

The Power of Your Story
Facilitator Guide
Version 4

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Rob Fischer

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FOREWORD

You're no doubt wondering why a man wrote a curriculum for post-abortive women. For me, it began years ago when a friend shared her story with me and asked me to write a book telling the true stories of women who had experienced abortion.

At the time, I had no context or involvement with abortion or with women who had experienced abortion. A pregnancy resource center put me in touch with twelve post-abortive women who were willing to bravely share their stories with me. I was humbled that they would take me into their confidence.

Why would twelve women share their abortion stories, complete with all the pain, trauma, and chaos those abortions brought into their lives? Their overwhelming desire was to testify to the world how devastating abortion can be and to help other women begin to heal from their abortions.

Now passionate about helping post-abortive women and men on their journey toward healing, I was asked to create a curriculum for Abortion Anonymous (AbAnon), whose mission is to help post-abortive women and men recover from the emotional pain brought on by abortion.

The Power of Your Story

This curriculum would not exist without the courageous women who shared their stories and experiences found throughout these pages. I am deeply grateful to the women who dedicated countless hours reviewing and refining this material. Their honesty and strength gives this work its heart.

Because this is the joint work of these women and me, in many cases I've chosen to identify with you using the plural personal pronoun "we." Please accept my attempt to draw myself into your experience in this way.

We invite you to fully enter this curriculum and the eight sessions you'll spend with other women like yourself. We are confident that you will experience healing and new-found hope!

— *Rob Fischer*

INTRODUCTION FOR FACILITATORS

Welcome to the AbAnon curriculum. Thank you for volunteering to serve as a facilitator for this group. We believe that your personal story and interaction with the women in your small group will have a profound impact on their lives. 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 A 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 post-abortive women. 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

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- Managing time
- Being fully 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 these pitfalls, so please follow the curriculum 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.

INTRODUCTION FOR FACILITATORS

Since AbAnon is uniquely positioned to reach women of all faiths or none at all, please be sensitive to attitudes that may not reflect a Judeo-Christian or even a pro-life morality. If necessary, remind participants of our group norms to ensure that everyone in the group is comfortable and treated with respect. Prevent participants from trying to convert others to their way of thinking. This is one reason we do not engage in corporate prayer during group sessions.

Since you will be co-facilitating with another woman, learn to work together humbly and harmoniously. Never contradict one another or usurp one another's authority as facilitator. 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 areas of your gifting and experience.

Finally, in the course of the 8 weeks, participants will read the stories of women who not only experienced an abortion but were also sexually abused. Abortion and sexual abuse are often found in the same story. However, a woman may not recognize her need for healing from sexual abuse until she reads about it in the AbAnon curriculum. Please be prepared to empathize with them and point them toward a SAVAnon group. Similarly, the stories of the participants may include a miscarriage or stillbirth, in which case you may eventually suggest they participate in a MiSAnon group.

HOW TO USE THIS FACILITATOR GUIDE

In order to facilitate the AbAnon curriculum you will only need the Facilitator Guide. Everything 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:

The Power of Your Story

- Text for you to read is presented as normal text that may sometimes be in **bold** for emphasis.
- Text in ***bold italics*** is intended as instructions for you and should not be read aloud to your group.
- The group norms are extremely important for managing conversations and expectations. Promptly review them with the group whenever anyone gets off-track.
- Remind participants to familiarize themselves with each session before the group starts, especially if they read it at the beginning of the week.
- In case participants have difficulty relating to a particular story, you may want to prepare for yourself a short list of specific prompts. Choose a couple of struggles or statements from the story that stand out to you and ask the participants: "In what ways do you relate to _____?"
- Look over the information in the Appendices before you begin your group. The first six are in the Participant Manual, but the last two are only found in this guide.
- Contact your program director to gain access to important facilitator resources.



SESSION ONE

PREPARATION

- *Read Session One so you're familiar with it.*
- *Review Appendix A: The Feeling Wheel.*
- *Review Appendix G: Demonstrating Empathy.*
- *Review Appendix H: Common Facilitator Scenarios.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*

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 abortion experience. We're glad you're here.

If you'd like to open your Participant Manual to Session One on page 9, you can follow along with me.

INTRODUCTIONS

Facilitators, lead and model this. Be careful not to share your abortion story at this time.

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

Facilitator Note – Add a fun icebreaker question like “What’s your favorite flavor of ice cream?” if you find that helpful.

Continue reading ...

OVER THE NEXT EIGHT WEEKS, WE WILL TALK ABOUT

- Your abortion story
- How your abortion may have affected you
- Ways you may have coped with your abortion

SESSION ONE

- 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 10 - 11 of the Participant Manual.

- **Keep confidence** – What we say here stays here. We pledge to keep each person's confidence and ask the same of each group member. This should include participating in a private location where no one can be overheard.
- **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 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 burdened with the possibility of having been the reason.

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- **Be respectful** – We agree to respect each other: our individual situations, our ethnicity, our faiths, the choices we've made and how we each process our abortions. You may hear someone say something that shocks you. Allow her the freedom to speak freely and feel what she feels.
- **Function as a team** – As a team, we listen to each other; no one dominates the conversation. We're here to assist, encourage and care for each other.
- **Be humble** – We all have strong beliefs. Resist judging or trying to convert someone who does not line up with yours. Sometimes the way we hide our own needs is by trying to help others. We're not here to fix each other.
- **Embrace your unique story** – Resist comparing your experience with those of the others in your group. Let each woman's experience stand on its own.
- **Believe and trust one another** – All the stories printed in this curriculum are true. We commit to being truthful with each other as well.
- **Check-in** – Allow each other to check in to ensure we're okay through any pain the healing process may prompt.
- **No "sharing" hangovers** – Resist feelings of regret concerning what we've shared with each other.
- **Always try to 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

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

We recognize that every person is different and working through your abortion usually occurs over time. Our sincere hope is that you will achieve some measure of healing through this eight-week experience. Although there are some basic similarities, each woman processes her abortion in a different way and that's okay.

You may not see your particular experience in this curriculum because the stories shared within this book are specific to that woman's situation. However, each session uses aspects of the story to explore general, powerful principles for healing that can be applied to many life experiences. Please use every method and opportunity that we provide to extract these principles and put them into practice.

Whatever healing you seek, 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

Our volunteer facilitators come with our own abortion stories and are in various stages of healing. Not functioning as professional counselors or life coaches in this group, we have personally experienced an abortion and are passionate about providing a safe, supportive

environment for others. We are here to acknowledge and empathize with you as you process your experience. You are not alone!

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 The Healing Way, 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 an abortion experience, whether they claim religious beliefs or not, is welcome to our gender-specific programs.

We freely acknowledge that part of our eight-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 The Healing Way 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. This support group is not intended to replace professional counseling or therapy. You can find a list of resources, including 24/7 hotlines, on our website.

Facilitator Note – Invite participants to pick their books back up and follow along from page 13 as you continue to read.

SESSION ONE

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 21, you'll see that after a review of our group norms and a personal abortion story from your facilitator, the session begins with Cindy's Story, followed by some discussion questions. These weekly stories are followed by readings that focus on healing actions with their own discussion questions. Some of the chapters also contain practical steps. At the end of each session, you will find a journal page. Feel free to use this space, journal electronically, or write your thoughts and emotions in a separate notebook.

Please do your 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 14 of their Participant Manual.

POST ABORTION STRESS SYNDROME

Joan Appleton was the head nurse at Commonwealth Clinic, which performed abortions. Joan was a very active member in the National Organization for Women. As a firm believer in choice, she felt she had a wonderful opportunity to practice her political beliefs.¹

While working at the clinic, Joan realized, "I often saw women who were injured emotionally by abortion. However, my supervisor told

¹ Clinic Quotes, "Former Clinic Worker Joan Appleton," September 11, 2012, <http://clinicquotes.com/former-clinic-worker-joan-appleton/>.

me, 'If she's having a problem **after** her abortion, it's because she was having a problem **before** her abortion.'"²

But it kept bothering Joan. "Why was it such an emotional trauma for a woman and such a difficult decision, if it was a natural thing to do? If it was right, why was it so difficult? I had to ask myself that all the time. I counseled these women so well; they were so sure of their decisions. So why were they coming back now, months and years later, psychological wrecks?"³

Joan continued to explain that in the pro-choice movement and abortion industry, "We deny that there is anything like post-abortion syndrome. Yet it *is* real, and they do come back. I couldn't deny their presence, their numbers were increasing, and I kept asking, why?"⁴

We refer to these very real psychological effects as Post Abortion Stress Syndrome. Supporters of abortion often deny the existence of any emotional harm. This places additional pressure on women who are feeling the negative effects of abortion but are told that their feelings are not real or meaningful.

However, Dr. Susanne Babbel, a psychologist specializing in trauma and depression, had the following to say: "No matter your philosophical, religious or political views on abortion, the fact of the matter is the actual experience can affect women not only on a personal level but can potentially have psychological repercussions."⁵

Dr. Babbel went on to explain:

2 See note 1.

3 <https://thelifeinstitute.net/learning-centre/abortion-facts/providers/former-abortion-ists/joan-appleton>.

4 Clinic Quotes, "Former Clinic Worker Joan Appleton," September 11, 2012, <http://clinicquotes.com/former-clinic-worker-joan-appleton/>.

5 Susanne Babbel, PhD, MFT, "Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS) – Does it Exist?" Psychology Today, October 25, 2010, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somatic-psychology/201010/post-abortion-stress-syndrome-pass-does-it-exist>.

SESSION ONE

Post Abortion Stress Syndrome is the name that has been given to the psychological aftereffects of abortion, based on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is important to note that this is not a term that has been accepted by the American Psychiatric Association or the American Psychological Association. Nevertheless, any event that causes trauma can indeed result in PTSD, and abortion is no exception.⁶

Facilitator Note – Read the following paragraph to the group:

Many women experience feelings of loss and depression at some point after an abortion. Post Abortion Stress Syndrome involves severe and extensive trauma.⁷

Ask the group: Please read silently the first list on page 16 of your manual and check any box that you believe you have experienced.

Please check any you have experienced:

- ☐ Self-harm, cutting, strong suicidal thoughts, or suicide attempts
- ☐ Increase in dangerous or unhealthy activities: alcohol or drug abuse, anorexia/bulimia, compulsive over-eating
- ☐ Casual and indifferent sex
- ☐ Risk-taking behaviors
- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Difficulty performing self-care activities
- ☐ Trouble functioning normally in a job or school

6 See note 5.

7 AfterAbortion.com, "What is PASS?" http://afterabortion.com/pass_details.html.

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- ☐ Inability to take care of or relate to existing children
- ☐ Problems maintaining other relationships (spouse, partner, other family members or friends)
- ☐ A desire to immediately get pregnant and “replace” the baby that was aborted, even when all the circumstances that led to choosing abortion the first time are still in place

Ask the group: Would anyone be willing to share a box you checked?

Facilitator Note – Read the following paragraph to the group:

Post Abortion Stress Syndrome sometimes does not appear until months or even many years after an abortion and may continue for months and even years. Other short- and long-term symptoms are common:⁸

Ask the group: Please read the second list on page 17 silently and check off any items that have applied to you.

Please check any that have applied to you:

- ☐ Uncontrollable emotions or trouble dealing with emotional issues
- ☐ Anxiety and panic disorder
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping and sleeping problems
- ☐ Disturbing dreams or nightmares
- ☐ Problems with phobias or increase in severity of existing phobias

8 AfterAbortion.com. “What is PASS?” http://afterabortion.com/pass_details.html.

SESSION ONE

- ☐ Repeated unplanned pregnancies with additional abortions
- ☐ Repeated unplanned pregnancies carried to term
- ☐ “Atonement marriage,” where the woman marries the partner from the abortion
- ☐ Distress seeing or socializing with other pregnant women, other people’s babies, and children
- ☐ Co-dependence or inability to make decisions easily
- ☐ Problems with severe and disproportionate anger
- ☐ Distress or health concerns with a later pregnancy
- ☐ An unhealthy obsession with excelling at work or school
- ☐ The need to prove you are a good parent
- ☐ Obsessive Pro-life or Pro-choice activism
- ☐ Chronic physical pain

Ask the group: Which of these stands out most to you?

Facilitator Note – The symptoms listed above were compiled from both psychological research and the experiences of AbAnon participants.

Read the following to the group:

JOURNALING TOWARD HEALING

Having identified some of the specific challenges you face, you can begin to move forward. As you embark upon your healing process, it is very helpful to keep a journal. There is no right or wrong way to do this. 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 celebrate the progress you have made.

Facilitator Note - Ask participants to put their books down. The facilitator NOT sharing her story will lead the next part.

FACILITATOR STORY

Read this introduction to the group: This curriculum is called *The Power of Your Story* 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 _____ will be sharing her abortion story. As you listen, please think about how you could provide support and encouragement. Then consider the connections between her 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 she finishes.

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The facilitator who is not leading this section shares her story. Respond with empathy and support that would model future responses from the group.

SESSION ONE

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her 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 18 as you continue to read the next two sections.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Some of you may be thinking, “I’ve been trying to put my abortion behind me. Why would I want to revisit that experience? I just want to move on and forget about it.” Over the next seven weeks you may feel a wide range of emotions, including sadness and grief, but that is a normal part of the process. If you find your emotions difficult to identify or understand, please take a look at “The Feeling Wheel” in Appendix A.

Joining with you in processing your experience, we will walk alongside you and provide you with helpful tools and strategies. Together we can support each other, finding answers, hope and healing!

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 symptoms found on pages 16 - 17. Check off any additional symptoms that you have experienced in the past or are experiencing now. Reviewing this list carefully will help you write your own story.
2. Please read Session Two: Cindy's story, the impact of losing your voice and Healing Action 1: Share Your Story in Community. Write your answers to the corresponding questions and be prepared to share your thoughts at our next group meeting.

Facilitator Note - Take a minute to specifically suggest how the participants might break their preparation up over two or three days.

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 feelings 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. Is there anything else you would like to bring up to the group?
2. 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.
3. Each week we want to try to finish on a positive note. What is one positive thing you are taking from this session? I’ll start... ***(share)***.

Who would like to share what you are walking away with? ***(Don’t force anyone to share if they’re unwilling or not ready yet.)***

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.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! Thank you for being here. Let's briefly review our group norms listed on pages 21 - 23 of your manual. Were there any you want to add or that seemed challenging to you? ***To the extent possible, let them state these.***

- **Keep confidence** – What we say here stays here. We pledge to keep each person's confidence and ask the same of each group member. This should include participating in a private location where no one can be overheard.
- **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 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 burdened 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 and how we each process our abortions. You may hear someone say something that shocks you. Allow her the freedom to speak freely and feel what she feels.
- **Function as a team** – As a team, we listen to each other; no one dominates the conversation. We're here to assist, encourage and care for each other.
- **Be humble** – We all have strong beliefs. Resist judging or trying to convert someone who does not line up with

SESSION TWO

yours. Sometimes the way we hide our own needs is by trying to help others. We're not here to fix each other.

- **Embrace your unique story** – Resist comparing your experience with those of the others in your group. Let each woman's experience stand on its own.
- **Believe and trust one another** – All the stories printed in this curriculum are true. We commit to being truthful with each other as well.
- **Check-in** – Allow each other to check in to ensure we're okay through any pain the healing process may prompt.
- **No "sharing" hangovers** – Resist feelings of regret concerning what we've shared with each other.
- **Always try to end on a positive note.**
- **Any additional norms your group came up with.**

***Facilitator Note** – If it hasn't come up yet, feel out the group regarding group texts and/or group emails. Be extremely sensitive about confidentiality!*

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 her story will lead the next part.

