrades were dying in battle. When David saw that his plan had failed, he wrote a letter to his general, instructing him to put this man on the front lines in a way that would guarantee his death. David sent this sealed message with the woman's husband!

David had the woman's husband murdered and then took her to become his wife. In the months that followed, before the woman gave birth, David managed to hide his adultery and murder. He went on with his life and no one was the wiser…or so he thought.

But God knew what David had done and sent Nathan, David's friend and counselor, to confront him. The reality of what he had done hit David with the full force of the guilt and shame that resulted from sleeping with another man's wife and then murdering him to cover up his deed. There was no way to undo what he had done.

Of course, as king, David could have used his influence to continue his cover-up. But he chose a different path. He knew that he needed to be forgiven, and he obviously couldn't seek forgiveness from the man he had killed.

The only one who could remove the crushing weight of shame and guilt was God, so David humbly acknowledged his sin. And God forgave him, removing that guilt and shame. David felt rescued and restored, exclaiming, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me

and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand."[10]

HEALING ACTION 6: RECLAIM YOUR IDENTITY

God knows you just as thoroughly as He knew David. He knows everything you have ever done. He knows about your involvement in abortion and makes that same offer of forgiveness to you that He made to David. He knows your shame and offers to remove it from you.

We show others a façade because we are ashamed to reveal our true self. Our identity has been deeply buried. Shame prevents us from exposing our role in the abortion, but it's only by exposing our role that we gain freedom from shame. Concealment intensifies it and prolongs our pain, but when we reveal and reject our shame, we find forgiveness and healing.

Out of a love for us we can never truly understand, God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. He bore our guilt and shame on Himself when He was crucified, buried and on the third day rose from the dead, proving that His life was more than sufficient to pay for our sins. He offers us forgiveness from our sins, delivering us from the crushing weight of guilt and shame.

"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"[11]

Like David from long ago, many men involved in abortion have found not only freedom from guilt and shame but a completely renewed sense of self by trusting Jesus Christ and receiving His forgiveness. If you would like to trust Jesus Christ and receive His forgiveness, simply

10 Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

11 Holy Bible. New Living Translation copyright© 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation,Carol Stream, Illinois 60188.

pray to Him. Confess your sins to Him and ask Him to forgive you. He doesn't turn anyone away. He loves you and offers you healing.

We are here to care for you and walk with you through your healing process. If you have put your trust in Christ, please consider telling your facilitator that you have made this decision.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 6: RECLAIM YOUR IDENTITY

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on pages 108-109 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

1. Look at the checklist on page 103. In what ways has shame over your role in an abortion bred a sense of unworthiness in your life?

Facilitator Note - Ask the group to turn to the diagram on page 104. Say: Can someone explain this diagram?

2. In what ways has shame obstructed your healing?
3. How did King David bring shame on himself?
4. What is the core message in this story for us?

Facilitator Note - If appropriate, share again your own brief story of how you trusted Christ to forgive you and cleanse you from guilt and shame. Ask: Who else has experienced the forgiveness that Jesus offers?

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- I am a bad person.
- No one can know the real me because they would reject me.
- There is no hope for my redemption and restoration.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

- I did something I believe is bad.
- There are people who will not judge me, but accept me as I am.
- Jesus knows the real me and does not reject me.
- Jesus has redeemed me and I am a new person.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Facilitator Note - Read the following to the group and go over it carefully.

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

1. Please read Ron's story, the impact of grief and Healing Action 7: Honor Your Child. Answer the corresponding questions and we will discuss your responses during our group meeting next week.

Facilitator Note - Some may not want to participate in a tribute for their child. Remind them gently that our group norms indicate that they should come to the meeting anyway to support the others.

Beyond the tribute, the final session will include celebrations of their healing progress and conversations about next steps.

2. During our final session, we will be providing an opportunity for you to honor your child. If you choose not to participate, that is perfectly fine; we understand and respect your decision, but please still come and be a part of the healing journey for the others in your group. As you contemplate how you might honor your child, we have listed some possible ideas you could think about:

- Consider naming your child.
- Write a letter to your child.
- Plant a tree or flowers.
- Pick a song.

