

Can We Talk About It? **by Michaelene Fredenburg**

At current abortion rates, it is estimated that one in three women in the United States will have had an abortion by age forty-five. But it isn't just women who are affected: The list includes spouses, partners, children, other family members, and friends. In fact, it is becoming rare *not* to know someone who has had an abortion.

Regardless of whether or not a person's family members or friends were directly involved in the abortion decision, they are still touched by it.

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings are left grappling with the loss of a family member – a loss that isn't openly acknowledged. They may also be disturbed by the emotional fallout they observe in the woman or in the father of the baby.

They often feel helpless and confused. How do you grieve a loss that isn't acknowledged by our culture? How do you reach out to someone you love without causing more pain?

Secret Pain

Often, even without our knowing it, people may be interpreting our words and actions through a screen of painful personal experiences. So when the topic of abortion comes up, bear in mind that the person you are speaking to may have been impacted by abortion. If this is true, their first need is for healing. This is why it helps to understand something about reproductive grief.

It's normal to grieve after any pregnancy loss, whether it is caused by miscarriage, stillbirth, adoption, infertility, or abortion. Most of us know someone who has suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage. The loss suffered in an abortion is similar, except for two important distinguishing factors: First, the loss is chosen, often after succumbing to pressure from others; second, the abortion is typically kept a secret.

Talking is an important part of grieving a loss like this. But people who are carrying the burden of a past abortion—either their own or someone else's—often feel that they're the only ones having a difficult reaction. Their sense of isolation keeps them from reaching out to others.

Sometimes they encounter pro-life people who condemn them, and pro-choice people who deny their feelings. Finding no safe place to deal with their troubling emotions, they may choose to repress or numb them in order to cope. And even when they want to talk about their experiences, well-meaning family and friends often urge them to simply move on with their lives and "forget about it." Thus, abortion can cause emotional scars with lifelong effects.



How You Can Help

Be alert to this need for healing. And if you discover that you are indeed speaking with someone who has been touched by abortion, offer to connect them with healing resources and to support them through the process.

Because abortion is rarely talked about, it's normal for people to be confused about what to do or say. Here are some things to keep in mind if a friend or family member approaches you about their abortion experience:

- **Pray:** Immerse every encounter and conversation in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, to open hearts, and to communicate His truth, love, and grace through you.
- **Listen:** Ask questions to clarify if needed, but resist the inclination to "fix" your loved one and never minimize their experience.
- **Keep it Confidential:** Keep in mind that each abortion impacts many people. It's important to protect the confidentiality of all who are touched by an abortion.
- **Be Honest:** If you cannot provide the support your friend needs, or if their grief is more complicated than you can address, say so. Help them to find support groups or professional counseling and offer to watch their children or offer transportation while they go to get the help they need.
- **Don't Force Healing:** Each person's timeline for healing is unique and varied. Healing is unpredictable – it shouldn't be forced or interrupted. Be available when your friend is ready to begin or to continue healing.

By communicating sensitively and compassionately, we can be a source of healing and understanding. We can bring the love of Jesus to those we love.