Read this introduction to the group: Today we will be talking about starting to write your story. To model what you will be working toward, _____ will be sharing her abortion story. As

you listen, please think about how you could provide support and encouragement. Then consider the connections between her 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 she finishes.

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The facilitator who is not leading this section shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her 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 - Say to the group: Each week, we'll spend some time discussing what we read. This week we asked you to read Session Two. Please be sure to do the reading each week so you can enter into the discussion.

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 28 and talk about Cindy's story.

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

CINDY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

During my childhood, my parents were very unhappy and fought all the time. They both worked hard, but we had little money, and they had difficulty communicating with each other. After years of fighting, they eventually divorced.

When I was 11, my father moved away. My mom went back to work and struggled to raise and feed my older brother, sister and me. As the youngest, I was a very fearful child, and I spent a lot of time alone, worrying.

Not long after the divorce, my mom met and married a man. He had money, which helped our financial situation, but he was not a good person. When my mom married, my brother moved out, which left my older sister and me at home.

My step-father began to come into our rooms at night. My sister was 16 at the time, and when he started to approach her sexually, she moved out. That left me, and for the next six years, my step-father sexually abused me.

My mom did not know what was happening. In fact, she seemed happy since she didn't have the financial stress anymore. I didn't tell anyone about what my step-father was doing to me. I was too ashamed, and I wanted to keep peace in my family.

You might wonder why I didn't say anything, but I felt like I had no way out. Who could I tell? By then, he had moved us to a different city, away from family and friends and away from my brother and sister. He built a beautiful home for my mom and me. To the people around us, we looked like a model family.

I felt trapped, insecure and lonely. I thought about telling my mom about my step-father but I decided it was too risky because it would ruin our

“family” and our security. I thought about confiding in someone else but was afraid they wouldn’t believe me, or worse, they wouldn’t know what to do and would just leave me in my situation.

I desired acceptance and approval of others above all else, and because of my fragile self-esteem, it felt safer to pretend and remain in shame and secrecy. I held back in my relationships with girlfriends because I didn’t want anyone to discover my secret. In my relationships with boys, I gave away too much because I wanted to be loved and secretly hoped that they might rescue me.

Since I was so needy and craved attention, I drove people away and my relationships were short-lived, leaving me feeling weak and abandoned again and again. This confirmed my biggest fear that there was something wrong with me and I was not worthy of being loved.

The shame and insecurity increased. There seemed to be nowhere I could rest, nowhere I could be real and be loved unconditionally. I began to doubt that there was anyone that could truly love or accept me.

Time passed, and my mom and step-father began to fight, and our “fake” world began to crumble. After one awful night of fighting, my mom and I moved out, and they divorced a short time later. By now, I was 16.

Living alone with my mom again, I wanted to keep peace in our home at all costs. She was healing from a divorce, and I still felt somehow responsible for the abuse I had received from my step-father. I thought that by keeping my secret, we would recover and move on with our lives. But one afternoon, I finally told my mom about the years of abuse; she listened and believed me. By telling her, my healing began. I was no longer carrying the burden of my abuse and shame alone.

I realize now that my secret only had power over me as long as it was kept hidden. My mom made me talk to a lawyer that day and started court proceedings against my step-father. This was very difficult for me.

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It meant that secrets I had kept hidden for six years would be exposed—not only to my extended family but to strangers as well.

Looking back, I know that standing up and telling the truth was the best thing I could do. This freed me from fear of him and living in shame. My secret lost its power when it was finally brought to light.

But the years after the hearing were difficult. I struggled to make new friends and start over. I was anxious to live a normal life but I didn't know what "normal" was. I had lived in dysfunction for so long, I didn't know what I was looking for.

During the years of my abuse, I had been invited to church with friends, but God felt distant to me. I still had so much shame and I was very cautious about sharing my story. I especially didn't want the truth of my past to come out in a church. It seemed like everyone at church had their lives together. They looked perfect from the outside and I was sure that nobody there had experienced what I had.

I also struggled with God. I wondered why He had abandoned me in my childhood. I wondered how a loving God could let this happen to me. I thought that maybe He was angry with me or didn't really care what had happened. I began to explore other religions and philosophies.

As I searched for answers, I sought security in relationships, education, and even food. I turned to anything that would distract and satisfy me, even if only temporarily. I continued to struggle with my deep desire to be accepted and loved.

While attending university, my roommate invited me to a Christian campus ministry meeting where I met healthy-minded people. These were real people who had come through challenges in their lives and seemed happy and "normal." I wanted what they had. It was there that I learned about the unconditional love of God and how His Son, Jesus took

all my sin on Himself and all I had to do was believe and trust Him so that I could be pure before God.

I saw this as my chance for a new life, a fresh beginning. I was hopeful for the first time in my life. I could start over. The only problem was I wanted his forgiveness, but I still wanted to control my own life. I wavered and now realize that I hadn't healed enough to handle what was coming next.

While in college, I began to date a guy I thought I would marry. Our relationship became serious very quickly. He was a paramedic and police officer and a nice guy—marriage quality—so I moved in with him. He did not share my new faith and I gradually grew away from God again.

Before long, I became pregnant. I was so excited because I thought that I was ready to start a new life as a wife and mother. I fully expected my boyfriend to accept my pregnancy and to marry me.

Unfortunately, my boyfriend said he had no interest in becoming a father. We weren't married and he felt he had no obligation to stay with me. I had seen my mother struggle as a single mom. My dad had left me, my step-father abused me, and now I was feeling abandoned by a man again. I turned to my family and everyone recommended abortion as my best option. I felt powerless and completely alone. I knew it was wrong but felt I had no other choice.

My boyfriend drove me to the clinic and paid for the procedure. When I got to the clinic, the waiting room was very quiet and all the other women were crying softly. When it was my turn to go back for the procedure, I remember the nurse saying it would be over quickly. I remember the suctioning. I remember asking her if it was a boy or a girl. She said, "It's pretty early to tell, but it looks like a boy."

She took me back to the waiting area and I began vomiting and crying. A wave of shame came over me very similar to the shame I had felt for years during my sexual abuse. I cried and a new emptiness filled my soul.

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I had taken God's gift, a child, and destroyed it. I knew this was wrong and I thought, "Now there's no way God will ever forgive me!"

I remember crying for two days straight, not wanting to get out of bed. My relationship with my boyfriend ended and I was left to sort through my messed up life again. I now felt further from God than I had as a child. Hopelessness filled my heart.

Over the next years, God tenderly called me back to Himself through other Christians who loved and accepted me. But I never felt comfortable telling them my secret. I kept my abortion from them.

Then I attended a conference where Francine Rivers, an author I admired, spoke. She shocked me when she shared her abortion story. And I thought, "If she can share her story in front of a room full of women, then I need to come clean with some close friends of mine."

So I attended a post-abortive recovery group. I began to share more freely. Soon I began volunteering to help other women who were post-abortive.

As a child, I did not have a voice with my step-father who was abusing me. When I got pregnant, I felt that I had no voice with my boyfriend. I felt censored, silenced by them. I had no other recourse, no power, no voice. Now, by sharing my story, God has redeemed my voice and taken away my awful guilt and shame.

DISCUSS CINDY'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 28.

1. In what ways could you identify with Cindy's story?
What were you feeling?
2. In what ways can you relate to Cindy's feelings of abandonment?
3. In what ways did Cindy lose her voice?

Facilitator Note – The material after each story is copied from the Participant Manual. You do not need to read this text out loud unless prompted, because group members should have already read and reflected on this information. 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. If you struggle with identifying your feelings, "The Feeling Wheel" is available to you in Appendix A.

Author Lysa TerKeurst wisely states, "Feelings are indicators, not dictators."⁹ Our emotions are guideposts for internal communication. They can point to something being wrong but they should not get to boss us around!

⁹ Lysa TerKeurst, *Uninvited: Living Loved When You Feel Less Than, Left Out, and Lonely* (Thomas Nelson, 2016), 146.

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The following seven healing 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. Share your story in community.
2. Admit to poor choices and abandon unhealthy coping methods.
3. Release what you cannot change.
4. Healing requires forgiveness.
5. Replace lies with the truth.
6. Reclaim your identity.
7. Honor your child.

In this session, we'll focus on Healing Action 1: Share Your Story in Community.

LOSING YOUR VOICE

Many women who have experienced an abortion express that they feel "voiceless." To be voiceless is to be powerless and vulnerable. There are at least three ways that your abortion experience may have left you without a voice.

First, many of us feel that we were coerced into our abortion. Given the same chance again, we would not have chosen this path. Often, we were pressured or even forced to get an abortion by: the father of the baby, his parents, our parents, a sibling, well-meaning friends, a doctor, or a social worker. In this case, someone else spoke on our behalf and made the decision for us.

Second, we are immersed in a culture that not only promotes but celebrates abortion so loudly that it can overwhelm or drown out our voice. Everywhere we turn we encounter messages that can sound so reasonable, such as:

- “Abortion is the right choice for you.”
- “Abortion is perfectly safe.”
- “Abortion is a woman’s right.”
- “You have no other choice.”
- “You’re not ready for children.”
- “You can always have children later.”

Because the voices promoting abortion are all around us, we can feel ashamed if we believe differently, pressured into silence and stripped of our voice.

Finally, many of us feel saddened because of our abortions but don’t really know why. Even though it may have seemed like the only possible decision at the time, we still may live in fear of being found out or exposed. We might have shared our experience with a few people, but the fear of our secret being revealed to everyone 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 abortion and controlled by what others might think.

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HEALING ACTION 1: SHARE YOUR STORY IN COMMUNITY

When interviewed, many post-abortive women explained that sharing the personal story of their abortion was crucial to beginning the healing process. There truly is power in sharing your story.

GAINING BACK YOUR VOICE

To gain back your voice, you need to address each of the three ways that may have left you voiceless.

First, if you feel you were in some way pressured or coerced into getting an abortion, you must reject any victim mentality that remains. As long as we view ourselves as “victims” we remain powerless, voiceless, and cannot rise above our circumstances.

Second, recognize that although the voice of our culture may be loud, this does not make it right. What is broadcast on social media or what people around you believe does not necessarily match what you believe or are experiencing. No one can argue with what has actually happened in your life.

Take your voice back. Read over this list of declarations once more and express your own beliefs by rewording any of these statements based on how you feel about your abortion today.

If you believe a statement should be reworded, rewrite it in the space provided:

Facilitator Note - Be prepared for the possibility that participants may not disagree with every statement.

- “Abortion is the right choice for you.”
-

The Power of Your Story

- “Abortion is perfectly safe.”

.....

- “Abortion is a woman’s right.”

.....

- “You have no other choice.”

.....

- “You’re not ready for children.”

.....

- “You can always have children later.”

.....

Finally, getting past the confusion and anxiety produced by fear of how others might judge your emotions calls for the courage to share whatever you feel.

Often, the process of remembering is the beginning of healing. This is because you are brought face to face with your struggles. Denying or ignoring any pain you might be experiencing from your abortion will only prolong that pain.

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 may be telling you to forget about it. Some 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.

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It is said, “Confession is good for the soul.” This is so true. One of the key steps for gaining back your voice and beginning your healing process is to selectively share your abortion story with others. Many women feel the need for healing following an abortion, some immediately but others not until years after the abortion. Wherever you are in your journey, by sharing your story in a safe, caring environment, you will likely find release and a measure of healing.

Revealing the secret of your abortion can free your spirit. What has been hidden is now in the open. Now you can speak. Telling your story in the context of your AbAnon group takes away much of the power from the confusing, exhausting feelings you may have.

SHARING YOUR STORY IN COMMUNITY

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

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

Second, as you hear others’ stories, you may realize things 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 women’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 women in the group tell their stories, you will experience the power of standing together. We were never meant to try to struggle through life alone. We need each other. Take advantage of this tremendous support system being made available to you.

DEBRIEF: SHARE YOUR STORY

Facilitator Note - Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on pages 34 - 35 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 will happen if you continue to view yourself as a victim?

Facilitator Note - Ask the group: Who would like to share how (or IF) you reworded some of the statements on page 32?

Facilitator Note - Ask: Were there any other false statements you have heard people say ?

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

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Facilitator Note - Possible answers include:

- *Hearing other women's stories encourages us because we're not alone.*
- *We'll realize things that 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.*

HOW TO WRITE YOUR STORY

Facilitator Note – Say to the group: The Participant Manual, beginning on page 35, gives some general guidelines to help you prepare to tell your story.

Read the following three paragraphs aloud and discuss the importance of writing down answers to the questions. Offer to privately help any participants who might have multiple abortions to work out whether to share all of them in her story.

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 10-20 minutes to read out loud. Review the lists of post abortion stress symptoms in Session One and then answer the following questions to help you establish a framework.

If you have had multiple abortions, we encourage you to focus on the one that brought you to this group. It may be practical to limit your efforts to your most traumatic experience, but use your own discretion. You may benefit from going back at a later time and answering these questions for each of your abortions.

The Power of Your Story

You can model your story on the examples in this book or on what you've heard in the group so far. Try to bring out as many emotions and memories as you can, but keep in mind that your abortion story is uniquely yours to tell in any way that feels right to you.

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

1. Describe the relationship you were in that led to your pregnancy.
2. How many abortions have you experienced?
3. How old were you when you had your abortion?
4. Who influenced your decision to abort?
5. How far along were you?
6. What do you remember from your abortion?
7. Describe what you were feeling.
8. How did others react to your abortion, and how did this impact you?
9. Describe the emotions you've experienced resulting from your abortion.
10. In what ways has your abortion impacted your life?
11. What has helped you so far in your healing process?

Facilitator Note - Say to the group: Please do not hesitate to contact one of your facilitators if you need help with your story. We would

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like to schedule who will be sharing their stories each week. Who can volunteer to share next week?

Take time to schedule when each participant will share her story. Avoid scheduling a story for week 8 because that should be a time of memorial and celebration.

Encourage participants to record their commitments in their manuals on page 37.

Record the schedule for sharing stories here:

Session	Date	Participant
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Session Three: Elle'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 that are not in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?



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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 G: Demonstrating Empathy*
- *Review Appendix B: Grounding Techniques.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! Thank you for being here. 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 abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging her before you consider the connections between her 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 she finishes.

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

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The participant shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling about having shared your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 46 and discuss Elle's story.

ELLE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

I grew up in the church. My Dad was a pastor and everyone in my family was very involved with the worship team as musicians and singers. Trying to live up to a certain standard within the church community, I remember feeling like we put on this “happy family,” facade but, in reality, there were all kinds of things going on behind closed doors.

My dad cheated on my mom many times, even with women who attended our churches. Every couple of years the secrets would leak out, my dad would be forced to resign from his position, then we would move to another city and start the whole cycle over again at a new church.

One Wednesday night when I had just turned 12 years old, I went to church for youth group, just like I did every week. Except this night changed the trajectory of my life. An older teenage boy from our youth group came into my dad's office while I was doing homework and sexually assaulted me.

While it was happening, I remember crying and trying to get away from his hands that were holding me down, begging him to stop. I pleaded with him over and over, “I'm too young. Please don't do this. I can't do this! Please stop!”

I still remember every single detail in vivid images from that traumatic night. It left me feeling helpless, degraded, unloved, traumatized and filthy, full of shame and guilt. I assumed that God didn't love me if he was willing to let this happen to me. And those feelings were solidified when my dad did nothing to help me.