3. The tasks that we ask you to complete before this final session will take some reflection and time, so please start working on them early in the week.

    a. Your first two tasks will focus on honoring the child you lost and are very important.
    b. The third task is to record your celebrations: where you were emotionally before participating in this group and where you are now. There is a place in your manual for you to write these, and we will share them next week if you are willing.

Facilitator Note - After reading #3 above, direct participants to the end of the section "Debrief Healing Action 7: Honor Your Child" on page 120 in their manuals, pages 130 and 131 in the Facilitator Guide, to make sure they understand the tasks.

CLOSING

Ask these questions which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Is there anything else you'd like to bring up to the group?
2. What is one positive thought or experience you are taking away?
3. In what way can we support you this week?

Start work on your affirmations as soon as possible; plan to meet with your co-facilitator to coordinate them if you choose.

SESSION EIGHT

A life may last just for a moment,
but memory can make that moment last forever.
— Unknown

PREPARATION

- ***Read Session Eight in the Participant Manual so you're familiar with it.***
- ***Have available the link to the SRT Services Participant Survey. The link can be found on the SRT Services website (facilitator resources) or in your AbAnon Workbook under "prep for Session 8."***
- ***Manage the discussion so as to leave plenty of time for the closing: affirmations and next steps. Be sure your affirmations are ready to share and to email to participants after the meeting.***
- ***Look over the Sample Memorial Service in Appendix E in case participants have questions.***

- ***Review the resources listed in Appendix F.***
- ***Check out the AbAnon section of the SRT facilitator website for additional small group sessions and other resources.***
- ***Meet with your co-facilitator and refer to your AbAnon Workbook for detailed guidance.***
- ***Pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the men.***

WELCOME

Say to the group: Welcome back! Thank you for being here. I can't believe that these eight weeks have gone by so quickly! I am so thankful to have been able to meet all of you and get to know you in these past weeks. Before we finish our final session, we will discuss some options for your continued healing.

Facilitator Note – Congratulate your group participants for persevering and completing the program. Tell the group: Before we begin our session, we would like to ask you to take five minutes to fill out our digital Participant Survey. The survey asks about your healing journey so far, how SRT Services might continue to serve you, and your interest in helping others with their healing.

- ***In-person group: text the link (SRT Services Participant Survey, found on the website or in your AbAnon Workbook) to each participant.***
- ***Online group: Drop the link into the chat and help the participants access it.***
- ***If anyone has difficulty with the survey, text them the link for them to try at their convenience.***

GROUP MEMBER STORY

Facilitator Note – Read the following to the group: We want to take time to allow each of you to share your story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share his story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging him before you consider the connections between his story and yours.

We may need time to take in the story we will be hearing, so there may be a few moments of silence after he finishes.

Say to the one sharing: Please do not interpret any silence as judgment.

Participant shares his story.

The Leading Facilitator responds with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. What is your reaction to his story?
2. What can you take away from his story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling now that you've told your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on pages 116-117 and talk about Ron's story.

RON'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the questions that follow.

My girlfriend and I were both 16 and in high school when we started dating. She was my first real girlfriend.

My parents were divorced and my dad remarried right away and started a new family. He simply walked away from my mom, my sister and me, and completely left our lives. My mom had a boyfriend who moved in with us, but he was very weird and I didn't want to be around him. He lost his job shortly after moving in, so my mom went to work and he hung around the house all day.

Consequently, I had no good role model or instruction from a father or father figure in my life. My sister got pregnant when she was just 14 or 15. She had a baby girl, brought her home, and then my sister ran away, leaving her child for my mom to care for. My mom really loved her granddaughter.

My sister eventually returned home and decided to give her little girl up for adoption. My sister did not have a good relationship with my mom and she put her baby up for adoption to hurt my mom. It was all quite a mess.

Meanwhile, I spent a lot of time at my girlfriend's house. I was drawn into her family. Her parents went sailing a lot in the summer and invited me to come along. I liked being included in her family.

