"Getting over" an abortion

Dear Alice,

I had an abortion almost a year ago and I have pretty much recovered emotionally from it, but every so often, I have "relapses," I become very upset for an hour or so and withdraw from the world. I in no way regret my decision?I did what I had to do?but it still upsets me. What advice do you have for me that will help me to get entirely over the abortion?

?Downhearted but Hopeful

Answer

Dear Downhearted but Hopeful,

You are certainly being courageous in your efforts to process your abortion, and rest assured, your emotional experiences are one hundred percent normal. Just like the physical aspects of abortion, emotions felt before, during, and after an abortion are unique to the women who experience them.

There is much debate about the psychological side effects of abortion. In a nutshell, they are not at all clear or consistent across all women's experiences. Each woman's emotional response may vary depending on other circumstances in her life, her reasons for choosing to abort a pregnancy, and surrounding influences in that decision, like a sexual partner. Negative emotions about an abortion can happen at any stage: in the decision-making process, during the abortion, and for any length of time following the procedure. They may come in waves, becoming stronger at moments and dissipating at others. These emotions may seem to be happening out of the blue, or at a time that reminds you of the abortion or your decision to have one, like the anniversary of the procedure itself or when the pregnancy was conceived.

Keep in mind that there is no emotional stopwatch that says you should be "over" an abortion by any certain time. The feelings may never go away completely, but certainly as more time passes, your feelings should lessen in intensity and frequency. You may want to ask yourself why you think you are having these recurrent emotional episodes, and explore any underlying or unresolved issues you feel may be in the background of the event somewhere for you.

After any major personal decision, it is completely natural to re-examine our actions with a fine-tooth comb, and part of that may include sorting through residual feelings about your necessary decision. For more information about the range of emotions women experience in
their decision to have an abortion, check out Planned Parenthood's online information section called "Thinking About Abortion".

Even negative emotions can be teaching tools. Talking with a close friend or relative, journaling, or talking with an abortion counselor are all good ways to continue working through what you've experienced. It's never too late to speak with someone about post-abortion emotions you may be having. Many women use Exhale, an after-abortion talk-line to sort out the range of emotions following an abortion. Their services are also available through their toll free line, 1-866-4-EXHALE. If you find that even after these attempts to make peace with your abortion leave you wanting more support, you may want to talk with a therapist.

Having an abortion can be part of the normal reproductive lives of many women and girls. Applause for your tenacity in paying close attention to your emotions and knowing yourself more completely as a result of this experience.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health
Blues & Depression

Related questions
Feelings after miscarriage
The abortion pill (mifepristone)
Finding low-cost counseling
Why can't a woman have sex for a few weeks after an abortion?
Does having an abortion hurt?
Legit reasons to go to therapy/counseling?

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
Published date: Oct 01, 1994
Last reviewed on: Feb 25, 2013
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/getting-over-abortion

Links