

5 Helpful Steps  
for Processing  
Grief after Abortion



Step One  
Understand You are  
Not Alone!



Every choice decision holds in its history its own unique set of circumstances. Women of all ages and all walks of life, economic and religious status have a commonality. That common denominator is that they are “keepers” of a deep, dark secret. If you are harboring something from a time in your past, the first thing you need to know is , you are not alone!

Since the legalization of abortion in our nation (1973), around a million procedures occur every single year. I myself carried my secret for over twenty years, without telling a single person. I truly thought I was the only one who had made such a choice. If you’ve never shared your abortion secret, you are normal. ***Helping others who’ve walked this path, I’ve found for the clients I’ve worked with, that only about one in ten women have ever shared their abortion secret with another person, including the father.***

The most important step in reaching a place of peace after abortion is to understand that your secret is not an isolated event, making you a social outcast with three heads. I’ve worked with women from every single walk of life. From a classy professional woman residing in Mexico, to a tattooed woman with nose piercings, to a pastor’s wife living with the secret pain of *three* abortions, the slice of women who’ve made a choice decision knows no boundaries of race, religion or social status.

I can only go by my own personal journey, but I can tell you that it was “so freeing” for me to see that I was not the “only one.” I hope you know you are not alone!

There is some sort of consolation that “others out there” were feeling the same deep sadness I was feeling. There were other women having random “moments” of secret emotional sadness and grief.

It is important to understand that so many others feel the same way you do! The beginning of my healing was learning randomly from another woman where I worked that she had grown weary carrying around her secret heart ache and pain. As we began to share, I was astounded to learn I was experiencing the same emotions she was feeling. I can’t tell you how freeing that was for me!

A burden shared really does become lighter. If you’ve been hiding your shameful secret abortion, the first step on your road to closure seems much too simple, yet it is an important little baby step to take. ***Knowing you are not alone can be a huge revelation.*** Yes, you’ve “gotten on with your life,”but your\_ deep dark secret doesn’t have to haunt you anymore. There are many, many women desiring to process and resolve this issue from their past.

Yes, “women of choice” have some sort of bonding by becoming a strange “sisterhood of secret-keepers.” Keeping the secret keeps us in perpetual grief. Facing our secrets, this is the first step for women who have a choice decision in their past. And it is in “knowing we are not alone” that gives us all the courage to begin the journey to peace.



Step Two:  
Understand What's Normal.



There is an implication that abortion will bring closure when we choose it. Abortion does bring closure to *the crisis* we are in. We get on with the business of living and we file the decision away as anything from “barely a blip on the radar screen,” to “I’m really sad and I feel like dying.” You may have had these two opposing mind-sets either simultaneously or as single thoughts zooming through your head at random times. For the most part, it is normal if you felt “deep relief” immediately after your abortion.

In voluntary pregnancy termination, things usually happen fast, including the decision. Even the procedure can even be a lunch hour appointment. You probably made the choice quickly and then you never talked again about it. Friends, co-workers, even the father assumes everything is fine. You probably got back on the treadmill of life and continued your daily schedule. There was no evidence of a baby, and perhaps even the father was out of the picture at this point. Your life went on.