My girlfriend and I started having sex and she called me one day and told me she thought she was pregnant. I wasn't prepared for that at all. She and I went together to a clinic to confirm her pregnancy. I asked her, "What are we going to do?" We were so young and naïve.

A week went by and she told me she wanted to have an abortion. She simply announced that this is what she was going to do. She didn't want to deal with the embarrassment and responsibility of a child as a 16-year-old.

Although I had not thought of abortion, it seemed the easy way out of our problem.

She asked me to figure out how to pay for the abortion, so I sold my car stereo to get the money. Neither of us said anything to her parents or my mom.

I took my girlfriend to the procedure and stayed at her side through the whole ordeal. It was awful! The procedure was terrible, gruesome and very traumatic for her. We weren't at all prepared for how devastating the abortion would be.

Immediately following the abortion, she began distancing herself from me. We stopped having sex. After the abortion, sex seemed dirty to me.

Right away I began feeling remorse and guilt. Even though I had absolutely zero religious upbringing, I had sensed deep down inside that abortion was wrong. Now we were both experiencing the consequences of our action.

I reasoned now that if we had let the child be born, I would have taken care of it. Both of us began wondering whether our child had been a boy or girl and what he or she would have looked like. It was very distressing.

In my heart, I felt the baby had been a boy. Even today, so many years later, I think about him a lot, wondering where he would be now. Would he be married with kids of his own?

My girlfriend and I had no one to talk to. We did not dare tell her parents and I didn't tell my mom until five years later. I kick myself for doing nothing to talk my girlfriend out of the abortion. I now believe that she was upset with me for not manning up and showing her another way out.

But I was selfish and fulfilled my wants instead of my child's. I deeply regret what I did. I felt tremendous shame and held myself back from others, thinking that surely they must know what I had done.

The abortion deeply impacted my life. My girlfriend and I drifted apart. I eventually met someone else and married her. But the abortion

discouraged me from starting a family. I felt so unworthy to father a child. The abortion continued to eat away at me.

I longed for a real father with whom I could talk. When I married my first wife, I didn't marry so much out of love for her, but for her family. She had a father and a mother. They were an intact family, something I longed for. Her dad became a mentor and confidant to me. He led me into a relationship with Jesus Christ and through the forgiveness that Jesus offers I began to experience healing from the abortion.

For reasons I won't go into, my wife wanted a divorce. But my relationship with her parents was so strong that they invited me to come live with them while their daughter ended our marriage.

After I came to Christ and confessed the abortion to Him, I felt a huge weight lifted from me. I know I'm forgiven, but the regret of what I did still haunts me. It's something you never forget. It's a part of my life that I'm not proud of. Abortion affected my whole life and who I am as a man. It stripped me of my self-confidence.

Eventually, I met my current wife and we've enjoyed life together, raising four children. I cherish my children deeply and spend all the time with them I possibly can. I want to be the father for them that I never had.

Recently, I ran into my ex-girlfriend at a public event. We greeted each other and hugged briefly. If I had known then what I know today, I would have stepped up and fought for our baby and showed her that we had other viable options.

DISCUSS RON'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual.

1. In what ways can you identify with Ron's story? What were you feeling?
2. In what ways did abortion impact Ron?
3. Where do you see grief in Ron's story?

GRIEF

Although you may not have thought about the abortion this way in the past, you have lost a child. Parents who experience a miscarriage suffer grief over the loss of their child and so can you.

Grief is a natural and healthy response to great loss. Expressed in sadness and mourning, grief may numb or overwhelm us. We may feel "lost" or a profound sense of emptiness. An awkward, inconvenient and sometimes embarrassing emotion, grief is an experience we'd often prefer to avoid.

Normally, when a loved one passes away, we find consolation in a formal memorial service or funeral. Even though it can be difficult to attend such an event, the ceremony helps us come to grips with reality and initiates healing that otherwise might not occur.

One thing that makes an abortion so difficult to heal from is that we are usually not given the opportunity to formally grieve or provide some kind of memorial for that little one. We may mourn internally, but we have no healthy release for our grief.