He actually came up to his office while it was happening and his unexpected arrival halted the assault. However, finding me disheveled and sobbing behind his locked office door, he did nothing to defend me but instead chastised me for not being down in the church service. He told

me to get myself together and to get back down to church. That pivotal moment completely changed the way I felt about my dad. He swept it all under the rug like it never happened and I no longer felt safe, protected, valued or loved by him.

By the time I was 14, I was choosing to be sexually active with anyone who gave me the attention that I so deeply craved. I wanted to be loved and accepted so badly that I began acting out what I had learned to believe: I had to do sexual favors for any male to ever love me and want to keep me around.

My insecurities and self-destructive behaviors became bigger and deeper. I started having eating disorders in high school, often starving myself until I eventually gave in and would binge eat. And then I'd put my fingers in my throat and try to purge the food out of guilt. My desire to have sex became so strong that I became addicted to the feeling of it like a thrilling drug.

By the time I was 16, I became pregnant. My best friend at the time was Haley. She sang with me on the worship team and her mom played piano for the church. Haley was the only friend who knew about my sexual abuse; we were very close. I was at her house one morning, feeling nauseous and dizzy. She asked me when my last period was and it wasn't until that moment that I even realized that I had actually missed a period.

Haley and I went out to get a pregnancy test but we were both too terrified and embarrassed to pay for it. So, I stole it and took it to the store bathroom where we could safely leave the evidence behind.

I remember going into the stall and taking the test, then immediately the results popped up positive. My heart pounded as Haley and I sat there in the bathroom in disbelief. We went back to her house and called Planned Parenthood. Haley said we'd just make it all go away and no one would ever have to know about the pregnancy. She asked me if I really wanted to spend the rest of my high school years being a teen mom, losing my

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friends and maybe not even getting to graduate or go to college. I was terrified to tell my parents and I was easily convinced that the abortion was the right choice for me.

Travis, my high school boyfriend, was a good guy and was always really sweet to me. He gave me a promise ring when we were just sophomores and always showed me how much he loved me. I didn't understand how loved I was at the time because I didn't know how to love myself.

Travis begged me to keep our baby and I've often wondered what my life would have been like if I had agreed. He even told his mom, who had brought him up by herself, about my pregnancy and they offered to raise the baby for me. But I was completely convinced that I needed to abort this baby. Neither of us had the money on hand to pay for the abortion, but Travis borrowed the money from a friend so that I could pay for it.

When I went to Planned Parenthood for the procedure, Haley held my hand the whole time and cried with me while they used a suction device to abort my baby. A nurse held my other hand and tried to say comforting words to me, but I don't remember anything she said. It's all a blur. I just remember the look on Haley's face while she watched what they were doing to me.

I remember a lot of pain in my abdomen and the suction machine sounding like a vacuum. It was loud. I stared at the ceiling and at Haley crying. I was ushered to a waiting room afterward where there was a room full of other patients sitting with heating pads on their abdomens and a peanut-shaped tray on their chests. Some sobbed and vomited and some just looked dazed. I remember crying while throwing up several times and shaking uncontrollably from the shock. I don't recall the car ride home with Haley, but I remember being back home and curled up in bed, crying.

It was the week of my Junior Prom. I told Travis that I didn't want to go with him when he asked me. I was so ashamed of myself that I just

couldn't handle being close to Travis at that point. He was always so good to me.

I feel a deep regret for taking his baby away from him. I've written emails to Travis a couple of times since then, apologizing for what I did. The first time he didn't respond, but I tried years later, apologizing again for the mistakes I made as a teenager. This time, to my surprise, he actually wrote back and told me that he forgave me.

My husband, John, and I tried to have children after we married. When I could not get pregnant I felt like God was angry with me, punishing me for having an abortion. That marriage ended in divorce and the idea that I was infertile.

Many years later, I met a handsome Jamaican man named Byron on social media. We started talking, texting and video chatting until he flew from Florida to meet me in Oregon. We were sexually active for the first 5 days that he was there with me. Then, on day 6, a woman showed up at my apartment and I found out that he was cheating on me. It turned out there were at least three women that I personally talked to who admitted they'd had intercourse with him that same week! I felt disgusted with him and with myself and sent him back to Florida.

A week later, I hadn't started my period so I took a home pregnancy test. I was in such disbelief when it came up positive that I took four more tests the same day. But it wasn't until I finally got a blood test to confirm my pregnancy that it all felt real. When the nurse called me to say that I was five weeks along, I started to panic: "Not with this guy! Seriously? Not him!"

Co-workers told me that I should have an abortion because I couldn't bring a baby into this world with a dad like that. They told me that it would ruin my career and that being a single mom was just too hard to do. They told me that having an abortion was the "right thing to do."

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That was when God showed me a vision of my little girl. In the vision, she was about 3 years old. She had her little hand wrapped around two of my fingers and as I looked down at her, she was skipping along, jumping over cracks in the sidewalk. The sun was shining down on her beautiful head of curls and I could see the richness of her hair, her bronzed skin and her beautiful brown eyes as she looked up at me, smiling and giggling. God let me know THAT was the little girl I was carrying, so I told them all that it wasn't their decision and that I was keeping my baby girl.

When my daughter was four, I took her to Tennessee for the summer to see my parents. During my travels, I met up with an ex-boyfriend, Matt. One thing led to another and I ended up pregnant again. I was both excited and scared. I called Matt to tell him and he called me a liar! He said I was just trying to trap him into a relationship. Once I'd convinced him that I wasn't lying and sent him the pregnancy test as proof, he started crying and begged me to end the pregnancy. He told me that he didn't want any more kids and he didn't want to pay any more child support. He said that if I decided to keep the baby, he was not going to be involved and that he would never forgive me for having it against his will. I just cried.

Never did I think that would be his reaction. I was terrified to have another baby by another dad and to be a single mom of not only one, but two babies. I was struggling to get by, week to week, and I was also starting a new job that required a lot of travel. I didn't have any family near me to help out. I felt alone and backed into a corner. I considered giving the baby up for adoption, but then Matt told me that he was on meth, which could cause birth defects.

Feeling defeated, regretful and fearful, I called Planned Parenthood again. They told me that if I hurried, I could take the abortion pills before my pregnancy was too far along. My guilt about having a second abortion was so heavy that I rationalized that using pills instead of a surgical procedure would somehow make it not as bad. I desperately needed to keep myself sane through the process, any way I could.

I took the first set of pills and waited until the next day to take the others. I felt very little pain, just a little bit of discomfort like cramping. When the bleeding started, I told myself this was easier and safer than my first abortion. I got through it before...

After it was over I told myself, "Yeah, I've had two but the second one wasn't as traumatizing; it was just pills; I wasn't as far along." I glazed over all my emotions, coaching myself through: not as painful, not as big a deal, not as bad as the first time...

It was easier to disconnect emotionally, justifying my choice, than to face the truth: I had a life inside me and I took that life. I discovered that the guilt is just as crushing regardless of the type of abortion.

A couple of months afterward, Matt reached out to me to ask if I had gone through with the abortion or if I kept the baby and lied to him. I couldn't believe that he would even ask me that! He was so cold and mean to me through the whole situation. I blocked him for a few years after that.

Later on, after I had a lot of therapy and was working on my mental health and my relationship with God, I felt like it was time to share my feelings with Matt to get some closure. When I contacted him, he agreed that he had issues during that time of his life and was angry at himself for being on meth and begging me to abort the baby. He said that he would never forgive himself for all of it.

I told him that I forgave him and that I was trying to heal and move on with my life. I wasn't angry with him anymore. I forgave him for his role in my second abortion for my own healing. It wasn't for him; it was for me.

Although I regret the actions of my past and how they have impacted my emotional and spiritual health, I find joy now in helping other women who have experienced sexual abuse, abortions, or any kind of relationship trauma. I feel that God has called me to show love to other women

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and to help them along their own healing journey by embracing them with understanding and without judgment.

I no longer have the same deep pain and sadness that lingered from my abortions. I no longer punish myself with the “what if’s,” and instead, I find peace in knowing that one day I’ll get to meet my babies in heaven.

DISCUSS ELLE’S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 46.

1. In what ways can you identify with Elle’s story?
What were you feeling?
2. What examples of despair do you see in her story?
3. What are some of the poor choices Elle made?

DESPAIR

Despair is the loss of hope or feelings of deep discouragement. A woman who discovers she’s pregnant may feel trapped— there’s no way out. Added to this could be the all too frequent scenario that the father of the baby wants nothing to do with a child, and he may even reject his partner now because she’s become a “problem.” Convinced that her life (as she knows it) will end if she has this baby, it comes down to the desperate choice of destroying *her* life or that of a nameless, faceless child within her.

Frederica Mathewes-Green of Feminists for Life of America describes the despair that many women feel when deciding to abort: “No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream or a Porsche.

She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.”¹⁰

In such a case, her decision is filled with despair. Her maternal instincts and hormones have already begun to influence her physically and emotionally. But she’s torn because she sees this unexpected pregnancy as the end of all she’s planned and hoped for. She desperately wants things back “the way they were.”

Very often a woman has an abortion believing it is morally wrong, but, in despair and hopelessness, ignores her conscience and values. Numbly going through the motions of the abortion, she could be screaming inside, “What am I doing?”

We can try to shield ourselves from emotional pain by clinging to rationalizations that make difficult choices feel more bearable. A woman wrestling with the decision to have an abortion may feel her conscience pressing hard against her, creating deep inner turmoil. She may interpret the pain of her struggle as evidence that the choice is somehow morally justified, but no matter how she tries to justify it, it’s still harmful to her and to the child she carries.

Then it’s too late. The deed is now done. And the despair that drove her to abort isn’t gone! Oh, she may feel relief at first; most women do. But months or years later, despair can torment her 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, she may feel unworthy of love, thinking, “I can never be forgiven. I don’t deserve anything good.” And she might begin living out this desperation, driven to unhealthy coping methods and falling into poor life choices.

10 Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Real Choices* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1994), p. 19.

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Please check all the coping methods that have applied to you:

- ☐ Impulsive behavior or 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

Any of these responses will only intensify despair, increasing its downward spiral.

In fear and anguish, a woman may resent those who coerced her, urged her, “supported” her, or merely failed to challenge her in her decision to abort. If she felt alone before the abortion, now she may feel totally isolated and alienated from others.

Reading this may be very painful for some. If despair led you to abort, 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 woman. 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 habits, behaviors and thoughts that are healthy and promote hope. Finding freedom from self-destructive behaviors is an integral part of your healing. Consider these 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

SESSION THREE

- 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 unplanned 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.
 - Anyone who learns of my abortion will reject me.

The best way to demolish a lie is to replace it with truth--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.

The Power of Your Story

Some of these truths might include:

- What I have done in the past does not define me.
- My life has great value.
- There are many kind people who would not judge me.

As you journal, list any lies that you have believed surrounding your 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 women who had an abortion, volunteer at a charity, or help the homeless. Serving others may seem like the last thing you might want to do right now, but experience shows that taking your mind off your own problems improves your perspective. 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 pages 51 - 52 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 abortion?

SESSION THREE

Facilitator Note - Ask for a volunteer to read the lists of self-destructive behaviors found on page 48 of the Participant Manual.

2. Please check the box next to each self-destructive coping behavior on page 48 that you have experienced. What led to your participation in these behaviors?
3. Where are you in the list of four steps to freedom from unhealthy behaviors starting on page 49?

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Michaela'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 that are not in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?



SESSION FOUR

*Regret is heavy because it keeps asking us to carry
what we no longer have the power to change.*

—Rachel Bren

PREPARATION

- *Read Session Four so you're familiar with it.*
- *Review Appendices A and B.*
- *Review the Responsibility Pie in Appendix C.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! Thank you for being here. How are you all 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 abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging her before you consider the connections between her 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 she finishes.

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

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The participant shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling about having shared your story?

Tell the group: Let's turn in our Participant Manuals to the Session Four questions on page 62 and discuss Micaela's story.

MICAELA'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

I did everything by the book growing up. I never drank, never smoked, and the purity ring on my finger was a commitment that I would wait until marriage to have sex. Important people in my life had high expectations of me. Like them, I held myself to a very high standard. If I ever fell from that height, I would be afraid to let anyone find out about that failure. This is key to my story.

At 19 I had my first real boyfriend. We had been best friends for seven years and I thought we knew everything we needed to know about each other. We grew up in church and were Christian youth leaders together. Our relationship seemed meant to be! Everyone looked up to us, but what nobody knew was that there was hidden emotional and verbal abuse. I felt like I had to be strong, had to make it work, but he pushed me beyond my limits. One night, he tried to pressure me to be too physically intimate with him and I had to pry his hands off me.

He was in a new relationship three weeks later and that wrecked me. Of course, I never told anyone what had happened because I thought that would show I was “falling from my high standard.” I didn’t want anyone to know about my struggles, but the pain was extreme. As time went on, I realized that I had been sexually assaulted and I felt like I had lost control of my own body.

After the night I was assaulted, I really wondered about sex. If the person who was my best friend for seven years couldn’t love me and could just find someone new like I’m trash, why wait? I wanted to get back at him, and oddly enough, I tried to do it through sex. I figured that if I chose to have sex, I wouldn’t be forced to do anything I didn’t want to do and could be in control. Once I lost my virginity, I didn’t think there was anything else worth saving, so I started having sex quite frequently.

After a while, I decided to see if I could find anyone worth settling down with. I came across Chad, a tall, good looking Christian on a dating app whose first message was, "Nice to know there's another Christian on here!" WOW! He would pray at the beginning of our dates and I felt as if this was a man I could spend the rest of my life with! People would tell me, "You're lucky to have this man. There are not many out there like him; don't lose him!" Two weeks after we met he told me that I was the one for him.

Chad claimed to be a virgin and was very disappointed that I wasn't. He would bring it up constantly and make me feel bad about it. I felt horrible for not waiting for him. He manipulatively convinced me that I was broken, so I felt like I had to make it up to him in any way I could because I didn't want to lose him. Then one day I caught him cheating.

At first Chad did everything to try to convince me not to leave, then abruptly decided to end our relationship. I was devastated! I didn't eat for a week. I even begged him to come back. From that point forward, our relationship became secretive, on and off. Chad would want me, then not want me. The constant back and forth shattered me, but toxicity can be addictive.

In the middle of all this drama, we finally had sex. Chad was the only person I had ever given myself to that I loved. It truly was the experience I wish I had the first time around. Once we did it, we did it a lot more often. We talked about pregnancy consequences and agreed that an abortion would be necessary, obviously just creating an easy way out for a situation we both doubted would happen.

Dating under the radar was secretive, yet fun...until it wasn't. Sometimes Chad was sweet, filling a room with candles. Then he would become distant and end our relationship again. There I was, every single time, sobbing until my face hurt; it was a brutal cycle. Eventually, I became extremely depressed and planned to take my life. I can't even explain the darkness that surrounded me. I convinced myself that this was the right move and my family and friends would be okay.

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I had been sexually assaulted; I had sex and was made to feel guilty about it by someone I loved, who then cheated on me! I felt used and unwanted. I had never felt so worthless in my life.

My plan was to jump from the top of a parking garage, and when I was about to do it, Chad met me and convinced me not to go through with it. He said, "If you do this, people will blame me for your death." I didn't realize how selfish his statement was at the time, but at that moment, I just responded, "You're right and I love you too much to allow that." We continued our on and off relationship.

Two weeks later, I suspected I might be pregnant. Something just didn't feel right. I had always hated pickles, but suddenly craved them. I was very emotional and moody. There was a leftover pregnancy test in Chad's glove compartment. As a joke I took it, but the joke was on me! The test was positive.

