



Post Abortion Emotional Health

The National Coalition of Abortion Providers trusts women to understand the complex nature of abortion and supports their ability to make this difficult, moral decision for themselves. We also understand that deciding whether or not to bring a child into the world is a decision about a woman's future and, whatever the outcome, it is normal to have a wide range of feelings during this process.

Opponents of legal abortion have claimed for years that most women who choose abortion suffer from so-called "Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome" (PASS), despite the fact that neither the American Psychiatric Association nor the American Psychological Association recognizes PASS as an official syndrome or diagnosis. Even former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, an acknowledged opponent of abortion, concluded in 1989 that "severe psychological reactions after abortion are infrequent and miniscule from a public health perspective." More recent studies reflect similar findings.

The reality is that the majority of women feel a sense of relief after their abortion and do not suffer any lasting negative emotional effects of any kind. Indeed, many find the decision-making process somewhat empowering. Resolving the issues posed by an unplanned pregnancy requires courage and may become a defining moment in a woman's life. It may be the first decision she has ever made on her own. It may be the first time she has taken responsibility for her own life and her future. Many women seeking abortions are already parents and are motivated by a positive desire to meet their existing parental responsibilities. Whatever decision women ultimately reach, many report a sense of empowerment for having reached an honorable decision in good conscience.

It is also our experience, however, that some women experience difficulties coping with their decision to have an abortion. The process can lead to feelings of guilt, conflict, apprehension or anxiety prior to the abortion, feelings which may linger after the pregnancy is terminated. For some women, it can even be a very disturbing or tragic event.

NCAP members continually strive to help women by providing compassionate medical care, expert knowledge, and emotional support within the limits of their practice. We also know that the best predictor of a woman's emotional well-being after an abortion is her emotional well-being prior to the abortion. That is why we would like each woman to have a supportive, non-judgmental environment that allows each woman to explore her feelings regarding her abortion decision. Using a variety of supportive counseling techniques, we explain to women all of their options, help them understand and achieve confidence in their own judgment, and address any circumstances that could be detrimental to their long-term well-being. For those women who need more help, NCAP members endorse a variety of approaches, including self-help materials, counseling, help lines, therapy, and referrals to sympathetic clergy. In addition, counseling materials and trainings are available to our member clinics to assist their staff in this process.

NCAP members acknowledge the wide diversity of reactions to abortion, but to suggest the existence of a prevalent "post abortion stress syndrome" is simply playing politics with this difficult issue. We elect to spend our energies working hard to reduce the abortion stigma so women can make this very moral decision in a supportive environment free from judgment.