

Who Can Use Ritual Healing?

I chose to get my abortion experience over with—behind me.
I failed.

— one man's reaction to his abortion experience

It's crucial for us, women and men, to grieve this loss or it may start to affect us beyond our control: through depression, over-drinking or eating, getting pregnant again immediately, crying upon seeing a pregnant woman....

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

— Audre Lorde, poet, essayist

You deserve compassion and empathy. Choosing this path, makes you no less deserving of time to grieve and heal from a very difficult situation in your life.

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, author

Rituals help heal through words, actions and symbols that have personal meaning to you. Rituals recognize the event as significant. The actions and symbols in a rite can carry that recognition to the depths of your being.

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

— Robbie Davis-Floyd, anthropologist and author

Some Useful Resources

The New Our Bodies Ourselves by The Boston Women's Health Book Collective
(Toronto: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1992)

In Necessity and Sorrow by M. Denes
(New York: Basic Books, 1968)

The Healing Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery after an Abortion
by Candace DePuy & Dana Dovitch
(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996)

The Cider House Rules by John Irving
(Toronto: Random House, 1985)

Unspeakable Losses by Kim Kluger-Bell
(New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998)

Liquid Life by William LaFleur
(New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Soul Crisis: One Woman's Journey through Abortion by Sue Nathanson
(New York: Signet, 1990)

Men and Abortion: Lessons, Losses and Love by Arthur Shostak & Gary McLouth
(Toronto: Praeger Special Studies, 1984)

Women in Transition - a post-abortion support group on the web:
<http://www.wits.org>

pamphlet created by Marie Snyder - please copy at will

Cultivating Health After Abortion: Using ritual to heal ourselves

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



What are some common emotional reactions to abortion?

Who can use ritual healing?



What kinds of questions can help activate healing?



What are effective ritual activities?



What resources are out there?

Emotional Reactions to Abortion:

Like any grieving, abortion loss 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.

- Kim Kluger-Bell, Psychotherapist

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.

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.

Guilt, shame and **remorse** follow decisions like this. Unresolved, they can result in self-destructive behaviours and can prevent grieving from taking place.

Expect **grief, sadness, loss, and despair** at what could have been but will never be.

Forgiveness of yourself and others around you and **acceptance** of the abortion as part of your life's journey are key to healthiness.

Renewal and increased participation in life will come in time, though some grief may always exist quietly in the background.

Questions to Activate Healing:

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.

- Kim Kluger-Bell, psychotherapist

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- 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 help or attend?
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- How has your partner made you angry?
 - Your family and friends?
 - What have you done to enrage yourself?
 - What did the circumstances do to you?
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- What is it about abortion that inspires guilt?
 - How can you be relieved of this feeling?
 - Can you apologize to the unborn?
 - Can you confess the decision, the act?
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- What ideas did you have about the baby?
 - What will you miss not ever having?
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- How will you forgive yourself and others?
 - What will it take to accept this situation?
 - Can you say good-bye to this baby?
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- How have you grown out of all this?
 - What can you do now that you couldn't if you had continued this pregnancy?
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Samples of Ritual Activities:

This incomplete list of activities, corresponding to the complexes of emotion and the sets of questions, comprises a single rite, a funeral of sorts, that can form part of the process that can arc you through this painful transformation.

Write or talk about the experience. Begin to document the details so it can all become real to you again. Collect objects and supports needed to enact the rite ...

To tap into your anger, you might **shred** bedsheets or receiving blankets, **break** eggs, write out your secret fantasies around having a baby and burn them ...

To make the event tangible and real, **create** a symbol of a baby to apologize to, perhaps out of clay, rolled up blankets, a teddy bear dressed up in child's clothing ...

To help comfort yourself, **hold and clutch** the baby symbol, sing to it ...

Release the baby symbol in a meaningful way, maybe into a casket to be buried, on a raft to be floated away ...

Celebrate life, plant a tree, blow bubbles, fly a kite, choose something from the rite to keep to remember that grief is a process ...