

Possible symptoms of Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome

The symptoms of **post abortion syndrome** will not necessarily appear at the same time, nor is it likely that any woman will experience the entire list. Some may occur immediately after an abortion and others much later. If you can identify with more than two of these symptoms, it could be that you are experiencing post-abortion syndrome.

Below are the symptoms that describe post-abortion syndrome, as described by Dr. Paul and Teri Reisser in their book, *Help for the Post-Abortive Woman* (now entitled *A Solitary Sorrow*):

1. Guilt. Guilt is what an individual feels when she has violated her own moral code.

2. Anxiety. Anxiety is defined as an unpleasant emotional and physical state of uneasiness that may take the form of tension, (inability to relax, irritability, etc.), physical responses (dizziness, pounding heart, upset stomach, headaches, etc.), worry about the future, difficulty concentrating and disturbed sleep.

3. Psychological "numbing." Many post-abortive women maintain a secret vow that they will never again allow themselves to be put in such a vulnerable position. As a result, often without conscious thought, they may work hard to keep their emotions in tight check, preventing themselves from feeling the pain of what has happened.

4. Depression and thoughts of suicide. All of us experience depression from time to time, but the following forms of it are certainly common in women who have experienced abortion:

- *Sad mood*--ranging from feelings of melancholy to total hopelessness.
- *Sudden and uncontrollable crying episodes*--the source of which appear to be a total mystery.
- *Deterioration of self-concept*-- Sleep, appetite, and sexual disturbances--usually in a pattern of insomnia, loss of appetite and/or reduced sex drive.
- *Reduced motivation*--for the normal activities of life. The things that occupied her life before the depression no longer seem worth doing.
- *Disruption in interpersonal relationships*--because of the general lack of enthusiasm for all activities. This is especially evidenced in her relationship with her husband or boyfriend, particularly if he was involved in the abortion decision.
- *Thoughts of suicide*--or preoccupation with death. Not surprisingly, in a study done by the Elliot Institute some 33% of post-abortive women surveyed reached a level of depression so deep that they would rather die than go on.

5. Anniversary syndrome. In the survey reference previously, some 54% of post-abortive women report an increase of post-abortion syndrome symptoms around the time of the anniversary of the abortion and/or the due date of the aborted child.

6. Re-experiencing the abortion. A very common event described by post-abortive women is the sudden distressing, recurring "flashbacks" of the abortion episode, often occurring during

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situations that resemble some aspect of the abortion, such as a routine gynecological exam, or even the sound of a vacuum cleaner's suction.

7. Preoccupation with becoming pregnant again. A significant percentage of women who abort become pregnant again within one year, and many others verbalize the desire to conceive again as quickly as possible. The new baby may represent an unconscious desire to replace the one that was aborted.

8. Anxiety over fertility and childbearing issues. A common post abortion syndrome symptom in women is a fear that they will never again become pregnant or be able to carry a pregnancy to term.

9. Interruption of the bonding process with present and/or future children. Fearing another devastating loss, a post-abortive woman may not allow herself to truly bond with other children.

10. Survival guilt. Most women do not abort for trivial reasons. They are usually in the midst of a heartbreaking situation whereby they stand to lose much if they choose to carry their pregnancies to term. But while the abortion frees them from their current trauma, it frequently produces in them an unrelenting guilt for choosing their own comfort over the life of the child.

11. Development of eating disorders. Some post-abortive women developed anorexia or bulimia.

12. Alcohol and drug abuse. Alcohol and drug use often serve initially as a form of self-medication--a way of coping with the pain of the abortion memories. Sadly, the woman who resorts to alcohol and/or drugs eventually finds herself having not only more problems but also fewer resources with which to solve them.

13. Other self-punishing or self-degrading behaviors. In addition to eating disorders and substance abuse, the post-abortive woman may also enter in abusive relationships, become promiscuous, and fail to take care of herself medically or deliberately hurt herself emotionally and/or physically.

14. Brief reactive psychosis. Rarely, a post-abortive woman may experience a brief psychotic episode for two weeks or less after her abortion. The break with reality and subsequent recovery are both extremely rapid, and in most cases the person returns completely to normal when it is over.

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