As we've already noted, our culture tends to suppress the humanity and personhood of an aborted child, denying us the freedom to

grieve and certainly dismissing the need to observe some kind of memorial for our baby.

Healing does not mean that you will never grieve again. You have lost a child and you have the right to mourn that loss. But it does mean that you have initiated a clear course of action to ascribe dignity and worth to your child, expressing your grief.

HEALING ACTION 7: HONOR YOUR CHILD

Many men and women who have had abortions have found great release from their grief and sorrow by making a conscious effort to remember their child in a dignified manner—in a way worthy of a human being. There is no standard method for doing this, but it should be something that you feel will be meaningful to you and honoring to your child.

For example, many have found great comfort in naming their child. Naming a baby attaches personhood to him or her. There are many additional possibilities:

- Plant a tree as a remembrance.
- Give a gift to a charity in honor of your child.
- Have a special keychain made and keep it in your pocket.
- Buy a special candle and put it in a prominent place.
- Hold a memorial service at a place that is special to you.

The important thing is to find something that holds meaning for you.

God reveals in the Bible that death is not final for a human being. We believe that we will see our aborted children again. And because of

Christ's forgiveness, that reunion with our child will be sweet and joyful, not bitter or sorrowful.

In view of this, one other action that has proven very therapeutic and cathartic is to write a short note or letter to your child. In it you may express your love and sorrow, ask forgiveness, talk about meeting them one day and anything else you find meaningful to write. Of course, this note or letter won't go anywhere, but it would be one more way of honoring your child, ascribing humanity and worth to him or her.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 7: HONOR YOUR CHILD

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 119 of your Participant Manual.

Lead a discussion based on these questions:

Please answer the following questions and be prepared to share your responses with the group:

1. If you have ever lost a loved one and attended a memorial or funeral service in honor of that person, what impact did it have on you?
2. In what ways have you grieved over the loss of your aborted child?
3. Our curriculum suggests that death is not the end of a human being. If this is true and we look forward to seeing our child in the afterlife, what impact does this have on you?

Task #1:

Please write a letter or note to your child. This is a very private matter, for your eyes only unless you choose to share it.

Facilitator Note : Ask if anyone wants to read his letter. If no one responds, ask: Would anyone care to share with us what kinds of things you mentioned in your note?

Task #2:

Think of some meaningful way to establish a memorial tribute for your child. This is a very personal exercise. It does not matter what someone else has done; choose something that is meaningful to you, remembering your child and bringing closure to his or her life. You may wish to carry out this plan with your confidant or another trusted individual.

My plan is:_____

TRIBUTE TO YOUR CHILD

Facilitator Note: Be ready to share how you honored your own lost children. Remember that some of the group members may not want to actively participate in the Tribute.

Read the following that is not in the Participant Manual: Thank you all for being here for this portion of our session. Remember, you are in a safe environment here. There are no right or wrong ways to accomplish what we are setting out to do today, and if you choose not to share, that is perfectly fine. We respect you and your decisions.

We'll go first to ease some of the tension you may be feeling.

The Facilitators begin the time of tribute.

—Each father shares how he is honoring his child if he desires.

Facilitator Note: Respond with empathy. These are POSSIBLE questions you can consider after each participant shares:

1. Have you already completed the task of honoring your child or is it in the planning stage?
2. Is there someone you might want to help you follow through?
3. ***To the group:*** Does anyone have anything he would like to say to_____ (***the one who shared***)?
4. Who would like to go next?

Continue until everyone who wants to participate has done so.

Say to the group: Congratulations! We believe sharing your tribute will open the way for even more healing.

Facilitator Note - Ask the group to turn to the celebrations they recorded on pages 120-121 of their Participant Manual. Say: If you are comfortable, we would like to hear your responses to Task #3 so we can celebrate with you!

