

Understanding Abortion's Aftermath for Others Hurt by an Abortion

Abortions can have serious, lasting consequences for the loved ones of the mother and father of the aborted child. Regardless of whether these family members or friends influenced the decision to abort or cooperated in some way to bring about the abortion, the relationship they once had with the post-abortive parent may change significantly. Intimacy and trust may suffer. Family and friends may struggle as they observe the pain and seemingly inconsolable sorrow of the post-abortive mother or father, pain that they are powerless to allay. They may be angry, disappointed, or supportive; but regardless of their attitude toward the abortion, the grief of the parents will cast a pall over all their relationships. The grandparents of the aborted child may grieve over the loss of their grandchild and regret their conduct and that of their daughter or son as keenly as do the aborted child's parents.

"As priests, we play an essential role in healing the sheep of our flock. It is through our active, sacrificial, and prayerful participation in the healing journey of those wounded and suffering from abortion that God allows one more soul to experience his mercy."

*Fr. Dan Leary,
Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.*

Grandparents

Grandparents may struggle with the knowledge of an abortion and the loss of a grandchild. Their reactions are often linked to their involvement in the abortion decision. Parents of the mother undergoing an abortion may have forced the abortion, may have known nothing about it until afterward, or may have been opposed to the abortion but supportive of whatever choice their daughter made.

Grandparents may exhibit some of these symptoms:

- Grief or sadness over having lost a grandchild
- Anger at their child for becoming pregnant or having the abortion
- Anger at the son's or daughter's partner or the partner's parents
- Concern for their child, wanting to resolve their child's emotional/behavioral problems
- Guilt, particularly if they forced the decision or if they believe that they missed the cues that signaled a pregnancy

Occasionally there will be tragic circumstances where parents witness their child's life taking a disturbing turn toward chemical dependency, severe psychotic reactions, eating disorders, dangerous lifestyles, and even suicide. Such parents need a great deal of support and help in coping with their pain and witnessing their daughter's or son's struggles.

Abortion may run in families, with the mother, an aunt, a grandmother, or some other close relative also having had an abortion. This can cause what is described as a generational wound, and prayers specifically for binding and healing these wounds should be offered. A recent family abortion may trigger unresolved pain in other family members, related to their own abortion losses.

Ministering to Grandparents

Although both grandparents may be troubled, it is often the grandmother of the aborted child who will come for healing. Listen to her story. Explain that mothers whose daughters have lost a child to abortion may often need to process this before the daughter may be ready to begin doing so.

Invite the grandmother to sort out her feelings and deal with her grief and anger now. Suggest that she write a letter to her daughter—a letter that she will never give her and, in fact, that she will destroy when she is ready to do so. In this letter she can express all her feelings of anger, disappointment, and sadness.

Invite her to grieve for her grandchild and write a letter to her grandchild, saying all the things her grandmother's heart now longs to say. Encourage her to make or purchase something as a memorial for this lost child. No one else has to know about this. If she is responsible for forcing her daughter to have an abortion, she will need to seek forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and also directly from her daughter. Suggest that she have a Mass said for the intention of her grandchild, the parents of her grandchild, and the healing of the family.

When her daughter is ready to seek her own healing, she will now be able to be present to her daughter because she has already begun to deal with her own issues and feelings.

Grandfathers—like fathers of aborted children—experience different reactions following their daughter's abortion, or son's involvement in abortion, depending on the role they played in the abortion decision.

If the grandfather is pro-life or would have otherwise opposed the abortion, yet was unaware of it until afterward, he may struggle with ambivalent feelings toward his own child and the child's partner. A grandfather may continue to question why his child either did not come to him for help or did not follow his advice. Such a grandfather can benefit from the same steps detailed in the section on ministering to men who have been hurt by abortion (beginning on page 33): discussing his story, seeking forgiveness, naming the grandson or granddaughter, and praying for the healing of all involved in the abortion decision. A grandfather who is pro-life may devote tremendous energy to pro-life efforts to end abortion. Pro-life work can be fine, as long as there is not an unhealthy or imbalanced need to be involved.

In contrast, the grandfather who forced the abortion on his daughter, because the pregnancy was an embarrassment to him, may have great difficulty coming to terms with the loss. He may be inclined to be narcissistic, tending habitually to exert power over others to get them to conform to his wishes. He may feel unable to ask forgiveness from his daughter and may feel unable to take even the first step in healing. With the patient support of his family members seeking to bring about true reconciliation with each other, and with God's grace, even these grandfathers may find the humility to ask forgiveness and to forgive in turn.