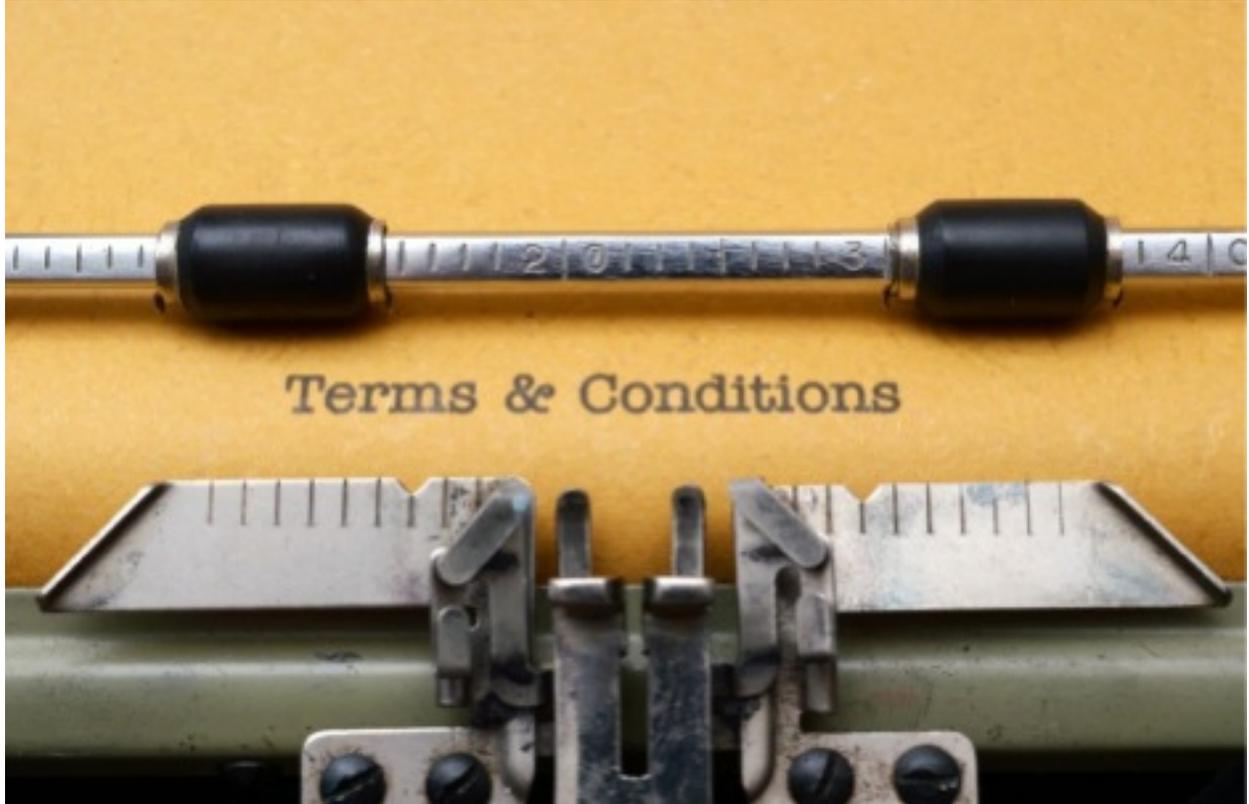
As the days went by though, you may have started to experience an unexplainable sadness. Most women I’ve worked with report that this deep sadness seems to be like an unexplainable black cloud over their head. The pain typically is not intense. It is a small, gentle pain that can last for moments or in extreme cases this black cloud of sadness can continue for several days. I’ve talked with countless women who detail to me this “black cloud” feeling. At this point in time you may have asked yourself if what you are feeling is normal. You may have random thoughts of wondering if you are crazy to feel this sadness.

What is normal after a voluntary pregnancy termination? It is not only normal, it is unavoidable for a deep sense of loss to eventually set in after abortion. It may be days, weeks, months or even several years, but as time passes the grief begins.

I don’t know if you’ve had your “black cloud day” yet, but I remember the exact time of my black cloud. It was a cold March day. I was grocery shopping, in a hurry of course. I rounded a corner with my cart, almost running into another woman with a cherub-looking little girl sitting the baby seat. Suddenly, a sense of sadness overcame me that I was unable to shake off. It was a black cloud of epic proportions and it followed me around for days.

This deep sense of loss was so incredibly real and it so blind-sided me that I didn’t know what to do with it. Of course I had no one to talk with. I shouldered the responsibility for the decision. There was no allowance to me *feel* anything.

It would be several years before I learned two important things: “I was not alone” and “the black cloud of deep sadness” was normal.



Step Three:  
Understand  
Disenfranchised Grief  
and Abortion



Voluntary pregnancy termination or abortion is such an isolating event that it is hard to find our way in the processing. If you are harboring an abortion secret, I hope you will have the courage to move out of the safe place of denial of the grief you may feel, to a place of peace and hope.

I have walked the “abortion grief journey” so I understand how much educating needs to be done in the area of grief after abortion. Even when I went to a professional therapist, I walked away completely hopeless in my journey. This therapist assured me that abortion was a legal choice and that “I needed to go home and get over it.” He validated my choice, but on the heart level he didn’t help me with the very normal “black cloud of grief” hanging over my head. I learned quickly that staying silent prevented shame and kept me safe. However, keeping the secret did not stop my “the black cloud” from coming and going at random times.

**Disenfranchised grief is a grief that isn’t publicly acknowledged or a grief that is not accepted culturally.** Abortion grief is a perfect example of disenfranchised grief. You may have tried to explain your sadness to someone close to you. In that attempt you may have received responses that were completely invalidating for you. For instance, “think how much better your life is now” or worse “of course you should feel bad, look what you did.” Disenfranchisement of abortion grief creates by default a unique group of women in our culture: “a sisterhood of the keepers of the secret.”

I hope you have not experienced the pain of trying to talk with what you believed to be a safe person. If you have been through something like this, it helps to understand there is a gaping hole in our culture regarding grief after abortion.

If you’ve also experienced your own “black cloud” moment of abortion grief, the answer is not stuffing the event down and denying the pain. The answer isn’t in believing you are alone. Bringing abortion after-care up to speed with choice decisions hasn’t happened yet in our culture.

Don’t let misunderstanding of this topic from others in your life who should be more understanding stop you from processing and resolving your abortion grief. Women after an abortion choice can feel a deep sense of loss. Not everyone understands this. Know what you are feeling is real. It is not healthy to stay in denial about your grief after abortion.