Task #3:

Please write down your Celebrations: where you were emotionally before participating in this group and where you are now. We want to celebrate the progress you have made and, if you are comfortable, will give you an opportunity to share what you wrote during our final meeting.

a. Before joining my AbAnon group, I was…

b. After joining AbAnon, I feel…

c. This group has helped me…

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- My aborted child would hate me.
- I'm not healed.
- _____ (fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

- There is only love in Heaven.
- Healing is gradual and nonlinear.
- _____ (fill in your own).

CLOSING

Facilitator Note - Address items 1-3, which are not included in the Participant Manual:

1. Having heard your celebrations, we would like to take our turn to let you know what each of you has meant to us!

Facilitator Note - Take turns reading Affirmations. Share them on a screen or pass them out to the individual if this is an in-person group. If there is time, encourage participants to affirm each man as well. Email the affirmation to the relevant participant after the meeting.

2. On page 122 in your Participant Manual, there is a list of additional steps for healing. ***(These are printed below for facilitators.)*** Which steps do you see yourself taking advantage of? In what ways can we help you continue your healing process?

ADDITIONAL STEPS FOR HEALING

Our hope and prayer is that this curriculum has at the very least helped contribute to your healing process. Healing from your role in an abortion is no small matter and often requires more than one or two experiences like this. Please let us know how we can serve you to help further your healing process. Some suggested next steps:

- Continue to meet with your confidant
- Consider asking one or more of the men in your group to meet with you as a mentor. Share your joys and struggles with each other. Hold each other accountable and support one another.
- Keep journaling your progress.
- Hold a formal memorial service for your lost child or children. A possible format is included in Appendix E.
- You may wish to go through *The Power of Your Story for Men* a second time. Healing often occurs in layers, so you may find it helpful to repeat this experience with another group of men. If sexual abuse is part of your story, consider joining an SAVAnon group. Go to www.srtservices.org to enroll in an upcoming group. An intake coordinator will contact you.
- Review the resources listed in Appendix F.

- If you would like to learn more about God and Jesus Christ, please let us know and we can provide additional resources and opportunities for you.

3. Is there anything else you would like to share with the group?

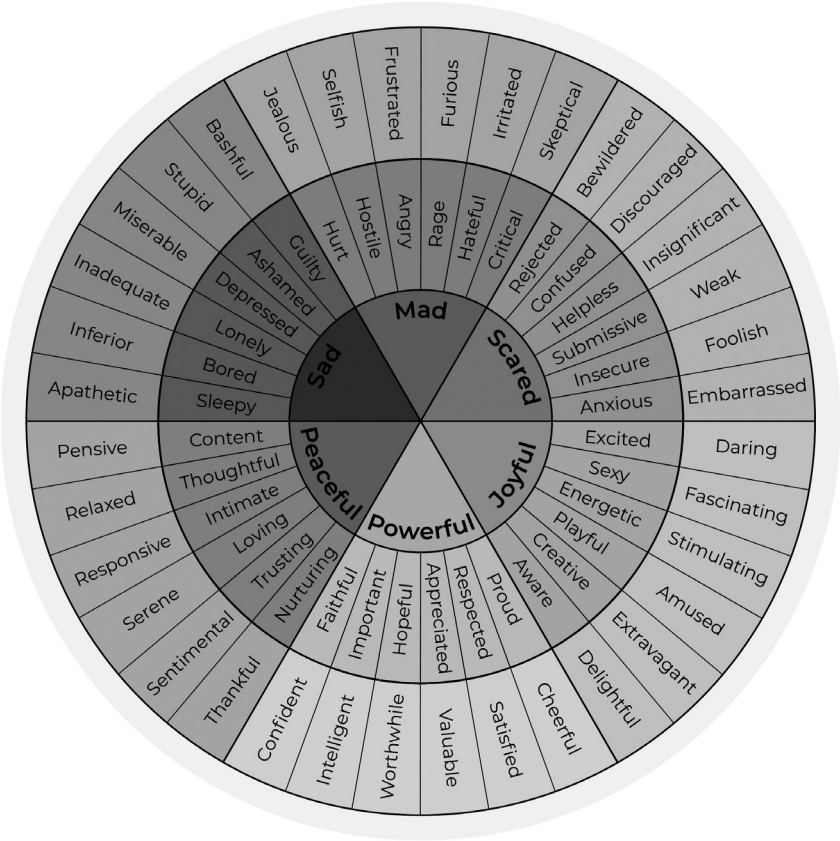
Facilitator Note - If anyone had difficulty with the Participant Survey, text them the link for them to try at their convenience.