Abortion Survivors and Siblings of Aborted Children

Individuals who have themselves survived a failed abortion as a child in the womb may struggle with profound questions throughout their lives. They may have a diminished sense of self-worth and may attempt suicide.

Some individuals may have lost a twin in a failed abortion procedure and may bear deep psychological wounds from this loss. Some individuals may have lost several siblings to abortion. When given permission, these individuals will grieve deeply for their lost siblings. This is becoming more common

now with *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) pregnancies, where a group of children survive implantation and some are subsequently “selectively reduced” to improve the survival chances of the rest of the siblings.

Those who have lost siblings to abortion may be more likely to have an abortion themselves.

The surviving children of earlier or later pregnancies in a family may exhibit survivor syndrome similar to that seen in children who lose a sibling to cancer or accidental death. They may struggle with being “replacement children” or “chosen children.” These children often have impossibly high expectations placed upon them for achievement. They may be objectified by the parent, pressured to become “the replacement” and not unique children in their own right.

Often they experience a lack of proper bonding with their mother, or their relationship with their mother changed after her abortion. Sometimes a wounded parent, in a fit of rage, will say something like “I should have aborted you instead of that other one!”

Some children sense that someone is missing in the family system. From conversations overheard or intuition, children may surprisingly perceive a family loss.

Ministering to Abortion Survivors and Siblings

These deep wounds require exploring and healing. There may be rage toward the mother who tried to abort them or defense of her right to choose to abort them. There may be survivor guilt that a twin or sibling was lost, while they survived.

Listen to them and acknowledge the loss they feel. Having someone they can talk to helps a great deal. Affirm for them how much God wanted them to exist. Encourage them to forgive their parents and all involved in the abortion decision. They could participate in a Mass for their lost sibling and for the healing of their parents. Explain to them that in the Communion of Saints we are still spiritually connected to deceased family members and that they are powerful intercessors for us. Invite them to write a letter to the lost child and say all that they have been carrying in their hearts. Encourage them to find a way to memorialize their lost family member.

Extended Family Members and Friends

Aunts and uncles of the aborted child may know about the abortion. They may have questions about how to facilitate the mother’s healing, in addition to having their own need to grieve for the lost child. They need to work through their own feelings, which may include sadness, anger, and guilt if they had known about the pregnancy and had not tried to stop the abortion. Even cousins of the aborted child are sometimes aware that there is a person missing from the extended family. Grieving seems to be most pronounced in those who are closest in age to the lost child.

Often it is the friends of the pregnant couple who are consulted and drawn into the web of the abortion decision. They may support it or reject it, but they will be the first ones to observe changes in the behavior of their friends. They may seek help in understanding what has happened to their friends.

Ministering to Extended Family Members and Friends

Relatives and friends may have found out about the abortion, whether before it happened or afterward. They carry sadness and concern for the parents of the child as well as a sense of loss of the child. Encourage them to pray for the parents and to try to continue loving the parents unconditionally while

they are healing. This makes it possible for the person who was involved in the abortion to eventually be able to speak about it without fear of condemnation and judgment.

If they have heard about the abortion from a third party, encourage them to respect confidentiality, even in their zeal to help the parents heal.

Praying for those hurt by abortion may be the most effective outreach. While family members and friends cannot force healing in a person who isn't ready, they may be able to *casually* share information about post-abortion healing and point them to local resources in a conversational manner, or even just inform them that they have just read something about grief following an abortion and how they didn't realize abortion can cause emotional injuries.

Family members and friends can be invited to have a Mass said for the healing of all those involved. Also invite them to write a letter to the lost child and say all the things they long to say. These lost children, as members of the Communion of Saints, can be powerful intercessors for their parents, siblings, and the rest of the family.

Abortion Providers

Abortion providers—including doctors, nurses, receptionists, and clerical staff—experience a great deal of stress in their jobs. Seminars in stress management are often offered at their annual meetings. Many abortion providers struggle with alcoholism, divorce, and accidents. Many who work in the field have their own abortion histories.

Ministering to Abortion Providers

If abortion providers come seeking help, it may be for their own abortion first. They should be welcomed with gentleness. Respond only to the issues they bring up. Those responding must not be overbearing in addressing the work of the abortion provider. Often involvement in the abortion business is a way of coping with their own abortion experiences. As they heal their loss, the reality of their daily involvement in the tragedy of abortion comes to them, and they will usually leave the abortion business. The greatest gift we can offer is unconditional love to those seeking help and the recognition that abortion has profoundly scarred their lives.

The Society of Centurions of America was founded by Dr. Philip Ney as a support group for former abortion providers. (For more information, see the "Recommended Resources" section.)