Step Four:  
*Understand How Abortion Grief  
Might be Affecting Your Daily Life*



Knowing you are not alone, knowing that feeling a deep loss after abortion is normal and knowing that grief after abortion is greatly misunderstood by those who haven't walked the journey, are important pieces in reaching a place of closure after your voluntary pregnancy termination.

Processing points of grief in one's life are important aspects of being a healthy person. If grief and loss after your choice decision has "hit you," it is important to look at how unprocessed grief can be influencing and impacting your life right now.

70% of solving a problem is *understanding the problem!* Just understanding that you may be experiencing some emotional and relational angst in your life today because of grief associated to your dark secret can be very helpful. Here is a checklist to see how abortion grief affects your life.

**I've never told anyone about my abortion or I tried to tell someone and was invalidated or condemned.**

Just like any regular grief situation, a person who gets misunderstood in their pain will shut down and isolate. This type of rejection in the midst of explaining pain can create deep depression and cause withdrawal and detachment from others. If you are experiencing deep depression for several days in a row, it really is time to see a professional. Your therapist can help you walk this journey so that you are not alone in it.

**I have fleeting moments of general sadness that can't be connected to my life situation.**

Whether your abortion occurred one week, one month or years ago, if you've pushed the sadness away, you will find a way to come out into the open in other random ways. If you are starting to have these moments you can't connect to anything because your life may be going along so well, it could be you need to address your "vpt" grief.

**There are certain seasons of the year I feel blue or go into a deep funk.**

If you can connect the dots of these seasonal blues to the "vpt" event, you are probably triggering off the unprocessed grief. Common trigger dates are anniversary dates tied to the procedure.

**My emotions seem increasingly harder to regulate.**

As days go by, the grief builds and builds if left alone without processing. The "black times" can get stronger or last longer. If you relate to any of these points of grief that relate to a "vpt" maybe this is the time in your life you should start facing the grief and loss connected to the event.



Step Five:  
Understand How to Stay Safe  
Processing Grief After Abortion



Staying safe in the process of working through grief after abortion can be difficult. Safety is very important though. Everyone grieves differently. Anne Morrow Lindbergh (who lost a child to kidnapping) once said, “Grief can’t be shared. Everyone shares it alone, his own burden, his own way.” Know that other women are also sharing abortion grief like you. You are not alone, but you may need to be alone to process your “vpt” if that is the safest way for you.

Here are some important tips for grieving any kind of loss, but especially abortion grief loss because it is so unique in nature.

**Don’t be hard on yourself.** Going down bunny trails where you beat yourself up with the decision is a non-productive effort. Responses and processing grief are as different as fingerprints. Everyone has a different style. Taking a lot of time is OK and normal for you. Don’t be hard on yourself. *Give yourself as much time as you need.*

**Everyone grieves differently.** If you can’t attach any emotion or loss to the “vpt” that can also be normal. It is a strange dynamic. You may be feeling the “black cloud” or the “blue times” but yet not be able to connect any emotion to the event. Again this can be normal. Your unique grieving journey is yours. Just know that time is on your side and the more you get into the process and just “let it flow.”

**Your body never lies to you.** As you begin to address your grief after abortion, difficulty sleeping. Any kind of herbal tea of course is helpful. Also, a hot bath with wonderful salts is helpful. Treating yourself kindly during this time is important. This of course may be hard to do because you may be punishing and condemning yourself instead.

**Support from others is great, but not absolutely necessary.** You may have to be very careful as far as determining who will be supportive to you during your journey and who will be unsafe. It of course would be great to have as many people as possible to support you. Getting into a post abortion support group is actually fabulous and very helpful. Ultimately, this is where I found my most safety, connection and freedom. The goal is 100% safety and you have to be in charge of that.

Grief after abortion is a unique journey for everyone who has to courage to sign up for it. Women everywhere have different stories and have handled the “black cloud” in different ways. However, the emotional undercurrents are very similar for all of us.

You are not alone and the right door will open for you to find your best plan for resolution and closure.



## Other Helpful Resources:

If you want to start the journey in the safety of your own home you can try the self-help plan I created so that you would not be alone and have tools to guide you through the process. All materials are non-judgmental and non-political or religious in nature.

[Follow this link](#) to order Choice Processing and Resolution Self Help Plan from Amazon.

[Download](#) this free brochure.

[Download](#) Information for your therapist. Your therapist can walk this journey with you. Let them know about the available resources to help them help you.

*C.P.R. ~ Choice Processing and Resolution* Trudy M. Johnson, M.A., L.M.F.T.

*C.P.R.*  
*Choice Processing and Resolution*

*Facing Grief After Abortion Without Fear*



GRIEF

**TRUDY M. JOHNSON, M.A., L.M.F.T.**

*Dr. Christiane Northrup, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., author of Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom, endorses C.P.R. as an excellent self-help plan for processing abortion grief.*

the journey of 1,000 miles begins with one small step.