Read the following, which is in the Participant Manual.

Thank you for being a part of this 8-week experience with us and participating so openly. Keep in mind that the healing process is seldom linear, and we commend you for all the hard work you have put in. It's encouraging to see your progress! Just having you in our group has contributed greatly to the healing of us all!

APPENDIX A

The Feeling Wheel



The Gottman Institute
Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox

APPENDIX B: GROUNDING TECHNIQUES

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding

Purpose: Brings attention to the present through the five senses.
How to Use:

- Name **5 things you can see.**
- Name **4 things you can touch.**
- Name **3 things you can hear.**
- Name **2 things you can smell.**
- Name **1 thing you can taste.**

2. Deep Breathing with Counting (Box Breathing)

Purpose: Calms the nervous system and regulates emotion.
How to Use:

- Inhale for 4 counts.
- Hold for 4 counts.
- Exhale for 4 counts.
- Hold for 4 counts. (Repeat 3–4 times)

3. Grounding Object / Texture Exercise

Purpose: Focuses the mind on something tangible to redirect distress.
How to Use:

- Carry a **small object**. (stone, fabric, keychain)
- Notice how it feels: rough/smooth, hot/cold, heavy/light.
- Describe it silently or aloud to yourself.

4. Mental Grounding (Descriptive Thinking)

Purpose: Engages the thinking brain to reduce emotional flooding.

How to Use:

- Silently describe your surroundings in detail.
- Recite the alphabet backward or count down from 100 by 7s.
- List types of animals, colors, or cities.

5. "Name What's True" Exercise

Purpose: Anchors the person in safety and reality.

How to Use:

Say out loud:

- "I am safe in this moment."
- "I am in [location], with [person], and it is [time/day]."
- "I have survived this before."

6. Feet on the Floor / Body Scan

Purpose: Helps participants reconnect with their body and breath.

How to Use:

- Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor.
- Slowly scan the body from head to toe.
- Notice areas of tension, pressure, or contact.

7. Cold Water or Ice Cube Trick

Purpose: Interrupts a trauma response quickly using physical sensation.

How to Use:

- Hold an ice cube or splash cold water on your face.
- Focus on the sensation as it grounds your nervous system.

8. Movement-Based Grounding

Purpose: Releases tension and anchors the body in space.
Ideas:

- Gentle stretching.
- Pressing palms together or against a wall.
- Walking while counting steps or feeling the ground.

9. Scripture or Affirmation Grounding (if faith-based)
Purpose: Brings truth and calm in emotionally charged moments.
Examples:

- "I am not alone."
- "God is my refuge and strength."
- "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

APPENDIX C: FORGIVENESS SUPPORT

Responsibility Pie

Below is a "Responsibility Pie." Think about your abortion experience. Divide the pie into pieces reflecting the proportion of shared responsibility for everyone who was also involved. Cast a wide net: doctors, partner, parents, clinics, yourself, others.

The Burden of Unforgiveness

Materials needed: small rocks and a bag big enough to hold them.

Choose a rock for each person you need to forgive. If you have more than 3 rocks, write down the name of the person each rock represents.

Place rocks in the bag and carry this "burden of unforgiveness" until you are ready to forgive the person represented by each rock. You must be in physical or visual contact with the bag of rocks at all times.

As you are ready to forgive each person, you may remove the rock representing that person from your "burden."

Facilitator Note - Check with each participant the following week, celebrating success and encouraging any who still need to complete the task.

APPENDIX D: HELPING A WOMAN WHO SUFFERS

AN AFTER-ABORTION RESOURCE FOR MEN

Did You Know?