Many thoughts raced through my head. I was a Christian, pregnant and not married. I would lose my position as a youth leader which I loved doing. The due date would have been in September and no one would hire a first year teacher who needed to take maternity leave at the beginning of the year. I also would have had the embarrassment of being stuck with Chad forever. All my friends and family despised him after he cheated on me and no one even knew I was still seeing him!

But if you want the honest truth, I believe people would have judged me if I had an abortion or if I had a baby outside of marriage. I really saw no way out. We agreed to go through with the abortion and Chad said he would be with me through it all.

The appointment was scheduled for a Monday, and Chad came over that Friday and stayed the whole weekend. Not once did he try to change our decision; not once did it seem like he even cared about what was going to happen. It was clear that he wanted the abortion. I know that if Chad

really wanted to save that baby, he would have done everything in his power to do so, and he didn't.

He drove me to the clinic and I was put in a room by myself when I took the first abortion pill. To be honest, at first I truly felt fine. It took me until nighttime to really feel any emotions about what I had done and before I knew it, I was sobbing.

I felt uneasy, like there was an evil presence around me. If I wanted to kill myself a few weeks ago, I definitely wanted to die even more now. At this point, I thought I really didn't deserve to live. If I could take someone else's life, what gives me the right to live?

Lying in bed with Chad, I cried and cried, but he didn't say anything. When I asked him why he was silent, his response was shocking: "I've heard this before; what do you want me to say?" I had never been physically with someone and felt more alone.

When I woke up the next day, I was filled with regret and I wanted to change everything from the day before. It's as if my decision just hit me like I was crashing into a wall. I told Chad there had to be something that we could do to save this baby. To my surprise, he got mad at me and told me that I had put him through enough emotional stress. He insisted that since the baby was in the process of being aborted, deformities and mental challenges would result if I didn't take the next set of pills.

I just gave up. I felt shut down and defeated. I didn't know what to do or who to call. I took the next set of pills and when I started bleeding, Chad was on the phone with another girl. He left shortly afterward, and I let him go. We stopped talking at that point, but I heard things.

Chad started lying to people, making it seem as though I hadn't given him a choice or hadn't even talked with him about the abortion decision. I was shown a screenshot of a text he sent to a mutual friend. The text said that I was a murderer and this person shouldn't be friends with

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someone who murdered Chad's child. This is probably the deepest hurt I've ever felt in my life!

I wanted to go to his house and destroy it. But something in me told me not to. It was as if God were saying, "Don't worry about this; I've got it." The little glimmer of hope that I wanted to believe—that there was still some good in this man—was shattered, but I had peace in my decision to not take action against him.

What's important about this situation is what I DID do. I opened up to a few people about my abortion, and one of them referred me to a life coach. I also told my family about it and their main concern was that I was okay. I know some people aren't this lucky to have parents that support them, and as hard as it was to tell them, they still accepted me for who I am and said that they didn't see me any differently.

I also got in touch with a pregnancy resource center that did post-abortive recovery. I know that a lot of people wouldn't want to take this step and would want to hide from what just happened, but, personally, I did not want this hanging over me for the rest of my life.

I seemed to experience mental breakdowns every other day, crying in the shower to hide my agony. I was afraid that this uncontrollable emotion would build up and cause me to lash out at people who didn't deserve it, most importantly, a future husband and children. I knew I needed healing immediately and if I didn't start to work on that, the rest of my adulthood would suffer tremendously.

So I joined a post-abortion class where we met for eight weeks to discuss our abortions and learn about God's forgiveness. At the end of the class there was a memorial service. I firmly believe that God gave me the name and gender of my daughter, Shiloh.

I received a certificate of life for my child, wrote a letter to my baby and was able to invite my close friends to this service. This was a huge step in

my process of healing. I was surrounded by people who love me; people that I know love my daughter whether she's here physically or not. It helped me to know that I am forgiven and set free by God.

The certificate of life for my daughter only has my name on it, not the father's. After the memorial service, I was finally able to separate the painful emotions from my relationship with Chad from my emotions concerning my unborn child. It was as if he were no longer involved in my experience. Until then I didn't know there was a way to ever separate the two, but I could finally view all that happened as MY story.

I eventually found forgiveness for the man who hurt me so deeply. I was able to move forward, knowing that Chad could never bring anything positive to a relationship with me. If God could forgive me for what I did, I had to be willing to forgive Chad. I felt new, I felt fresh, and I started on my journey to self-forgiveness.

*The first year after my abortion was definitely the hardest. As Mother's Day arrived, as I was able to travel and do things in the summer, I would feel guilty. I felt guilty for being able to enjoy my life because of the life I took away. Instead of missing someone because you're used to them being there, you miss someone because you wish they **were** there. You wish they could experience what you're experiencing, but you are the reason they cannot.*

There's not an important event or holiday that goes by that I don't think about where my life would be, what she would look like, or the joy she would bring to my family despite the circumstances. I'm able to control my emotions better, but missing Shiloh will always stick with me.

I have peace knowing that when I die I will meet my baby. She will not hold the abortion against me but will embrace me with arms that I've been needing to feel the entire time while here on Earth. As a mom, you always want to know that your baby is safe. That connection begins in the womb and it's something that a lot of people can't understand.

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The regret I have will never go away, but it does get easier. I don't like to say that you "move on;" rather, you learn to live with it. I had to learn to feel the emotions surrounding my abortion experience, to really process them and not push them away.

What has stuck with me is something important my mom told me: "You can't keep being mad at yourself for a decision you made when you weren't in the right state of mind." The strength I didn't know I had, getting through the abortion itself, its aftermath, and past a dysfunctional relationship, is something I see and value in myself now.

DISCUSS MICAELA'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 62.

1. In what ways can you identify with Micaela's story?
What were you feeling?
2. What are some specific regrets Micaela has regarding her child?
3. Recognizing that Micaela had to take steps to heal, what steps have you taken, or can you start to take to move forward in healing?

THE BURDEN OF REGRET

Regret is another emotion that many women experience after 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.

Women commonly express a number of regrets as a result of their abortion.

Please check all that apply to you:

I regret that...

- ☐ I dated that person.
- ☐ I had sex.
- ☐ I didn't take time to explore my options.
- ☐ I failed to tell people closest to me who might have supported a decision not to abort.
- ☐ I didn't listen to those who tried to talk me out of having an abortion.
- ☐ I listened to those who urged me to get the abortion.
- ☐ I failed to recognize an escape God provided.
- ☐ I had the abortion.
- ☐ I don't know my baby, the 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 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, weighing 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

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discard this great burden, but on the other hand, we feel that we just might deserve it!

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

- Dehumanized (“It’s just tissue”)
- Depersonalized
- Removed or distant

But at some time after our abortion, we may face:

- Reality setting in about our baby—he or she was a human being, a person
- A desire to know about our baby—gender, hair and eye color
- Imagining what our baby’s life would have been like

Thinking about your aborted baby’s life can introduce the uncomfortable emotion of grief. Grieving the “what ifs” is normal and healthy. Working through grief and regret can take time and the effort is unlikely to be a straight path. As Micaela shared in her story, her grief and regret never completely went away but became a part of her life that she learned to live with as she focused on the benefits that her healing produced.

HEALING ACTION 3: RELEASE WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE

Regret, sorrow, and grief are all forms of emotional pain. As with physical discomfort, pain plays an important role in letting us know something is wrong. There are only two primary responses to pain: you can either suppress it or take steps to heal it.

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

Instead, you must take steps to begin working through your regret.

- 1. 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. Not what others think about you, but who and what you ARE. List these positive attributes here and state them in this fashion: "I am..."

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

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7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

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

— I am brave.

— I am capable of making good decisions.

2. **Allow yourself the freedom to lay down the baggage of “what ifs” and discard the things you could not control.** You cannot change the past, no matter how much you wish you could. It’s likely that there were circumstances around your abortion over which you had no control. If so, you are carrying someone else’s baggage.
 - To start acknowledging and accepting your emotions without judging yourself, study “The Feeling Wheel” in Appendix A.
 - Verbalize your regrets: Say each one out loud. Accept it or learn from it. The grounding techniques in Appendix B can help you calm your mind as you try to release your burdens.
 - If you find yourself tormented by specific memories, consider writing them out on paper and then destroying the paper. (burning, shredding, tossing in the trash)

- If regrets return, take a walk or listen to music to redirect your thoughts.

There will always be a reasonable amount of regret attached to your 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 63, 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 67 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. At what point did you begin to view your aborted child as a person?
3. How does thinking about your child impact you?

Facilitator Note - Direct the participants to the mirror exercise on pages 65 - 66 and ask the group: What are some positive attributes you identified in yourself?

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4. Which suggestions for laying down your baggage can you implement today?

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 Marie'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 Session 5, #1 on pages 82 - 83 in their Participant Manual (page 93 in this guide) and stress the importance of casting a wide net for the list of names they write down. Refer them to the Responsibility Pie in Appendix C to help in this effort.

CLOSING

Ask these questions that are not in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?



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 pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! Has anyone been journaling?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

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

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

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The participant shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling about having shared your story?

Facilitator Note – Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 78 and talk about Marie's story.

MARIE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

When I was 11, my parents divorced. They had fought a lot and my dad, a former Marine, was physically and verbally abusive toward my mom and me. When we called him on it, his military, "stuff your feelings" attitude was forced upon us.

I grew up going to church with my mom. I read the Bible, tried to make good choices, and dreamed of one day getting married and having a family.

I didn't date a lot. Perhaps my religious upbringing intimidated the boys. I remember finding out that an unmarried woman in church had become pregnant. I couldn't believe how any Christian could do such a thing and I judged her harshly for it.

When I was 15, I met Glenn at a roller-skating rink. He, too, was being raised by a single mom. His mom drove a truck, so she was gone a lot. Glenn was always in trouble at school, but he was sweet, responsible and attentive to me. I was impressed with his knowledge and ability to express himself. Glenn was not a Christian. He pursued me and we eventually started dating.

Glenn didn't go to church on his own, but as we began seeing each other, he tagged along with me on Sundays. I had lots of boundaries imposed on me from my mom and church; in contrast, Glenn had very few.

We dated for two years and spent a lot of time together. My mom trusted me and his mom didn't care. Because both our mothers worked, we spent way too much time alone and became sexually active, which was something I never thought I would do until I was married.

I cried after the first time we crossed that boundary. I felt like I had just forfeited something precious I could never get back. Gone was the hope of a beautiful wedding in a white gown, followed by the enchantment of the honeymoon night discovering each other for the first time.

But after having sex once, I became addicted and we had sex all the time in the absence of our moms. Glenn and I went to different high schools and he would pick me up after school so we could be together. As far as birth control was concerned, we occasionally used a condom, but mostly just used the “pull-out” method. We were very naïve and thought we would never get pregnant.

After about six or seven months of being sexually active, my period was late and I got scared. I finally took a pregnancy test at home and tested positive, but hid it from my mom.

I told Glenn and he and I went to two or three clinics, not knowing what to do. At the first clinic, a woman gave me another pregnancy test to confirm my pregnancy. She asked me, “Would you like to see what your baby looks like at this stage of its development?” But I didn’t want to see. I was still in denial about the whole thing and tried to shove it down.

Then we went to another clinic and they walked through all of our options with us, including adoption. But because of Glenn’s upbringing, he was against adoption and didn’t want to deal with what he perceived might happen with the child.

We didn’t like the various options presented to us because they all involved owning up to what we had done. We wanted to keep this quiet at all costs. I was sure my mom would kill me if she found out and I couldn’t imagine the shame of being exposed at church. I was serving as the vice-president of our youth group.

Finally, we felt like we had no choice other than abortion. Glenn and I went to Planned Parenthood and met with a representative in an open

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cubicle. I had seen a girl from one of my classes at school in the waiting room and was concerned about the lack of privacy. Everyone could hear what was being said in the cubicles and I didn't want that girl to know why we were there.

The woman at Planned Parenthood asked me how far along I was and I told her 10 or 11 weeks. She gave us the name and address of a doctor and told us how much it would cost.

A few days later, my mom—who was still unaware that I was pregnant—drove me to school. I had forged a note to the school explaining my absence. Glenn and I had arranged that he would swing by and pick me up right after she dropped me off. He and I drove to a fast-food restaurant and waited there until my appointment.

This was April of our senior year. There we were, two high school students by ourselves, making choices we should never have made. I had told Glenn that the only way I'd go through with the abortion was if he stayed by my side the whole time and he agreed to do so.

At the doctor's office, I paid for the abortion out of my own savings, hoping that my mom wouldn't find out. The doctor was very cold and all business. I remember there were no windows at this facility and no one there seemed to care. It didn't feel right.

Glenn and I were led into a room where the procedure was to be performed. The doctor coldly told us what to expect. The room felt surgical and unfriendly. Both the doctor and nurse were completely uncaring. Nothing felt normal. I had to detach myself from it all. I had always dreamed of having children, and now this...

I remember the horror of hearing and feeling the vacuum and the scraping of instruments inside me. At one point the doctor broke an instrument in my womb. He became very angry and upset. I had blocked out this memory, but Glenn described it to me later.

After the abortion, we went down the hall to a back room and I was afraid I would pass out. I did get sick and threw up in the hallway. The nurse wasn't happy with me for doing that. She put me in a room and told me to get dressed, but I couldn't function. Glenn had to help me dress. Then the nurse talked to us about painkillers.

We stopped at a drugstore on the way home and filled a prescription for medication. The next day I had cramps and was sick, so I stayed home from school again. That weekend was a blur. I felt empty and knew that what I had done was very wrong. I was overwhelmed with grief and shame.

On Sunday, Glenn told me he was going skiing with friends and I was angry with him for leaving me alone. I had no one else to be with. I went to church, but it was very hard being there.

For several days, Glenn and I didn't talk. I couldn't eat and my mom and one of my teachers became very concerned about me. I was moved that they cared for me.

A week or two later at school, I ran into the girl who had seen me at Planned Parenthood. She commented that she had overheard someone talking about getting an abortion. I snipped back at her, "I can't imagine anyone ever doing that!"

When I went in for the abortion, the doctor had asked about birth control and I told him we didn't need any. And a couple weeks after the abortion, Glenn and I began having sex again. We planned to get married right after graduation. Shortly before school ended I became pregnant again.

"How could this happen to me again!" I had a graduation and a wedding to plan. Glenn and I graduated and got married a week later. The week after our wedding, Glenn left for basic training in the military.

My mom still didn't know about my pregnancy and again I was in denial about it. Perhaps in a subconscious effort to starve myself and the baby, I deprived myself of food and water during this time. But Mom noticed I

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wasn't having my period and asked me about it. I told her I was pregnant, but just wasn't ready yet to deal with a baby. To my utter shock she said, "There's a simple procedure to take care of that."

Now that Glenn was in the Air Force, I could go to the base for my medical needs. We made an appointment with a doctor on base and I went to see him. Reluctantly, I admitted to him that I had just had an abortion earlier that year and that I wasn't sure I wanted this baby either. I was scared.

This doctor was very kind. He noticed the cross on my necklace and asked me about its significance. I told him that it represented Christ's death on the cross for me and that I had received him as my Savior. Then the doctor gently told me that having an abortion would not be good for me.

He also warned me that unless I started eating and drinking water he would have to hospitalize me and that charges could be brought against me for neglecting my unborn child. I realize now that this was an empty threat, but it had the desired effect. I truly believe this doctor saved my life. I had been so depressed that I might very well have taken my life if things had not changed.

Up until now, my mom thought I had gotten pregnant on our wedding night, but when I told her my due date she came unglued. She was very upset and horrified about what people at church would think. Then she had a change of heart and decided to take me out for a steak to celebrate the coming of her grandchild.

