



CAN RELATIONSHIPS SURVIVE AFTER ABORTION?

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Many women choose abortion in an effort to save their relationship or "keep" a boyfriend from leaving.

Sometimes this choice is the result of an outright threat of abandonment if the woman won't "do the right thing" and abort. Other times, the pressure is more subtle: "It's your decision, but..."

Unfortunately, all the evidence shows that abortion to "save a relationship" almost never works. Most relationships between unmarried couples come apart shortly after an abortion. Others survive only because the partners are still bound together by grief. These relationships often turn into prolonged, mutually destructive mourning rituals. Even married couples are often driven apart by an abortion unless they can find a way to complete the grieving process together.

Abortion breeds anger, resentment, and bitterness toward the partner who was not supportive or who ignored their partner's desire to keep the baby.

At the same time, there is often tremendous pressure in the relationship to conceal one's true feelings of grief or guilt. This can especially be a problem for men, who are often taught to hide their emotions. Men may also feel obligated to appear "strong" so as not to upset the woman any further.

Men can be affected by abortion in many of the same ways as women. Many men have reported post-abortion problems such as feelings of grief, helplessness and guilt; sexual dysfunction; substance abuse; self-hatred; fear of relationships; risk-taking and suicidal behavior; depression; greater tendencies toward becoming angry and violent; and a sense of lost manhood.

When either women or men carry the emotional baggage of an unresolved abortion into a subsequent relationship, it can cause trouble in subtle and even dramatic ways.

This is especially a problem when they keep the abortion a secret from their spouses, who are then unable to understand their emotional cycles. The distortions in behavior that result when spouses keep secrets from each other can be devastating to a marriage.

At the very least, the "need" to keep a past abortion secret prevents couples from giving and receiving unconditional love. This deprives the relationship of the opportunity to reach its full potential.

It is no coincidence that the abortion rate and the domestic violence rate have risen almost side by side. Abortion, for both women and men, is associated with self-hatred, self-punishing behavior, and an increased tendency to act out anger and rage toward others.

A woman who is self-destructive or suicidal, but afraid to deliberately harm herself, may be more likely to become involved with a violent man. A violent relationship may allow her both to express her own rage and to experience what she unconsciously feels is the "punishment I deserve." Because of self-hatred and low self-esteem, she may remain in the relationship because she thinks she doesn't deserve anything better.

Certainly, there are many other causes of domestic violence. But substantial statistical evidence and many case studies show that abortion is contributing to this national tragedy.

Until these women and men are provided with an environment that promotes post-abortion healing, they are likely to remain trapped in these cycles of violence.

Dr. Theresa Karminski Burke is a psychotherapist and founder of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries. Supporting citations are posted at www.afterabortion.org

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM POST-ABORTION STRESS?

Q1: Do you find yourself struggling to turn off feelings or memories related to your abortion(s)? Do you need to keep reminding yourself to just forget it or put it behind you?

Do you become uncomfortable around reminders of the abortion, such as being around babies or pregnant women, being in a doctor's office, or when hearing news reports about abortion?

Q2: Do you feel nervous or anxious at the idea of telling a loved one about your abor-

tion? Is your abortion a secret that is holding you back from greater intimacy with others?

When you do choose to share your abortion experience with others, are you overcome with strong feelings such as anger, grief, or guilt?

Is there an increased distance between you and your parents, siblings, or partner because of the past abortion(s)?

Q3: Do you have trouble talking about the abortion issue as a political issue? When you

do talk about it, do you find it hard to respect opposing views, or do you become overly emotional, either in support of or in opposition to it?

Q4: Do you tend to look at life in terms of "before" and "after" the abortion(s)? Are there traits about your "self" before the abortion that you lost but would wish to regain?

Has the abortion changed the way you look at yourself?

Have you lost interest in taking care of

yourself? Have you tried to become less attractive to avoid the risk of becoming involved in a relationship, love, and sex?

Q5: Do you become angry or depressed more easily?

Have you experienced "reconnectors" to your abortion, such as nightmares, flashbacks, or hallucinations, such as hearing a baby cry?

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