Pregnancy changes a woman physically, mentally, and emotionally in profound ways. The physical connection in the womb is provided by the placenta, built of cells from both the mother and fetus. Cells can migrate to the mother's body through the placenta, so that she may carry the baby's cells for the rest of her life. This creates an inseparable bond between mother and child that transcends emotion.

What she may be dealing with after an abortion:

- Post Traumatic Stress: uncontrollable emotions, anxiety, distress when near babies or pregnant women, obsession with job or school excellence, nightmares, inability to make decisions, severe anger, suicidal thoughts, depression, substance abuse.
- Keeping the experience a secret to hide her shame. She may be desperately afraid of being judged by others and, at the same time, feel like she deserves judgement.
- Despair: She may have felt that there was no way out of an abortion decision, and after an initial feeling of relief, regret may hit her like a tornado. She may feel like she is a bad person, completely undeserving of love or anything good in life.
- Anger at herself, her situation, partner, medical personnel, God, or anyone who either encouraged the

abortion or failed to talk her out of it. This may show itself by her lashing out at others, even those who had nothing to do with her abortion, or she may bury it deeply and sink into depression.

- She may be in great fear and believe lies:
  - My choice to abort defines who I am.
  - I don't deserve to live because my baby died.
  - I don't deserve happiness or anything good.
  - No one kind or good will want me.
  - Anyone who learns of my abortion will reject me.
  - My aborted baby would hate me.
- The force of her grief may overwhelm her, but she may believe that she has no right to grieve the loss of the child because it was a choice.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You will need to wait until she is ready to grieve her loss. In the meantime, you can use these suggestions to help her through her trauma and eventually help her through her grief:

- Listen actively to her as often as she wants to communicate.
- Be understanding and patient with her. Try not to become defensive!
- Hold her and let her express her emotions freely.
- Take on some responsibilities around the home that she would normally do.
- Speak words of love, comfort, and affirmation to her.
- When she is ready, help her find a support group like AbAnon.

Grief is a normal response to great loss and must be allowed full expression to provide emotional healing. Healthy grief expresses itself in sadness and mourning. We may feel "lost" or experience profound emptiness. Unhealthy grief may numb or threaten to overwhelm us. It can also be complicated by denial, anger or shame.

Not allowing ourselves to grieve is like leaving an open wound uncared for. Cleaning an open wound is painful but necessary. In the same way, grieving is not a pleasant process either, but it does bring healing.

MEN NEED TO GRIEVE

When a couple experiences abortion, a man often sets personal feelings aside to focus on helping his partner with her trauma. As a result, he may neglect his own emotions due to a desire to comfort and protect.

But men need to grieve, too, and yours may look very different from that of your partner. Sometimes men are hesitant to share their feelings, but you may be helping your partner by expressing yours. A lot of healing can result as you help each other through the grieving process.

STEPS TO TAKE TOGETHER TOWARD HEALING

- Acknowledge the trauma your partner has gone through. There are many elements that a woman must process that her partner does not.

  – The physical loss itself
  – The hormones that flood her system
  – The stress of any procedures that were involved

- Look to each other for any support you need.

  – Go to your partner first to work through challenges before you consider looking to other people.
  – Resist substances like alcohol or drugs.

- In the long term, consider the option of creating some kind of memorial together:

  – Plant a tree or a flower.
  – Paint a garden rock.
  – Choose a name for your child.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS TOGETHER

Take turns addressing each question, listening carefully to each other.

1. What emotions did you experience when you learned about the pregnancy?
2. What emotions did you experience during and after the abortion?
3. In what ways have you expressed your grief since then?
4. What do you need your partner to do to help you through this?

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE MEMORIAL SERVICE

This memorial service outline is provided as a sample to help guide you in planning. It does not need to be followed word-for-word or in its entirety. Please feel free to pick and choose the portions that best reflect you, your faith, and the needs of your family and community.

Celebrating a memorial service for your aborted child can foster significant further healing and provide a great deal of closure. Holding the celebration with a pastor in a church building can create a powerful sense of forgiveness and grace, or you could honor your child in a place special to you with someone who has experience in facilitating memorial services for unborn children.

