

How To Talk To A Friend Who's Had An Abortion

Listen with your heart

If this is the first time your friend has told you about her abortion, she may fear that you will reject her or that you will repeat to others what she tells you. She needs to know that this will not happen. She must find in you compassion, and know that you are not sitting in judgment of her for a past abortion that cannot be undone. She needs to know you will keep everything she says to you in confidence. Only then will she feel it is safe to trust you and to tell you of her deepest pains and fears.

Ask God to fill your heart and hers with love and understanding.

Ask God: What does she need today?

- someone to listen?
- a shoulder to cry on?
- a referral to a priest or professional counselor?
- or even crisis intervention?

Begin by listening to your friend. Listen without interruption. You don't have to understand every detail in the sequence of events. What is important is that she no longer feels alone in her despair, that she can let go of some of the terrible burden she has been carrying by sharing it with you.

Let her tell all the jumbled details of her troubled soul.

She may talk about:

- what happened at the clinic
- rage and anger--at the boyfriend who walked away, the parents who meant well but coerced her, clinic personnel who lied, God who let this happen, her baby for coming at the 'wrong' time, herself for not handling things better

"Years ago, a friend called me. She had four children and just found out she was pregnant again. Her doctor advised her to abort because her blood pressure was dangerously high and she had other health problems as well. I don't know whether she wanted advice, (permission' or sympathy. But with more conviction than common sense, I launched into a lecture on how wrong it is to take an innocent child's life and how dreadful abortion is for the mother, too.

When I stopped ranting, she quietly told me that she had already had an abortion several years earlier because of similar health concerns. What could I say at that point? Finally, I apologized and gave her the name of an ob-gyn who might know how to keep both her and her child healthy during the pregnancy." – from a well-intentioned friend, Carolyn

- guilt, regret, depression, haunting nightmares, even suicidal thoughts
- going to confession many times, yet never feeling forgiven
- drowning in an ocean of grief she doesn't understand
- feeling unlovable and unforgivable in God's eyes ... and her own.

Assure her of love and support

Much as you'd like to make all her suffering go away with the right words, her grief and loss and self-condemnation cannot be resolved in one conversation. Assure her of your friendship. Tell her you will (be there) for her through her journey toward healing and spiritual and emotional health.

Remind her that God is her Father. ... her most merciful Father. In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus described God's eagerness to shower the repentant child with love and grace and bring him back into the arms of the family. If we turn our hearts to God, He will reach out to meet us.

Where help can be found

Ask your friend if she has ever heard about help for people struggling after abortion.

There are counselors, priests, deacons, support groups and retreats prepared to help. There are safe places where trained people can help her to overcome grief and loss, and restore her hope. If she is Catholic, she can go to confession and be absolved of the sin of abortion. Offer her the name and phone number of the local Project Rachel or similar ministry. If a number is not printed on the back of this brochure, call the diocesan chancery (obtain the phone number from directory assistance). The National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing website www.marquette.edu/rachel--lists all Project Rachel offices in the U.S.

Almost everyone knows someone who's had an abortion. Many know someone personally who is suffering greatly because of an abortion. If a friend confides in you tomorrow that she had an abortion, would you be able to respond in a way that brings her closer to healing the wounds in her heart and her soul? There are ways to avoid the trap Carolyn fell into. Ways that may put your friend on the path to healing and hope.

How to help a friend who might be suffering in silence from an abortion

If you see a friend struggling with sadness and emotional turmoil and you suspect that abortion might be the cause, would you know how to offer help (without giving voice to your suspicion)?

Here's a suggestion.

At an appropriate setting and time, you could say something like this:

Spiritual healing

You may tell her that some women greatly benefit from

- daily prayer, talking and listening to God who loves them
- reading the Scriptures, especially the Psalms and the Gospels
- attending daily Mass
- regular Confession
- asking Mary, Mother of us all, to help her know Jesus personally.

Begin the Journey

Encourage her to make a phone call to Project Rachel for help. Remind her of the depth and breadth of God's love and mercy.

Assure her again of your love. Promise to be there. Not only today, but in the future. Thank her for taking that leap of faith and talking with you. It took courage. Her healing journey has just begun.

I finished the post-abortion reconciliation offered through Project Rachel two months ago.

I can't find words to describe how wonderful this experience was. I was helped to shed all the denial, anger, lies, stubbornness and tears that were in my heart. ... Through this care the walls came tumbling down and in their place stood compassion, forgiveness, grace, faith and love.

By Ellen Curro, M.Ed., PA-C. and staff of the NCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

"I saw an interesting article (or brochure or website) that gave me a new outlook on abortion. I never realized the awful pressures women face in making that decision and how much they can suffer afterward from grief and feeling alone and feeling that they're judged harshly by others. And how hard it is for them to get healed completely. But I understand there are programs, sometimes called Project Rachel, that help women struggling with emotional problems after abortion."

Have information on local programs (address and phone number) on hand in case she asks for it. You could also leave such information where she could find it.