Over the next months, my relationship with Glenn grew very unstable. His mom pitted him against me and my mom did the same with me toward him. At one point, we both hired lawyers and were heading toward divorce. But I still loved Glenn and so I called him behind my mother's back. He and I agreed to meet and talk things out. We decided to stay together and work on our marriage, but the next several years were very rocky. We often sought counsel with various pastors to help us in our marriage.

Glenn and I moved to Tacoma, WA, and there our son, Mark, was born. I felt like Mark had saved my life from the grief of my abortion, but it was wrong of me to place that burden on him.

By the time Mark was five, I wanted another baby—hoping for a girl, but Glenn couldn't see how we would manage. However, we agreed to "let things happen" and they did. I eventually got pregnant and we had little Robin.

After 10 years we moved. Glenn was gone a lot. I had no family in this new town and year after year I seemed to grow more depressed. At times I contemplated suicide.

Meanwhile, Mark seemed to have a serious anger issue, so I went to see our pastor about Mark's anger, while burying my own. During that session, I confessed to my pastor that I had an abortion. He referred me to a woman who could help me. We met and she shared with me about her abortion and how she had finally come to the place where she could forgive herself.

Forgiving myself for what I had done was inconceivable to me and I expressed that to her. In reply, she asked, "Are you more worthy than God?" Meaning, "God forgives you. Are you more holy than He is that you cannot forgive yourself?" She then encouraged me to attend a group going through post-abortive recovery.

I attended and began my journey toward healing. I learned that God invites us to call him "Abba," which means "Daddy." He became the loving father to me that I never had. I also learned that healing from an abortion doesn't always occur at once. It is often a lengthy process that God leads us through over many years.

During our classes, they challenged us to ask God the gender of our aborted child and to name the child. Before this, I had never wanted to know the gender, but I prayed. Shortly thereafter I had a dream in which

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a little girl ran toward me with outstretched arms. She looked just like Mark, which puzzled me, and I knew this wasn't Robin. When I woke up, I realized that God had answered my prayer and revealed to me that my baby had been a girl.

Later, I told Mark about my abortion and then about this dream. With childlike wisdom he said, "What about naming her Grace?" And I knew that was her name! Through all this I experienced God's love for me and he began restoring my joy and bringing me deeper layers of healing.

DISCUSS MARIE'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 78.

1. In what ways did you identify with Marie's story? What were you feeling?
2. What was the role of forgiveness in Marie's healing?
3. How do you respond to the idea of naming your child?

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 women respond to

their abortion with anger that may be directed at themselves, at the father of the baby, at those who participated in the abortion or those who failed to intervene. Circumstances leading up to or resulting from the abortion are also common targets. Sometimes we find ourselves angry with God.

Very often, we as women are taught that we must not express anger. For some of us, our first challenge is admitting that we are even experiencing what to us may be an ugly emotion that we would prefer to deny.

In many cases, we may not even know why we're angry. Perhaps we've never even associated our anger with our abortion. 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, 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)

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Some techniques for releasing anger when it overwhelms you:

- Scream into a pillow.
- Write a very complete and specific letter (as many times as necessary) to the object of your anger, then rip it up and throw it away.
- Do the same as above in an email, BUT SEND IT TO YOURSELF!

Angry feelings are normal and understandable, but anger can also be a desperate attempt to regain control over a situation in which you believe you may have lost control. When you surrender to anger, you injure others or even yourself because it becomes like acid that eats away at the person holding it.

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.

Unrestrained, it can consume your life, weaving strong patterns that are difficult, but not impossible, 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 your life, you must identify its root cause. Anger is a very relational response. What that means is that even if you are upset over a situation or an event, you will likely direct your anger toward people.

Because of this relational aspect of anger, the only way to truly rid yourself of anger is to forgive those who have offended you—including yourself. When we're angry with someone, we tend to put the responsibility on them to change, not realizing that we need to change first. You must take the initiative. Forgiveness is vital, because it removes the reason for your anger and helps you work through it.

For most of us, forgiving others and ourselves can be extremely difficult.

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

Second, you might mistakenly think that by withholding forgiveness from someone, you 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 you feel wounded, you may be tempted to do the same. Being angry and bitter toward others can drive you into isolation and loneliness. This thinking is part of the folly of anger, allowing it to control you.

Forgiveness is **NOT**:

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

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- reconciliation

Forgiveness IS:

- a choice
- a process
- feeling the hurt and then releasing the hurt
- giving up control of the other person involved

You cannot go back and erase your abortion, but you can forgive others and yourself. Forgiveness will help you release the burden of anger in your life.

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS:

1. **Identify those with whom you are angry.** Write down the names of everyone who played any role in your unwanted pregnancy and abortion experience. Include anyone and everyone that was even remotely involved: before, during and after.

.....

.....

.....

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 can help you assign levels of responsibility.

Facilitator Note - Be prepared for those who only list themselves. Encourage them to dig deeper and consider assigning the "Responsibility Pie" in Appendix C.

There is nothing wrong with expressing anger toward God. Even though God is perfect and never needs to be forgiven, it may be beneficial for the participant to "forgive" God in the same way they forgive the individuals they name in this session. Be understanding as they release their grudge against God.

2. **Forgive each of these individuals.** We are not suggesting that you actually contact 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 should say something like: "I choose to forgive _____ (person's name) _____ for his/her role in my abortion and I release my grudge against him or her."
 - 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, speak each statement of forgiveness out loud. This may feel awkward at first, but 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

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seriousness of the exercise and can gently begin to boost confidence and clarity as you give voice to your healing. If you find yourself unable to let go of anger, try the “Burden of Unforgiveness” exercise in Appendix C.

Facilitator Note - For participants who have difficulty letting go of anger, assign them the “Burden of Unforgiveness” activity in Appendix C. Follow up during the week or at the next session.

- c. If the statement in (a) is something you are just not ready to say, consider backing it off to something like: “I **want** to forgive _____ (person’s name) _____ for his/her role in my abortion and release my grudge against him or her. I no longer wish to carry the burden of anger.”

- 3. **Next, understand that anger is a two-way street.**
People have offended you but you may have offended others as well, by aborting your child or by the way you’ve treated them. If you have offended others, you can find refreshment and freedom by going to them and asking for their forgiveness. By taking this step, you also offer them freedom from their anger.

You must approach this step using some common sense:

- a. **Make a list.** Whom have you offended? Go to them and ask them to forgive you. Be very careful, however, to avoid opening yourself to relationships that have been abusive or otherwise toxic.

- b. **Choose your words wisely.** Words like, “Sorry if I offended you,” are insincere and hypocritical. Admit your offense. Say something like, “I’m sorry for _____.”
Would you please forgive me?”
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 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 never 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.

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 or 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

The most common challenge for post-abortive women who seek healing is forgiving themselves. We can know that others forgive us and that God forgives us but we just can’t accept that forgiveness!

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You are not alone in this painful confusion! If you are one of the many who struggle with forgiving yourself, there are ways to move forward.

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

It can be very helpful to repeat step 2a on page 83 (*of the Participant Manual, page 94 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 refer to your answers to the discussion questions on pages 86-87 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 pages 79 - 80 of the Participant Manual, page 90 of this guide.

1. Review the list of the consequences of anger on page 79 - 80. To what extent is any anger you have identified related to your 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 82 - 83 in their manual; pages 93 - 94 of this guide. Discuss the number of names identified; be prepared for those who only list themselves and refer them to the "Responsibility Pie" in Appendix C. 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?
4. Why is it so difficult to forgive ourselves?
5. How does it benefit you to forgive someone who hurt you?
6. 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).

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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 Dianne's story, the impact of fear and Healing Action 5: Replace Lies With Truth. 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 that are not in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?



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*Lies are like shackles that keep us bound to the secrecy
and evil that was done to us.*

—Unknown

PREPARATION

- *Read Session Six so you're familiar with it.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*
- *Be sensitive that there are only two weeks left in the group. Gently prepare your participants.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! How is the journaling going?

GROUP MEMBER STORY

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

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

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The participant shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling about having shared your story?

Tell the Group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 97 and talk about Dianne's story.

DIANNE'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

My boyfriend, Dave, and I had been dating for a year and a half when I got pregnant. When I told him the news, he panicked. Without asking, he made an appointment at an abortion clinic and called to let me know.

My world was crushed! The man who I thought loved me was unwilling to do the right thing. We had talked about marriage, and I had been anticipating a proposal in the near future.

As Dave drove me to the clinic, I was consumed with fear and felt pressured to follow through with the abortion. I wanted to talk to my best friend to get her advice, but I was too ashamed and afraid. I felt I couldn't talk to anyone.

As a Christian, I was already carrying the shame of being pregnant and not married. While I bought into the popular claim that my baby was just tissue, deep down I questioned whether that was really true.

I was very afraid. Everyone that day was telling me that everything would be fine. Lying on the table with the doctor's wife holding my hand, I was dying inside. I felt overwhelmed with guilt, and then...it was too late! I was devastated and filled with regret.

Still lying on the table, I began sobbing and begging God to forgive me. The nurse tried to console me saying, "Everything's all right." And I remember telling her, "No! Everything is not all right!" I had been deceived. I had been lied to. I felt like I had been thrown to the wolves. I was just a dollar sign to them. I left that place empty: a broken woman.

I was in shock and in mourning. But I plastered on a fake smile and pretended to my family and friends that all was good.

Dave and I stayed together as a couple, even though our relationship was now anything but healthy. I still loved him, but I hated what he had done to me. He made me feel worthless by pressuring me into an abortion instead of taking on the responsibility like a decent, honorable man should. Now, I had such low self-esteem, I felt unworthy of anyone who would treat me any better.

Ultimately, Dave proposed and we got married. We began our marriage with baggage that would take years to sort through. There were constant reminders at every turn: TV commercials, a baby footprint pin on the lapel of a pro-lifer, seeing a newborn baby—the reminders were all around. Eventually, when we had a child, I remember holding my baby boy in my arms, knowing what I had done to my first baby and feeling like I didn't deserve such a beautiful gift.

For six years from the day we left that awful facility we never talked about the abortion. I suffered in silence, but inside I screamed heartache, anger, regret and sadness almost each and every day. After we were blessed with a second baby boy, I had difficulties with my third pregnancy and I miscarried. I was heartbroken and wondered if my abortion had caused me to miscarry. I pictured this baby meeting his or her sibling in Heaven and it gave me comfort.

My mom was a regional director of a national pro-life women's organization and she had asked if I was interested in attending a conference in Washington, D.C. with her. I was consumed with trying to protect my secret. I feared that my mom's friends would not accept me and even judge me if they knew my secret. But because of my passion to protect the unborn, I decided to go, even though I knew I would be uncomfortable.

When we arrived, we joined with other women making signs, which we would hold while marching on the Capitol steps the next day. I felt like a hypocrite. But I also felt like I was doing a good thing.

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On the third day of the convention, a woman spoke at the breakfast meeting. She had adopted a baby that was close to being aborted. She told the story of her adopted baby girl almost being a victim of abortion. Then, she began singing a song she had written about her daughter called, "I Almost Didn't Know You." I started feeling sick to my stomach. I worked hard holding back the tears, but I knew I couldn't, so I excused myself, telling Mom I wasn't feeling well. When I reached the hallway, the tears began to flow. In my room I couldn't stop sobbing.

The story and the song this woman had shared reminded me that I DIDN'T get to know my baby. Was it a baby girl? Would she have had blue eyes? Blonde hair? Would she have loved to dance, or sing, or both? Was it a baby boy? Would he have loved science or sports, race cars or history? I would never know.

On the flight home, my mom began talking about the conference. She still didn't know I had aborted her grandchild. She didn't know the pain I was carrying. I struggled to carry on a normal conversation, like everything was fine, but I was overwhelmed with sadness and shame.

On my first day back home, after my husband left for work, I was thinking about my experience at the convention. I was glad I had gone. I remember being alone in the living room. I closed the curtains and cried out to God for forgiveness. Tears began flowing. How could I continue with this internal pain? I felt so alone and so sad.

But God spoke to me that morning. In that moment of my agony, I heard Him tell me that He was going to use me for His glory. It's not like I heard Him audibly, but He spoke to my mind, my heart, and my soul. I didn't really know what it meant, but I believed that somehow and someday God would use me, even if it was only to help just one person. I felt God tell me that it was time to take a step toward healing.

The next day I said to my husband, "We have to talk about the abortion. It happened. We've swept it under the rug all these years and we're not

going to make it in our marriage unless we talk about what we did.” This was the first time in over six years that I had even spoken the word “abortion.” The pretending needed to end. All those years, I would sit in church and look around, thinking that I was the only woman in church who had had an abortion. I felt so bad about myself all the time. It was way past time to seek help. Dave agreed to try to get help and we went to our first counseling session. It was the first step toward seeking healing and Dave and I were actually talking about the abortion.

I became pregnant again, not too long after my miscarriage. I started experiencing problems and learned that one of my baby’s kidneys was not functioning properly. After countless trips to see my doctor, 24 ultrasounds later, and residing near the hospital for the final four weeks of my pregnancy, I gave birth to our third baby boy. Again, I wondered if any of the complications were the result of the abortion.

Over the next few years, Dave focused on work and supporting our family and I focused on doing what moms do. We found a church home where we attended a few more counseling sessions. These loving, caring, godly men tried to help us, but they weren’t trained to work with post-abortive women and men.

At that time, no one knew about my abortion except for the counselors we saw. One Sunday an ad in the bulletin about a “post-abortive support group” caught my attention. It was to be held at the local pregnancy center. My dilemma was that I knew the woman in charge of the center very well and she did not know that I had had an abortion. Also, my mom’s best friend served on the board of directors and she didn’t know about my abortion either. Finally, I decided to tell them. The time came and I was so fearful, but God gave me courage. I started crying as I shared my story. I was afraid they would reject and judge me. Instead, they cried with me. They prayed over me, and I left feeling loved and encouraged. I attended that first class, taking another step toward healing.

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Shortly after that, I attended a new Bible study that was offered at the pregnancy center for post-abortive women. I learned more deeply about God's grace and His love for me on a fresh and new level. While I was indeed accountable for what I had done, God wanted me to accept the gifts He was offering me: grace, forgiveness and His unconditional love. God's Word came alive to me, and I finally received healing and made peace with God regarding my abortion.

God eventually placed on my heart the desire to go through leadership training to help other women find healing through His Word. I thought back to the time in my living room with my curtains drawn, when I cried out to God, and He spoke to me about using me to help others heal. But before going into leadership I would need to share my abortion story with those closest to us.

Dave and I called a family meeting with our boys. At the time, our three sons were 18, 14 and 12. We were both fearful and didn't know how they would react. I didn't know if they would think less of me. As their mom, I didn't want to let them down. It broke my heart looking at them and knowing it could have been one of them that had been aborted. God gave me peace to finally share our story with our precious boys.

Dave talked about his part in the abortion. We wanted them to know that we had messed up...that we were imperfect, but that we had a perfect God who can make all things new. Being miles apart, I wrote my parents a letter to share my story. They were loving, forgiving, and supportive. The next time they came to visit they brought me a bouquet of beautiful roses, sending a message of their unconditional love and forgiveness.

It is a miracle that Dave and I have now been married for over 30 years. Part of my healing process was focused on forgiveness. We are all called to forgive others for wronging us. God showed me grace and I needed to show grace to my husband. This didn't come naturally! I had some

deep-seated anger to deal with. But God gave me the ability to love Dave unconditionally just as God loves me unconditionally.

