

Cultivating Health After Abortion

I just want to forget this ever happened.
What's wrong with that?

Like any event of grieving, abortion raises many feelings. The following are reactions you might experience. A rite can help you avoid getting stuck at an unpleasant stage for too long. The whole emphasis to move on and lead your day-to-day life is such a strong impulse for us, but it's crucial to process our feelings around the abortion before we can let it go. This incomplete list of activities, corresponding to the complexes of emotion and the sets of questions, comprises the skeleton of a rite, a funeral of sorts, that can form part of the process to arc you through this painful transformation.

Emotional Reactions	Questions to Activate Healing	Samples of Ritual Activities
Emotional numbing and partial memory loss protect you from having to cope with the overwhelming nature of this event. This can last for days, weeks, or even years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What do you remember about the abortion? * What made you finally decide to have one? * How will you mark it? * Who will be willing to attend? 	Write or talk about the experience. Begin to document the details so it can become real and objective. Collect objects and supports needed to enact the rite...
Intense rage and anger at your partner, friends, family, yourself, your body, your faulty birth control, at having to make this decision, or at life in general is common.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How has your partner made you angry? Family? Friends? * What have you done to enrage yourself? * What did the circumstances do to you? 	To tap into anger, shred bed sheets or receiving blankets, break eggs, write out what angers you or secret fantasies around having a baby and burn them or flush them...
Guilt, shame, and remorse follow decisions like this. Unresolved, they can result in self-destructive behaviours and can prevent grieving from taking place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What is it about abortion that inspires guilt? * How can you be relieved of this feeling? * Can you apologize for it? * Can you confess the decision? 	To make the event tangible and feel <i>real</i> , create a symbol of a baby to apologize to, perhaps out of clay, rolled up blankets, a teddy bear dressed in child's clothing...
Expect grief, sadness, loss, and despair at what could have been but will never be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * What ideas did you have about this potential baby? * What might you miss about it? 	To help comfort yourself, hold and clutch the baby symbol, sing to it, rock it...
Forgiveness of yourself and others around you and acceptance of the abortion as part of your life's journey are key to healthiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How will you forgive yourself and others? * What will it take to accept this situation? * Can you say good-bye? 	Release the baby symbol in a meaningful way, maybe into a casket to be buried, on a raft to be floated away, on a pyre to be ceremonially burned...
Renewal and increased participation in life will come in time, though some grief may always exist quietly in the background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How have you grown out of all this? * What can you do now that you couldn't if you had continued this pregnancy? 	Celebrate life, plant a tree, blow bubbles, fly a kite.... Choose something from the rite to keep in order to remember that grief can be a lifelong process.

"Once I accept the existence of dying as a life process, who can ever have power over me again!"

~ Audre Lorde

"The one way to make bereavement tolerable is to make it important. To gather your friends, to have a gloomy festival, to talk, to cry, to praise the dead. It is a nameless torture to try to treat it as something private and casual."

~ G. K. Chesterton

"To perform a ritual in the face of chaos is to restore order to the world."

~ Robbie Davis-Floyd