

Ministering to the Post-Abortive Individual



Physically, Emotionally, and Spiritually Scarred

As shown in "Adverse Effects", abortion often has a serious and lasting impact on the post-abortive woman, her post-abortive partner, the grandparents of the aborted child, the child's siblings, and others. In fact, the emotional trauma caused by one abortion has been shown to contribute to a decision to have a second abortion. When an individual expresses a desire for pastoral guidance dealing with abortion, it is important for one to understand the deep levels of pain and suffering that the post-abortive individual may be experiencing. Great pastoral care should be taken to assist the individual in uncovering his or her physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds and helping him or her encounter God's infinite love, mercy, forgiveness, and healing in the face of the tragedy of abortion. It is particularly important to never appear to be judgmental when speaking with a post-abortive individual. Condemn the sin, but not the sinner.

Where is the post-abortive individual coming from?

The circumstances which prompt an individual to seek healing from a past abortion can vary greatly. Plagued by instant regret, a woman may come forward immediately in need of help. On the other hand, she may suppress her feelings for decades before

seeking healing. Perhaps, a past abortion may surface for the first time as a couple undergoes marriage preparation with their pastor. Maybe the individual has tried to seek healing in the past but had a bad experience. Whatever the circumstances, those offering pastoral care should make every effort to understand the post-abortive individual's background in order to see where he or she is in the healing process.

What does healing look like?

1. Self-honesty. The post-abortive individual can be transparent about his or her past abortion or involvement with an abortion. He or she does not attempt to suppress post-abortive feelings but can, rather, acknowledge his or her wounds for what they are.
2. Acknowledging and reconnecting with the deceased child. The post-abortive individual recognizes the sacred human identity of his or her deceased child and understands the gravity of his or her choice to end the child's life.
3. Surrendering this child to God. The post-abortive individual offers his or her deceased child into the loving arms of God, trusting that in Him, the innocent life of his or her child, along with all things, will be made new.
4. Giving and accepting forgiveness. The post-abortive

individual can ask for and accept God's forgiveness, forgive himself or herself, and forgive those who may have influenced the decision to abort.

5. Reconciliation and commitment to new life. Accepting God's forgiveness, the post-abortive individual commits to turn away from the past choice of abortion and takes up a new life in Christ with a firm resolve to avoid that which has led him or her to choose abortion.

Guidelines for Ministering to the Post-Abortive Individual

If possible, arrange the meeting space in such a way that the person can sit between you and the door.

1. Listen. Let the individual talk. Assure them that they are free to stop sharing at any time. Follow their lead in addressing what they are comfortable discussing. If they speak about the aborted baby, it is appropriate to do so as well. If not, don't bring up the baby at this time.
2. Understand. Give the individual permission to feel. Let them know that it is okay to express anger, sadness, regret, etc. Watch out for dysfunctional coping mechanisms, such as alcohol, drugs, rapid repeat pregnancy, etc.
3. Counsel. Do not deny the gravity of the sin of abortion. Remind the individual that there is

nothing that God cannot forgive. If appropriate, ask questions. In conversation, consider working through some or all of the following questions:

- What was your age and marital status at the time of the abortion?
- What led up to the decision for abortion?
- What was your part in the decision?
- Were you accompanied by someone, or did you accompany your partner?
- How did you feel afterwards, and what did you do?
- In what ways, if any, has abortion affected your sense of self? Your life from then to now?
- How has abortion affected your relationship with your partner?
- How has abortion affected your relationship with God?

4. Assist. If appropriate, consider offering to be available for continued pastoral counseling. You may also direct them to professional post-abortive healing agencies listed below. Here are some other specific tools you may incorporate:

- Write a letter. Encourage the post-abortive individual to

write a letter to help process his or her thoughts and feelings. This letter may be directed to the deceased child, God, an individual who played a role in the abortion whom they may feel betrayed by, etc., but it will not be sent. If the individual feels comfortable, they may read their letter aloud to you. Voicing these thoughts and feelings can be a powerful tool in the healing process.

- Grieve. Allow the post-abortive individual to grieve for their child. Encourage them to give the deceased child a name, begin a new relationship with him or her, and surrender him or her to the Lord. They may find healing is a gesture of memorializing their deceased child (they may consider asking

a pastor about a memorial remembrance service or Mass, planting a tree in the deceased child's memory, etc.).

Specific Cautions

- When walking with a post-abortive individual, it is responsible to inquire about post-abortive feelings such as hopelessness, shame, and suicidal thinking. Be wary of comments like "I want to be with my baby." If any kind of suicidal intent is detected, immediately refer the individual to a mental health professional.
- Physical touch is not advised in this ministry.
- Speaking publicly can be healthy for a post-abortive individual, but not if the individual is doing so to "make up for" abortion. A post-abortive person should be successfully healed and feel fully forgiven before speaking publicly about an abortion.
- Pro-life activism can be good for a post-abortive individual, unless there is an obsessive need to be involved.

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