If I hadn't had Christ in my life to carry me through my darkest days, I most likely would have turned to alcohol or drugs to mask the pain. I am also thankful to those who prayed for us through those dark times. Prayer works.

Abortion did not end in the clinic—that's where the suffering began. I encourage you to replace fear with courage and take the steps toward healing.

DISCUSS DIANNE'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 97.

1. In what ways can you identify with Dianne's story?
What were you feeling?
2. What fears led to her abortion?
3. What were some lies Dianne believed?

Facilitator Note - If the subject of telling others about an abortion comes up, supply participants with the PDF available on The Healing Way website called "Telling Your Story."

FEAR

While anger focuses on what is past, 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.

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Keep in mind that there are different kinds of fear. For instance, we can have a healthy fear of dark alleys at night that prompts us to take proper precautions. We also may cultivate a healthy fear of failure that motivates us to show up at work on time and perform our jobs well.

But the kind of fear we're talking about here is neither healthy nor overcome with safeguards. Paralyzing fear can prevent us from making good decisions or making any decisions at all. It's unhealthy, destructive and prevents our healing. It haunts and cripples us.

If fear played a role in your abortion, it drove you to do something that you may now deeply regret. Additionally, the abortion itself may have given you even more things to fear.

Please check anything that has produced fear in your life:

- ☐ Being found out
- ☐ The long-term consequences resulting from the abortion
- ☐ People rejecting me
- ☐ Somehow being punished for what I did
- ☐ Whether I would ever be able to have children
- ☐ How I might feel toward future children
- ☐ My child in Heaven hating me
- ☐ Other: _____

Examining and processing the overwhelming emotions resulting from our abortions is crucial for healing, but it can amplify fear and create anxiety. For instance, just getting used to the concept of forgiving people involved with our pregnancies or abortions, especially ourselves, is typically a time-consuming struggle. Resting in anger to

avoid forgiveness can function as a defensive barrier against emotions that might scare us even more, like grief.

Grief can create great fear in post-abortive women. A healthy way to grieve includes sadness and mourning, but very often we can feel numb or overwhelmed. We may prefer carrying guilt to facing our grief, because guilt is focused primarily on ourselves. Grief focuses on the hard truth that our aborted child died.

God reveals in the Bible that death is not final. We believe that we will see our babies again, but what will that look like? The uncertainty of that reunion can prevent us from courageously grieving our loss, allowing fear to get in the way of healing.

HEALING ACTION 5: REPLACE LIES WITH TRUTH

Fear can be characterized as “False Evidence Appearing Real.” Lies. As we have discussed in Session 3, you may unwittingly have accepted lies about yourself during the trauma surrounding your pregnancy and abortion decision. Some of these lies might include:

- 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.
- My baby would hate me.

The only way to demolish a lie is with truth. You might think this is primarily a logical, intellectual exercise, but it is more than that. Yes, overcoming lies is largely a matter of your will, but the problem is that your emotions may trip you up. The fear and anxiety you’re feeling may seem to actually confirm some of those lies.

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Emotions are fickle. You can be confident one moment and anxious the next. Try to resist viewing your emotions as something “bad.” They are only bad when you allow them to be in control. Emotions can be guideposts pointing to something that is wrong, but by naming them you can begin to use them as the markers they were always meant to be.

You defeat lies by speaking truth to yourself and by hearing and accepting it from others. We encourage you to speak truth to yourself out loud. Engaging your mind and voice, hearing it in your own words, reinforces these truths in your mind and heart so you can begin to live them.

Some of these truths might include:

- 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.
- My baby lives in Heaven without any tears.

The community you experience in this group can help you replace lies with truth. We do this for each other by affirming one another and refuting falsehoods with truth. For this reason, as you’re together, catch each other if you hear someone stating something that is not true. Gently call it to their attention and replace the lie by affirming a truth for them.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 5: REPLACE LIES WITH TRUTH

Facilitator Note - Tell the group to turn to page 98 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 page 101 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 held up your healing?
2. When you think of your aborted baby, what are your strongest feelings?
3. What is one lie that you have believed?
4. What is a truth you can substitute for this lie?

Facilitator Note - Read to the group:

PREPARE FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Please read Paula'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.

SESSION SIX

Facilitator Note - If you have non-Christians in your group, read the following that is not in the Participant Manual: The next session is about shame. In the text is a story from the Bible and we realize our group comprises different faith traditions. If you like, feel free to read the story as a simple example of love overcoming shame.

CLOSING

Ask these questions that are not in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?



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.*
- *Have available the PDF "Telling Your Story" to give to participants. It can be found on The Healing Way website.*
- *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 pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.***

WELCOME

Tell 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 abortion story in a safe, caring environment. Each week, a member of our group will share her story. Today we will be hearing from _____. As you listen, please try to think about supporting and encouraging her before you consider the connections between her 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 she finishes.

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

Facilitator Note - Ask the group members joining online to mute. The participant shares her story. Respond with empathy and support.

When ready, ask the group these questions:

1. How did you feel hearing her story?
2. What can you take away from her story that may help you move forward in your healing?
3. ***To the one who shared:*** How are you feeling about having shared your story?

SESSION SEVEN

Tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on page 108 and talk about Paula's story.

PAULA'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

Many years ago, I was serving in the US Marine Corps. One day after I accepted a ride home, one of the soldiers I worked with violently raped me. When I got back to the barracks I was in a state of shock. Because of his threats I was afraid to tell anyone, but felt tremendous guilt and shame.

Three months went by and I still hadn't told anybody, but I could no longer ignore the fact that I was pregnant. On our base there was a club for enlisted personnel that was run by a couple. They took many of us under their wing, kind of like surrogate parents. I told this woman I was pregnant and she went with me to the doctor to confirm my pregnancy.

At this point, I called my parents and my mom flew down and went to the doctor with me for a checkup. I knew at the time that I didn't want an abortion. I felt that abortion was wrong. Many believe that abortion is acceptable in the case of rape, but to me abortion was not justifiable. My mom was very supportive and put no pressure on me either way.

When we got back to the barracks my dad called me. I loved my dad. He was my idol. But over the phone he broke down and began crying. He said he didn't know how the family could deal with this. Well, that destroyed me and I decided then and there to abort the baby.

I went to the Navy hospital for the procedure. They led me into a room that wasn't even an operating room but more like a large office. Because a Navy hospital is also a training facility, the doctor conducting the abortion had 8 or 9 other doctors in training in the room with me. He

proceeded to explain to them about the procedure and what he was going to do to me.

Being treated like this was terribly humiliating, shameful and embarrassing. They gave absolutely no thought to what I might be feeling or going through under the circumstances. They were so callous and cold. My mom had already flown home and I had no support from friends.

The doctor told me in a cold, clinical fashion what to expect and the nurse was even colder. He said that because I was so far along, they couldn't perform a simple D&C, but would have to inject a saline solution into my uterus to end the life of the fetus. After doing so, they sent me to a hospital room and told me to get up on my own to go to the bathroom if I had the urge.

I was so young, naïve and ignorant. After a while I got up to go to the bathroom and gave birth to the fetus in the toilet. I experienced utter horror and didn't know what to do. I felt like I was in a nightmare in another world. My heart was broken. A piece of me died that day.

Just then the nurse came in, took a look and said, "I'll take care of that." She sent me back to my bed and retrieved the fetus. She didn't tell me what gender it was. She didn't tell me anything. I had a hard time calling it a baby, because that made it too real.

After this ordeal, the Marine Corps gave me the option to either remain on active duty or to leave and go back home. I chose to go home. At home we never spoke about the abortion. I knew my mom felt guilty about it. I felt like I was in a fog.

My self-esteem plummeted to zero. I carried horrible guilt and anger. I was angry at God for allowing this all to happen. I was desperate for someone to love me and make me feel worthy. I just felt so unworthy of love or anything good.

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Around this time, I met my first husband. I saw him as my savior— finally, someone to love me. But we really struggled in our marriage and I never told him about the rape or the abortion. After two years we decided to have a child in spite of our marriage difficulties. I was scared to death that I'd never be able to have children again as judgment for killing my baby.

But I did get pregnant. However, I began having complications early in my pregnancy with bleeding. And I thought, "God is punishing me." My husband and I were still having problems. He had done many things that convinced me that I was unworthy of love. Seven months into the pregnancy, he left me.

I went in for another prenatal appointment and asked the doctor if my baby was going to be all right. He said, "I'm concerned about both of you." Both the baby and I were in a bad way, physically. I cried out to God, "Just let my baby live and I'll do anything!"

Little Travis was born two months premature. He was very tiny, but he survived. During this time I was very down. Carrying the weight of the rape, the abortion and now my divorce, I was at the lowest point I had ever been. Several times I contemplated suicide. Had it not been for little Travis, I might have gone through with it.

Over the next three years, I got a job and my parents helped me get into a house. At this point, my emotions swung in the opposite direction and I decided I didn't need anyone. "I can do this myself," I thought.

After some time, I met my current husband and we married after three months. He loved me unconditionally even though I felt unworthy of his love. I don't know how we made it through our first year of marriage, but my husband just kept loving me in spite of what I said or did. His unconditional love served as the initial catalyst for my post-abortion healing.

My husband was in the military and we were transferred to Hawaii. One day I was sitting in an enlisted club with two other women. The three of

us were talking and, on a whim, decided to start reading the Bible together. We didn't really know what we were doing, but through the Bible reading we began drawing near to God. I was still carrying around a lot of guilt and shame.

About four years into our marriage, my mom sent me a recording of a speaker named Rachel Johnson, who counseled post-abortive women. On this recording, she encouraged me to imagine a peaceful scene: I saw myself standing in a beautiful field full of wild flowers with a gentle breeze blowing and the sun shining.

Then I visualized a figure coming toward me from far across the field. As this figure drew closer, I could tell that it was an adult with a child. As they continued walking toward me, I recognized that it was Jesus. He walked up to me and placed the child's hand in my hand. Then he said, "I have your child. I'm holding her for you until you come."

I never knew what the gender of my aborted baby had been, but from that moment forward I knew it was a girl. This experience totally broke me and set me free from my guilt and shame. I felt completely safe and accepted by Jesus.

Rachel also encouraged me to look at myself as I would look at another young woman who might be in my situation. I knew I would accept her and extend grace, mercy and forgiveness to that young woman, so I should do the same toward myself.

Some years later, I was meeting with twelve other women and someone shared a personal experience that prompted me to tell the story of my rape and abortion. This was the first time I had shared my story. I was surprised that day by two things. I was amazed that my story encouraged the other women so much. But I was also stunned to learn that at least three quarters of those women had experienced rape, sexual abuse or abortion.

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Mine was no isolated case. There are thousands of women who have had similar experiences. Since then I have given my time and energy to helping other women heal from the wounds of their abortions. I am honored that God has entrusted me with this task. He truly does love and accept me just like I am with all the junk from my past.

DISCUSS PAULA'S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on page 108.

1. In what ways can you identify with Paula's story? What were you feeling?
2. What did Paula do to overcome her shame?
3. Paula visualized her baby. How have you pictured your child?

SHAME

Shame is a painful emotion caused by a sense of guilt. Guilt is not supposed to torment us, but to encourage 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 somehow deserve it.

Shame is a very common emotion felt by post-abortive women. Like some of the other emotions we've discussed, it can cause us to hide, deny, blame others, or rationalize our decision to abort our child. Like those other emotions, it can be debilitating and can prevent us from healing.

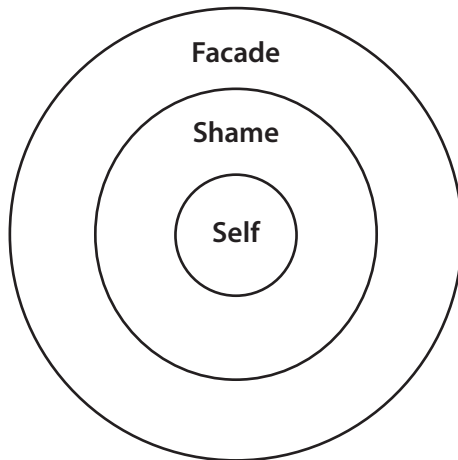
Above all, shame breeds a sense of unworthiness. Many post-abortion women express feeling unworthy because of their abortion.

Please check all that apply or have applied to you:

I feel unworthy of...

- ☐ Having children
- ☐ Being loved by a good man
- ☐ Experiencing love and acceptance from others
- ☐ Being part of a church
- ☐ 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.¹¹



¹¹ Donald Miller, *Scary Close—Dropping the Act and Finding True Intimacy* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2014), pp. 20ff.

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At the center of these concentric circles is our “self”—who we really are. But our shame causes us to 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 facade—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, our shame 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 facade and let others in. In this way, we can begin to love again and be loved. At AbAnon, we have found that many women overcome shame and find healing from their abortions through a relationship with God. God is ready and willing to forgive and restore. For this reason we would be falling short if we did not share with you this important path to freedom from guilt and shame. Please consider the following true story from the Bible about a woman who suffered from shame.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

John, one of Jesus’ disciples and an eyewitness to these events, tells about a woman that Jesus met one day. Jesus and His disciples were on foot about halfway into a 75-mile journey from one part of Israel to another. At noon, they stopped at a well in a region called Samaria. Samaria was populated by people with mixed blood of Jews and non-Jews. Their religious beliefs were a blend of Judaism and other religions. As a result, most Jews looked down on Samaritans and would have nothing to do with them. But Jesus was different.

Jesus sat by this well in Samaria while His disciples went off to buy food. While they were gone, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. The customs of the day give us insight into this situation. Normally, the women in a village would come to the well in the cool of the morning. They would also use that time to socialize with each other and catch up on the village news.

This woman, however, came to the well at noon. As far as we know, no one else but Jesus was there. We soon become aware of why she chose to come to the well at an hour when she would not have to interact with the other village women.

Jesus initiated the conversation by asking this woman for a drink—which shocked her—because most Jews would never stoop to request anything of a Samaritan. When she expressed her surprise over His request, Jesus said, “If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.” (John 4:10 NLT)¹²

The woman was confused by Jesus’ response at first and thought He was talking about water from the well. But Jesus explained, “Anyone who drinks this water [from the well] will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” (John 4:13-14 NLT)

This offer intrigued the woman and she asked Jesus to give her this ever-thirst-quenching water. Appropriate for the culture of the day, Jesus asked her to go get her husband and come back and Jesus would fulfill her request. At this point the woman’s shame subtly came to light, for she replied, “I have no husband.”

12 Holy Bible: New Living Translation. 2013. Carol Stream, IL: Tynedale House Publishers.

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Jesus, knowing this, responded to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (John 4:17-18 NIV)¹³

If it weren’t for the rest of the story, we might assume that Jesus was being cruel. We understand that her fear of judgment prevented her from coming to the well to draw water in the morning with the other village women. Her shame caused her to come alone in the heat of the day and to bear her burden in solitude.

The Bible doesn’t tell us why this woman had five husbands, but Jesus doesn’t judge the reasons. He just forgives. In the discussion that followed, Jesus revealed to her that He is the long-awaited Savior and that He was offering her forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The woman was so excited about this that she left her water jar at the well and ran back into the village. She said to everyone she could find, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!” (John 4:29 NLT)

At first, it seems like her excitement was about Jesus’ ability to supernaturally see into her past, but that’s not what thrilled her. What she eagerly told the others about was that Jesus knew everything there was to know about her past—*and yet He still loved her and offered her the living water of forgiveness and eternal life*. Her unspoken testimony was, “Come see a man who knows every sin I’ve ever committed, and yet He still loves and accepts me!”