God can supply a positive memory to overcome the many negative memories of the abortion. This is a time for the father to acknowledge the death of his child and grieve in the context of a caring community. It also is a time of personal thanksgiving because the Lord has provided a measure of healing.

The service should be private – not open to church members or the public. Try to create an environment that feels warm, peaceful and safe for grieving and reflection, a positive experience that can be shared with a spouse, a pastor, family or friends. It should be a small and intimate event so that the father's loss can be recognized and mourned. If you are part of a group finishing a healing program, you will greatly benefit if you celebrate a memorial service together as a community.

Welcome and Opening Words

- Gentle introduction of why everyone has gathered
- Roses representing the child can be brought by each family member to put together a bouquet to leave at the memorial.

Reading, Poetry or Worship Music

Personal Story or Tribute

- Allow parents or family to share their story or have someone else share prepared words on their behalf.
- Read letters to the unborn child.
- Name the child.

Symbolic Rituals

- Light a candle to acknowledge the child.
- Instead of carrying a burden of guilt, we can emotionally release the child to God, where he or she, in fact, already is. Ideas:
  – Release balloons or butterflies.
  – Shoot an arrow.
  – Put something that floats in flowing water.

Special Music or Song

- Choose a song meaningful to the parents or a comforting lullaby.

Words of Comfort and Hope

- Scripture
- A meditation about God's grace, forgiveness and the unborn child
- Gentle words offering compassion, support, and assurance that grieving is valid

Closing Blessing, Prayer, or Statement of Comfort

- End with words affirming love, remembrance, and healing.

Invitation for Community Support

- Invite attendees to offer continued care, friendship, and ongoing support to the grieving family.
- If a program was printed, have extended family and friends take it home and ask them to pray for the immediate family.
- Memory table with ultrasound images, blankets, keepsakes, or small tokens
- Give a lapel pin of baby feet to each family member.
- Provide guests with remembrance cards or small items. (e.g., flower seeds, memorial bookmarks, candles)

Home memorials:

- Coin with date of abortion
- Candle
- Dog tag
- Plant a bush, flower or tree.
- Ebenezer rock in a garden
- Plaque at the National Memorial to the Unborn (in-person or virtual)

APPENDIX F: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Further Healing:

Linda Cochrane and Kathy Jones. *Healing a Father's Heart: A Post-Abortion Bible Study for Men*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996.

Harper, Jack & Sheila. *SaveOne: The Men's Study*. Save One, 2019.

Rachel's Vineyard, https://rachelsvineyard.org,Hotlines: 877-467-3463 or 866-721-7881.

Support After Abortion, https://supportafterabortion.com, Helpline: 844-289-4673.

National Memorial for the Unborn. Chattanooga, TN. https://www.memorialfortheunborn.org/.

Books and Movies:

Burke, Kevin. *Redeeming a Father's Heart: Men Share Powerful Stories of Abortion Loss and Recovery*. Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2007.

Condon, Guy and Hazard, David. F*atherhood Aborted: The Profound Effects of Abortion on Men*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.

Coyle, CT. *Men and Abortion: A Path to Healing*. Life Cycle Books, Ltd, 1999.

Dodd, Chip. *The Voice of the Heart: A Call to Full Living*. Sage Hill, LLC, 2015.

Eldridge, John. *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*. Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 2010.

Tilly: A Message of Hope, directed by Stephen Vidano (2003; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books), DVD

Online Resources:

Abortion Changes You, https://www.abortionchangesyou.com.

Care Net-A Pro Abundant Life Ministry, https://www.care-net.org.

Ebat, Amy and Bren, Rachel. Produced by SRT Services. *Grace & Grenades: Dropping Truth Bombs About Sexually Related Trauma*. May 18, 2024 forward. Podcasts. https://www.graceandgrenades.com.

Heartbeat International, https://www.heartbeatinternational.org.

Silent No More Awareness Campaign, https://www.silentnomoreawareness.org.