HEALING ACTION 6: RECLAIM YOUR IDENTITY

That was not some psychic trick that Jesus pulled when He told this woman about her whole life. God knows you just as thoroughly as He knew the Samaritan woman. He knows everything you have ever done. He knows about your abortion and makes that same offer of

13 Holy Bible: New International Version. 2011. Biblica, Inc.

forgiveness to you today. He knows your shame and offers to remove it from you.

We show others a facade because we are afraid to reveal our true selves. Our identities have been deeply buried. Shame may prevent you from exposing your abortion, but it's only by exposing that abortion that you can gain freedom from shame. Concealment intensifies and prolongs pain, but when shame is revealed and rejected, there is forgiveness and healing.

Out of a love we can never truly understand, God sent His Son, Jesus, to defeat sin. He bore the guilt and shame on Himself when He was crucified and buried. His resurrection from the dead proved that His life was more than sufficient to pay for all sins. He offers you forgiveness from sin and freedom 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!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT)

Like that Samaritan woman long ago, many post-abortive women 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 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 support 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.

CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Another antidote for shame is the confidence that comes from being fully loved and accepted by others, a connection that empowers positive action.

Defeating shame can begin by being genuine and transparent and by allowing others to love who you truly are. 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.

It is true, every time you love someone and accept their love, you run the risk of being disappointed, abandoned, or hurt. Ironically, fear and shame can cause you to push them away. You may reject their love because you feel unworthy, or perhaps you've been burned so many times you are afraid of being hurt again.

Still, we desperately need the love of others in our lives. To love and be loved is a basic human need. When you allow shame to prevent you from trusting others, you'll never experience their love—the very thing that can help dispel that shame. This is one reason we discussed forgiveness. By forgiving others and asking for their forgiveness, you open the door for the possibility of reconciliation, trust and real love.

Decide to take a risk, allowing others to love you and daring to love them. Choose wisely. There are those who do love you dearly. Drop your mask, allow them to love and comfort you and return their love freely.

STEPS FOR OVERCOMING SHAME 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 her anything. You might be inclined to consider your partner, but we suggest you opt for another woman in whom you can confide.
 - a. Be very selective in your choice of a confidant. Look for someone you admire. Choose a woman who may not necessarily have it all together, but is also not on the brink of disaster.
 - b. Ask this person if she would start meeting with you regularly. Share the characteristics of a confidant with her so you're both on the same page. Commit to confidentiality and transparency. Then establish when and where you'll meet.
 - c. **Confidants:**
 - **Spend time together.** Whether in person or online, let your confidant into the whole of your life. Be yourself.

- **Care for each other.** Look for ways to serve each other that will clearly demonstrate genuine love.
 - **Challenge each other boldly.** We are often hesitant to point out negative behavior in another person. But if given permission to do this at the outset, you will experience a richer, more meaningful relationship that helps both of you grow.
 - **Encourage each other.** Celebrate joys and victories and avoid complaints or gossip. Help each other move forward in your spiritual journeys.
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, to 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 recovery group like this
 - A common-interest club or association
 - A group of peers from work
 - A church
 - A dog park
4. **Uncovering the secret.** It's often difficult to know what to say, when to say it, or even if you *should* share your abortion experience with important people in your life: parents, children, friends. Your facilitator can

supply you with *Telling Your Story*, a PDF that contains ideas, suggestions and questions you might ask yourself.

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 6: RECLAIM YOUR IDENTITY

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on page 117 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 109. In what ways has shame over your abortion bred a sense of unworthiness in your life?

Facilitator Note - Ask the group to turn to the diagram on page 109.

Say: Can someone explain this diagram?

2. In what ways has shame kept you from healing?
3. How did the Samaritan woman try to avoid her shame?
4. What does this story mean to you?

Facilitator Note - Check in on their progress identifying a confidant by using these questions which are not in the Participant Manual (A-D):

- a. Beginning on page 115 of the Participant Manual, there are three action steps for freeing ourselves from shame. The first step is to make a

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list of people who truly love you just as you are.
How did it go for you in making this list?

- b. 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?
 - c. 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?
 - d. In what ways do you struggle with telling important people about your abortion? ***Have the PDF: “Telling Your Story” available to email to any participants who would like to have it.***
5. How can you overcome the fear of trusting others and accepting their love?

Facilitator Note – If appropriate, share with the group these thoughts that are not in the Participant Manual: If you found identifying a confidant frustrating, remember that we are here for you. And when our group ends, we can help you find another safe and healthy group where you can continue your healing journey. We recommend experiencing AbAnon a second time. The first time can be scary — getting to know a group of strangers and telling an abortion story you may never have shared with anyone. It can be hard to mine the precious gems in the curriculum when your nerves get in the way.

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.
- I can never start over..
- _____
(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 made me 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 Kelly'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.

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Facilitator Note - Some may not want to participate in a memorial 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 memorial, 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 okay. 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 are very important and will focus on honoring the child you lost.
 - b. The third assignment 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 you can 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” to make sure they understand their assignments: tasks #1 and #2 on page 128 in their manuals (page 145 in this guide) and “Record Your Celebrations” on page 131.

CLOSING

Read the following that is not contained in the Participant Manual:

1. What else would you like to bring up to the group?
2. In what way can we support you this week?
3. What is one positive thing you are walking away with?

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 so you're familiar with it.*
- *Meet with your co-facilitator and pray beforehand for God's presence, power and work in the lives of the women.*
- *Have the link available for the The Healing Way Participant Survey. The link can be downloaded from The Healing Way website (facilitator resources). Contact your program director if you need help accessing the facilitator resources.*

- *There should be no participant story scheduled for this session, but if there is, please refer to “Group Member Story” at the beginning of Session 7.*
- *Review Appendix D: Abortion and an On-Going Relationship*
- *Look over the Sample Memorial Service in Appendix E in case participants have questions.*
- *Review Appendix F for next steps.*
- *Manage the discussion so as to leave plenty of time for next steps, celebrations and, during the closing, affirmations. Be sure your affirmations are ready to share and to email to participants after the meeting.*

WELCOME

Tell the group: Welcome back! Thank you for being here. I can’t believe that these eight weeks have gone by so quickly! We are 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 satisfaction with your healing journey so far, how The Healing Way might continue to serve you, and your interest in helping others with their healing. You will be asked about the celebrations you recorded on page 131 of your manual. This survey goes directly to The Healing Way; your facilitators do not see it.

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- ***In-person group: text the link (The Healing Way Participant Survey) from the website 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.***

When everyone is finished, tell the group: Let's turn to the discussion questions on pages 124 - 125 and talk about Kelly's story.

KELLY'S STORY

Please read the following true story and answer the discussion questions at the end.

My husband and I had been married for only a few months. We met in college and lived together for five years before we married. We lived a very unhealthy lifestyle—partying all the time and living from paycheck to paycheck.

When we found out that I was pregnant, both of us had the same reaction. We immediately thought, "We can't afford a baby! This doesn't fit our lifestyle." At the time we didn't think we ever wanted kids and we didn't feel ready then.

So we decided we had to "take care of this problem." We never discussed other options because we were too entrenched in our life of partying and having fun.

I looked for a clinic, just chose the first one and made an appointment. I met with a woman there who showed me pictures of the development of a fetus. She was calm, soothing and not at all judgmental or mean. But I

realized she was trying to talk me out of my abortion, so I wanted to get out of there.

I was very young and felt insecure and lacking the confidence to ask questions or counter her arguments. Finally, I stood up and blurted out, "I'm not ready to talk about this anymore," and left.

I tried to find a different clinic and found a doctor nearby who performed abortions in his practice. I made an appointment for three or four days later. My husband went with me and the staff was surprised to learn that we were married and seeking an abortion.

I remember feeling distaste for what I was doing. I knew it was wrong, but our independence and finances trumped the baby. My strong feminism also played a role in my decision.

In the doctor's office, the nurse led me back to a room and had me lie down on a table. She began to prepare me verbally, telling me what to expect: what I would hear, feel and see.

I cried through the whole process. The nurse asked me, "Are you crying from pain or emotion?" I was not in physical pain but felt an overwhelming emotional tugging. Meanwhile, my husband held my hand. He was very somber through the whole procedure. The doctor and nurse remained "clinical."

My husband took me home and I began cramping severely. I was nauseated and felt terrible. I slept for a day and a half. A girlfriend of mine came over and tried to cheer me up. She totally dismissed the abortion and tried to make me laugh it off, which only made me feel worse.

Despite my feminism, I didn't want to be one of those people who thought abortion was no big deal. I knew it was wrong and it felt very improper to simply dismiss it.

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A few days later we were supposed to drive up to San Francisco with another couple for an all-day food and wine tasting event. When we left that morning, I remember feeling very sad. My friend asked me, "Why are you so down?" I said, "Well, you know what happened on Friday!" And she responded, "Get over it! We're going to the city. We're going to have fun!"

And I remember looking at her and telling her, "I think God is going to punish me for what I've done, and I'm scared about what that's going to look like." She just gave me a blank stare as if to say, "I have no idea what you're talking about." And she just dismissed it.

So I decided, "I'm going to buck up and be cheerful, put this out of my mind, and at least pretend that I'm having a good time." Even though I was already grieving, struggling with deep regret and sadness, I was more concerned with ruining their fun and keeping them from having a good time than I was about my own feelings. I became adept at convincing those around me that I was "fine."

Years later, I found myself sitting in a church and listening to a message about Jesus Christ dying for my sins and that he offers forgiveness to all who come to him. During the message the pastor distributed little black pieces of paper and a pencil. He asked us to write down any sin that we thought God couldn't possibly forgive us for. The pencil on black paper made the writing nearly invisible.

Without hesitation I wrote down, "My abortion" on my piece of paper. Then the pastor told us to get up, take our pieces of paper to a large wooden cross and nail them to the cross. This was to signify that Jesus died for that sin, nailing it to the cross and bearing the guilt and shame on my behalf. At that moment I declared that I wanted to follow Jesus. I felt so grateful, so relieved to be forgiven for my abortion!

A couple years later, a friend of mine invited me to a pregnancy resource center fundraising event. After the event, on the way home, I shared my abortion story with my girlfriend. She hadn't known about my abortion.

She then asked me if I would consider attending a post-abortive support group. I thought, “Why would I want to do that? I’m forgiven, it’s all good.” But at her prompting, I decided to go.

I wasn’t fully on board with being in the group until I got there. Hearing the other women’s stories made me realize that I had not fully dealt with my abortion. I began to see that there’s value—healing—in sharing my story with others and hearing their stories. It was significant for me to see how God was going to bring something good from my abortion.

While in that support group, I experienced healing from the secret and the grief. Incredibly, I saw that God could use even my abortion for his glory. He is in the life-changing business—he creates beauty from ashes. I was set free. God not only forgave me, but he began to use my story to encourage and heal other women.

DISCUSS KELLY’S STORY

Lead a discussion based on the questions below that are in the Participant Manual on pages 124 - 125.

1. In what ways can you identify with Kelly’s story? What were you feeling?
2. How did Kelly avoid facing her grief over her abortion?
3. How was Kelly able to forgive herself?

GRIEF

Although you may not have thought about your abortion this way in the past, you have lost a child. Normally, when a loved one passes away, we find consolation and closure through a formal memorial service or funeral. Even though it can be difficult to attend such an

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event, the ceremony can help us come to grips with reality and initiate healing that otherwise might not occur.

One thing that makes an abortion so difficult to heal from is that we do not usually feel free to formally grieve or provide some kind of memorial for our baby. Not only does our culture deny the humanity and personhood of an aborted child, but for many of us, the abortion was a deliberate choice. We feel unworthy.

Another thing that makes healing difficult is when a woman has remained in relationship with the father of their aborted child. Sharing or even communicating your grief is challenging. Either partner could be hesitant to bring it up for many reasons: damaging the relationship, denial of pain and grief, or just to avoid conflict. If you find yourself in this situation, “Abortion and an On-Going Relationship” in Appendix D may help you grieve together.

Healing does not mean that you will never grieve again. You have lost a child and you have the right to mourn that loss. Mourning your loss means that you have initiated a clear course of action to give dignity and worth to your child, a healthy release of your grief.

HEALING ACTION 7: HONOR YOUR CHILD

Many post-abortive women have found great release from their grief and sorrow by making a conscious effort to remember their child in a dignified manner. 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 baby.

For example, many women have found great comfort in naming their child. Naming a baby attaches personhood to him or her and allows him or her to be part of your family. There are many additional possibilities:

The Power of Your Story

- Plant a tree or flowers.
- Give a memorial gift to a charity.
- Buy a solitary rose and dry or press it to preserve it.
- Purchase a special necklace or ring to wear in remembrance of your child.
- Buy a special candle and put it in a prominent place.
- Purchase a memorial plaque at the National Memorial for the Unborn (memorialfortheunborn.org)
- Hold a memorial service at a place that is special to you.

God reveals in the Bible that death is not final. We believe that we will see our babies 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 helpful for post-abortive women is to write a 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 letter won't go anywhere, but it would be one more way of honoring your child, acknowledging your child's humanity and value.

REPLACING LIES WITH TRUTH

Possible lies you may have believed:

- My child would hate me.
- I'm not healed.

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- _____
(fill in your own).

Truths to substitute:

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

DEBRIEF HEALING ACTION 7: HONOR YOUR CHILD

Say to the group: Please look at your answers to the discussion questions on pages 127 - 128 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 child?
3. For us, death is not the end. As we look forward to seeing our child in the afterlife, how does that make you feel?

Facilitator Note : *2 Samuel 12:23 records David's words after his son dies: "But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." This can*

be a helpful verse to show a believing participant that their child is, in fact, in Heaven.

MEMORIAL

Facilitator Note - Read the following: Thank you all for being here for this portion of our session. In this time of remembering, you will have an opportunity to share your responses to Tasks #1 and #2, giving honor to your child. You are in a safe environment. There are no right or wrong ways to accomplish what we are setting out to do, and if you choose not to share, that is okay. We respect you and your decisions.

Facilitator Note: *Be ready to share how you honored your own lost children through a memorial and/or a letter to your child. Some of the group members may not want to actively participate.*

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

The Facilitators begin the time of honor.

—Each mother shares how she is honoring her child if she desires.

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

1. Have you already completed a memorial for your child or is it in the planning stage?
2. Is there someone you might want to help you follow through?
3. If you were able to compose a letter, would you like to share it?

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4. If not, would you care to share with us what kinds of things you mentioned in your letter?
5. **To the group:** Does anyone have anything she would like to say to _____ *(the one who shared)*?
6. 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 remembrances will open the way for even more healing.

Facilitator Note - For ease of discussion, the descriptions of Tasks #1 and #2 are situated after the Memorial in this guide. In the Participant Manual, they appear before the Memorial. You have already addressed them, so you should proceed directly to Additional Steps for Healing, below.

Task #1: Establish a memorial.

Think of some meaningful way to establish a memorial 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:

.....

.....

Task #2: Write a letter.

Write a letter to your child. This is for your benefit. Whether you choose to share these private thoughts with the group is up to you.

ADDITIONAL STEPS FOR HEALING

Facilitator Note - Ask the group to turn to the list, printed below, of additional steps for healing found on pages 129 - 130 in their Participant Manuals. Ask: Which steps do you see yourself taking advantage of? In what ways can we help you continue your healing process?

Our hope is that this curriculum has helped contribute to your healing process. Recovering from an abortion is no small matter and often requires more than one experience like this. Please review the additional resources listed in Appendix F and let us know how we can help you move forward. Some suggested next steps:

- Continue to meet with your confidant.
- If other women in your AbAnon group are willing, maintain contact with them. You can function as mentors for each other. It could be encouraging to compare next steps and support each other if you pursue a memorial of some kind.
- Keep journaling your progress.
- Hold a formal memorial service for your lost child or children. A possible format is included in Appendix E.
- You are encouraged to go through AbAnon again with another group. Healing often occurs in layers, so you may find it helpful to repeat this experience with another group of women. If sexual abuse is part of your story, consider joining a SAVAnon group. If you have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth, consider joining

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MiSAnon. Go to The Healing Way website to enroll in an upcoming group. An intake coordinator will contact you.

- We can help you find another post-abortion group with a different curriculum to further promote your healing. Options can be found in Appendix F: Additional Resources.
- 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.

My next step:

Facilitator Note - Ask the group to turn to the celebrations they recorded on page 131 of their Participant Manual. Encourage each participant to share how she completed all three statements. Say: If you are comfortable, we would like to hear about your healing progress so we can celebrate with you!

RECORD YOUR CELEBRATIONS

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...

CLOSING

Facilitator Note - Address the following 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 woman as well. Email the affirmation to the relevant participant after the meeting.

2. 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.

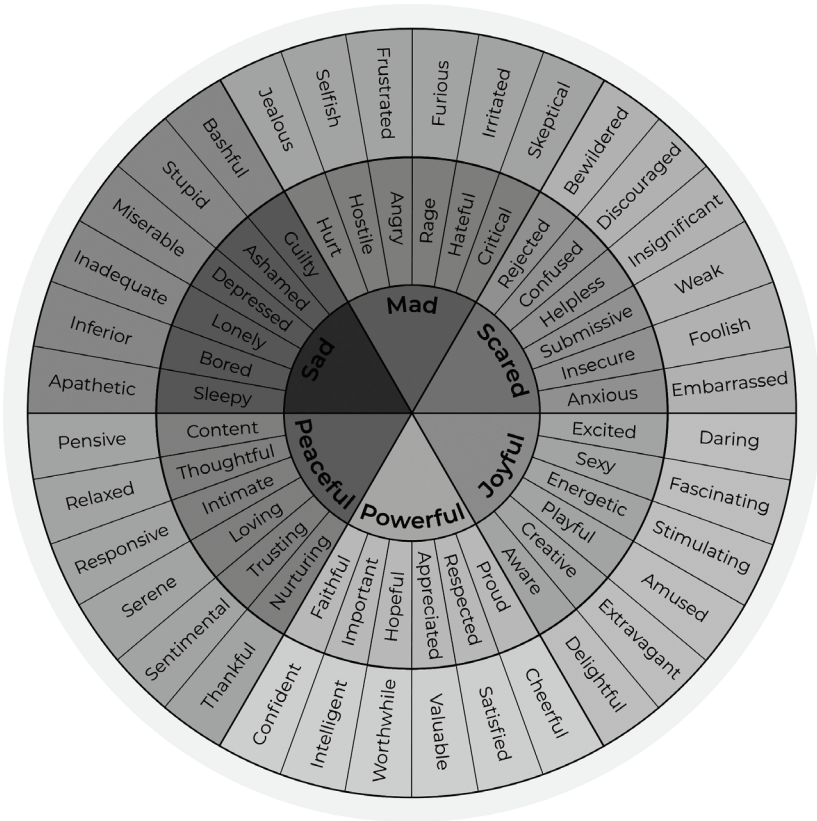
Read the following, which is in the Participant Manual.

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!

For an in-person group, feel free to hang around and share time and hugs. Try to determine what each woman has chosen for her next steps and encourage her in these.

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.

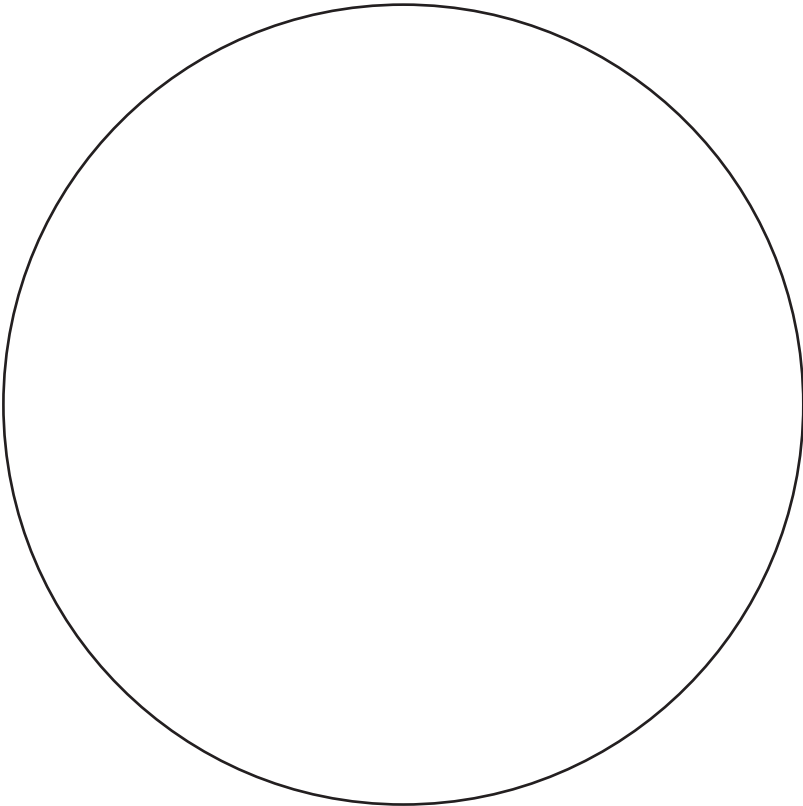
Examples:

- "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 pregnancy and 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.



FORGIVENESS SUPPORT: THE BURDEN OF UNFORGIVENESS

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

Choose a rock for each person you need to forgive. Write down the name of the person each rock represents.

Place rocks in the bag and carry this “burden of unforgiveness” until you want 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 can express the desire 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

ABORTION AND AN ON-GOING RELATIONSHIP

Many women have remained in relationship with the father of their aborted child, and talking about that abortion can be very difficult. Either partner could be hesitant to bring it up for many reasons: damaging the relationship, denial of pain and grief, or just to avoid conflict. It is, however, important not to ignore the elephant in the room. For a woman, one of the greatest sources of comfort can be the empathy and support of her partner. For a man, it's important to allow him the opportunity to grieve, too.

What a man may be dealing with after an abortion:

- Having failed or felt prevented from expressing his desires regarding the abortion, he may feel emasculated.
- Despair, regret, anger.
- Feeling like a coward.

Opening communication calls for some wisdom and patience. You need to allow your partner the freedom to process his loss in his own way, understanding that it may differ greatly from yours. Your job is not to change his personal response but to recognize his right to grieve. He may have buried his own feelings to focus on helping you through yours, or he may desire to avoid all the emotions that accompany abortion.

A sad possibility is that he doesn't believe the abortion was a problem and may not understand why you are grieving. If this is the case, move forward with sensitivity. Helping him understand your perspective may take more time.

Communicate. He probably has no idea what you are feeling, so tell him what you are experiencing and what you need to get through this difficult time. Refer to "The Feeling Wheel" if it is helpful. Men are often hesitant to share their emotions, but you may actually be helping your partner by expressing yours. A lot of healing can result as you help each other through the grieving process.

Encouraging your partner to have a role in the grieving process could help preserve your relationship. It may benefit you both to include your partner as you consider the following suggestions to help you move toward healing.

STEPS TO TAKE TOGETHER TOWARD HEALING

1. Consider arranging a memorial service or create some kind of memorial together:
 - Plant a tree or a flower.
 - Paint a garden rock.
 - Choose a name for your baby or babies.
2. Seek help.
 - Find a couple's counselor or life coach to help navigate this difficult time in your relationship.
 - Go to your partner first to work through challenges before you consider looking to other people.

APPENDIX D

- Participation in *The Power of Your Story for Men* can be explored by going to The Healing Way Website.
- Resist forms of numbing or distraction (drugs, food, alcohol, pornography, fantasy, social media)

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS TOGETHER

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

1. What feelings did you experience when you learned about the pregnancy?
2. What feelings did the abortion produce?
3. In what ways have you expressed your grief since then?
4. What have you found troubling about your grieving process?
5. 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 mother to acknowledge the death of her 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. If you are still in a relationship with the father, make sure his loss can be recognized and mourned, too. 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
- Flowers 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.

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

- If a program was printed, have extended family and friends take it home and ask them to pray for the immediate family.
- Display a memory table with ultrasound images, blankets or keepsakes.
- Give a lapel pin of baby feet to each guest.
- Provide guests with remembrance cards or small items. (e.g., flower seeds, memorial bookmarks, candles)

HOME MEMORIALS:

- Candle
- Custom jewelry
- Plant a bush, flower or tree.
- Memorial rock in a garden
- Plaque at the National Memorial to the Unborn (in-person or virtual)
- Certificate of Life

APPENDIX F

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FURTHER HEALING

Barbito, Karin, et al. *Unraveled Roots: Exposing the Hidden Causes of Damaging Behaviors*. Support After Abortion, 2020.

Cochrane, Linda. *Forgiven and Set Free: A Bible Study for Women Seeking Healing After Abortion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2022.

Harper, Sheila. *SaveOne: A Guide to Emotional Healing After Abortion*. Garden City, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2008. www.saveone.org

Layton, Pat. *Surrendering the Secret: Healing the Heartbreak of Abortion*. Lifeway Press, 2021. www.SurrenderingTheSecret.com.

Masse, Sydna. *Her Choice to Heal: Finding Spiritual and Emotional Peace After Abortion*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2024.

Deeper Still, www.deeperstill.org, 865-300-4283. [Retreats]

Rachel's Vineyard, www.rachelsvineyard.org,
Hotline: 877-467-3463. [Retreats]

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

BOOKS AND MOVIES:

Unplanned, directed by Chuck Konzelman, 2019. [DVD]

Bella, directed by Alejandro Gómez Monteverde, 2006. [DVD]

Tilly: A Message of Hope, directed by Stephen Vidano, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. [DVD]



ONLINE RESOURCES:

Abortion Changes You. www.abortionchangesyou.com.

Care Net-A Pro Abundant Life Ministry. www.care-net.org.

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

Heartbeat International. www.heartbeatinternational.org.

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

Silent No More Awareness Campaign. www.silentnomoreawareness.org.

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988

APPENDIX G

DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY

EMPATHY: connecting with the other person's pain and trying to understand how she might be feeling.

Cliché Responses that Lack Empathy:

"Everything happens for a reason."

"This too shall pass."

"Just look on the bright side..."

"God has a plan."

"I know how you feel."

"He's in a better place now."

"This could be a blessing in disguise."

"Something better is around the corner."

"At least..."

Examples of Empathetic Responses:

1. Acknowledge their pain.

"I'm sorry you are going through this."

"Wow, that really sucks."

"I hate that this happened."

"That must be hard."

"That sounds really challenging."

"I can see how that would be difficult."

2. **Share how you feel.**

"Wow. I don't know what to say."

"I can't imagine what you must be going through."

"I wish I could make it better."

"My heart hurts for you."

"It makes me really sad to hear this happened."

3. **Show gratitude that the person opened up.**

"Thank you for sharing with us."

"I'm glad you told us."

"Thank you for trusting us with this.

That really means a lot."

"This must be hard to talk about.

Thanks for opening up to us."

4. **Show interest.**

"How are you feeling about everything?"

"What has this been like for you?"

"I want to make sure I understand..."

"What I'm hearing is that you are feeling
_____. Is that right?"

"Is there anything else you want to share?"

5. **Be encouraging.**

"You are brave/strong/talented."

"You matter."

"You are a fighter."

"We're in your corner."

"I'm proud of you."

6. **Be supportive.**

"We're here for you."

"How can I help you?"

"What do you need right now?"

"I'm happy to listen any time."

"I would like to do _____ for you."

APPENDIX H

COMMON FACILITATOR SCENARIOS

Group Participant Asks Facilitator for Advice

- Don't teach or counsel.
- Refer to the curriculum: "Let's go back and see what the Participant Manual says about this." Read it to the group or have a participant read it out loud.
- Turn the question back to the group: "What does the rest of the group have to say about this?"
- If the participant continues to press you, after trying the above steps, respond by sharing something from your own story.
- Get more information or assistance: "Can we come back to that later? I'd like the chance to look into that further before I respond".
- Notify your Program Director; she can help you decide on the next step.
- Some questions may be best addressed outside of the group. Private conversations are also a good place to gather more information or share resources.

General Group Dynamics

- Revisit the group norms: "One of the group norms we agreed on was ____ (Choose a norm) ____ . How do you feel we are doing with this?"

- Text a copy of the group norm(s) to the participants after the meeting and remind them to be consistent with that norm for next week's group meeting.

Group Doesn't Respond to Question(s)

- Allow for awkward silence; pause for a slow count to five.
- Don't be the answer person.
- Refer to the curriculum: "Let's go back and see what the Participant Manual says about this." Have a group member read a paragraph or sentence that addresses the question.
- Do not read the assignment out loud. This could discourage them from doing the assigned reading the next week.

Group Member Gives a "Wrong" Answer

- Ask a follow up question; stay curious: "What makes you feel this way?"
- Ask the group: "Does someone else have a different response?" Repeat the question if needed. Allow for awkward silence.
- Call on one of the other participants. Say: "Sarah, what are your thoughts about this question?"
- Refer to the curriculum: "Let's go back and see what the Participant Manual says about this." Have a group member read a paragraph or sentence that addresses the question.
- Share an example from your own story if no one else responds.

Group Member is the “Silent One”

- Pay attention to her body language and eye contact. Look for indications she may have something to say.
- Look for questions that are safe and don’t require self-disclosure. Call on her: “Mary, would you like to respond?”
- Allow for awkward silence.
- If necessary, say: “Would you like to pass?”

Group Member Dominates Discussion

- Giving advice:
 - Look for an opening in the conversation and ask the person giving the advice, “Have you experienced that in your own life?”
 - Then mention, “I am concerned we are giving advice, which violates one of our group norms. We are not here to fix each other.”
- Encourage equal participation by redirection:
 - If someone is eager to answer every question and has already responded several times during a group meeting, when she begins to answer another question, say: “Sarah, let’s hear from someone in the group who hasn’t shared yet.... Mary, how did you answer this question?”
- If someone continues to dominate discussions, notify your Program Director to help you prepare for a private conversation.

Group Member Admits Thoughts of Suicide

- Take it seriously. Warning signs needing immediate attention:
 - Threatening or talking about hurting or killing herself.
 - Seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means of suicide.
 - Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide.
- If disclosure of suicidal thoughts happens in the healing group, ask the participant to stay, so you can talk with her privately.
- If she has expressed an immediate plan, or has access to a gun or other potentially deadly means, do not leave her alone.
- Contact your Program Director immediately.
- Contact one or more of the resources listed. Get her help immediately.
 - Call 911.
 - Call any hospital ER in her area.
 - Contact emergency mental health services in their area or state.
 - National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255

Group Member Admits to Recent Violence, Abuse or Sexual Assault

- Do not counsel but help make an action plan: “The emotional trauma you experienced needs immediate attention.” Support her decision. If needed, make the call with her.
- Call:
 - 911 if in immediate danger
 - Law Enforcement to report any incident of domestic violence or sexual assault
 - Child Protection Services if you suspect a child or teenager is being abused (physically or sexually) by a family member or someone who lives with them.
 - Any Hospital ER
- Notify your Program Director.
- National Domestic Violence Helpline-1-800-799-7233 for victims or concerned friends/family.
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- Sexual Assault for Military 877-995-5247

