

H. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: **PASTORAL RESPONSE GUIDELINES**

H.3 ABORTION

PRAYER | PRAYER FOR TRUST: ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

*O Christ Jesus,
When all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness,
Give us the sense of Your presence, Your love, and Your strength.
Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love and strengthening power,
So that nothing may frighten or worry us, for, living close to You,
We shall see your hand Your purpose, Your will through all things.*

Amen.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note: A review of section G.1, G.2 and G.3 helps support appropriate communication

1. Students disclosing about abortion may include:
 - Students who have had an abortion.
 - Students thinking of having an abortion.
 - Students whose friend has had an abortion.
 - Students whose relative had an abortion or they suspect had an abortion.
 - Students whose mother had an abortion.
 - Students who experienced a school presentation or speaker on this topic.
 - Male student whose girlfriend has had an abortion.

2. Students' response to this topic may include symptoms of post abortion stress:
 - Excessive crying.
 - Inability to grieve/numbness.
 - Inability to stop thinking about it.
 - Lingering guilt.
 - Feeling compelled to conceal an abortion.
 - Experiencing disturbing thoughts about babies and abortion.

- Believing she is unworthy.
- Avoiding relationships or struggling with intimacy.
- Reacting physically and emotionally when abortion is mentioned.
- Anxiety over fertility or childbearing issues.
- Alcohol and drug abuse.
- Engaging in self-destructive behavior.
- Having thoughts of suicide.
- Dealing with direct or indirect grief which may be recent or very long lived.

CHURCH TEACHING

In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Blessed John Paul II writes, [In] firmly rejecting “pro-choice” it is necessary to become courageously “pro-woman,” promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone. The experiences of many counseling centers show that the woman does not want to suppress the life of the child she carries within her. If she is supported in this attitude, and if at the same time she is freed from the intimidation of those around her, then she is even capable of heroism. As I have said, numerous counseling centers are witness to this.”

(John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1994, pp. 206-207)

“God alone is Lord over life and death. Not even “my” life belongs to me. Every child, from the moment of conception on, has a right to life. From his earliest beginnings an unborn human being is a separate person, and no one can infringe upon his rights not the State, not the doctor, and not even the mother or father. The Church’s clarity about this is not a lack of compassion; she means, rather, to point out the irreparable harm that is inflicted on the child who is killed in abortion and on his parents and on society as a whole.”

Youcat # 383

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth” (CCC 2270).

Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:

You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.
(CCC 2271)

“We need to bring the Gospel of life to the heart of every man and woman and to make it permeate every part of society.” John Paul II *Evangelium Viate*, 80, 1995.

CASE STUDIES

Note: The following Case Studies and Personal Story could be discussed during a staff in-service.

ABORTION

SITUATION #1

Pia is a bit of a class busybody. After the Respect Life Club meeting, she pulls the sponsor teacher aside. She tells him that she knows that someone in her grade 12 class who is pregnant and is wanting to have an abortion. She says that she needs advice as to what she should say/do. When the teacher asked her for a name she says that she isn't comfortable saying who it is.

SITUATION #2

Tessa is involved with Campus Ministry. She's in grade 11 and helps after school with sandwich making and odd jobs. One day she got into a conversation with a few students about the Respect Life Club and how she's not that interested in joining. The Campus Ministry Coordinator thought that was strange and asked her why she wasn't interested. She looked away and after some time admitted that she wasn't proud of what she had done. She said that she understood that what she did was wrong, but she had already had two abortions.

SITUATION #3

Isabel is a grade 8 student who seems to have changed lately. In the past, she's always had her homework done and was on top of things. Lately she's seemed down and withdrawn. Mrs. White is her Social Studies teacher and has been worried about her. After class she pulled Isabel aside to ask her about how she was doing. Mrs. White told Peg that she'd noticed a difference lately and had been wondering if Isabel needs to talk to someone about how she was feeling. Isabel was surprised that someone had noticed her and started to cry. Mrs. White gave her a tissue and just waited. Finally Isabel shared that two weeks ago she was forced into having sex with an older boy. She feels horrible and is worried that she is pregnant. Another student told her to take the "morning after pill," but she hadn't.

PERSONAL STORY

ALEXIA'S STORY

When I was 17, I found out I was pregnant. When I told my boyfriend of thirteen months, he was stunned. He told me to go to a doctor to make sure the home pregnancy test result was right. I went to a walk-in clinic and their test confirmed I was pregnant. My boyfriend and I talked about our options. He told me he'd go along with whatever I decided.

Moment by moment I changed my mind. Sometimes I thought about being a mom and even considered buying a crib. The next minute I was certain I'd be a terrible mother.

A couple weeks later, my boyfriend asked me to marry him. I still wasn't sure what to do about the pregnancy; I made an appointment to have an abortion.

At the clinic they told me that what I was carrying wasn't a baby yet. They informed me giving birth was more dangerous than an abortion. I chose to be given general anesthesia. When I woke up, I knew I was no longer pregnant.

Four months after my abortion, I got drunk. I locked the bathroom door and cut myself. Then I dipped my index finger in my blood and wrote, "I killed my baby" on the bathroom wall. I passed out.

After my abortion I couldn't stand seeing children and mothers playing together. Listening to people talk about pro-life or pro-choice issues angered me. I continued to embrace the pro-choice movement for many years after having the abortion. However, I didn't want to talk or hear about it. I also started feeling angry when people talked about their babies or showed me pictures of their children. I kept thinking, "I wish they'd just shut-up and leave me alone!"

After a time of deep prayer, guilt, regret, and remorse surfaced. I began to think about the age my baby would have been, had not I aborted him/her. One day in church, the homily opened my heart. At first I worried what other Catholics would think if they knew what I'd done. Would they reject and condemn me? Would I be able to find the courage to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? The church had literature on post-abortion counseling. I sought help.

My abortion changed my life in ways that were very negative and destructive. First, it destroyed a living human being within my womb, a human being which I now know was a blessing from God. Second, my decision hurt the baby's father.

The good news is that I found forgiveness, reconciliation and began the healing process through prayer, sacramental counseling. God gave me the strength to face my choice. I turned to Christ and asked him to lift the heavy burden from me. He answered my prayer. God's grace and love freed me to confess what I had done, know that He'd forgiven me, and I was able to forgive myself. Because of this renewed hope, I've been able to talk with and console others who have had abortions or are in crises pregnancies. I'm still in the process of healing, and this will probably continue throughout my life.

I will always regret my abortion. But God's truth has truly set me free from the shackles of despair, and has given me a sense of peace and joy that knows no limits.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS - RESPONDING IN FAITH

- 1.** Listen patiently to everything she has to say. Expect and allow her to repeat herself and to bring the subject up again later.
- 2.** Emphasize that the Church teaches forgiveness. The unborn are commended to God's infinite mercy.
- 3.** Express your support and concern. Some girls may have a fear of punishment from family, peers, the Church, and their aborted child. Try to mitigate their fears.
- 4.** Reassure her that her feelings are normal. Others have experienced an abortion and found healing.
- 5.** Assure her that having an abortion does not condemn her to not being a good parent in the future.
- 6.** Be sensitive to specific cultural beliefs and superstitions (e.g. haunting, damnation, etc.)
- 7.** Recognize that others may have been directly or indirectly involved in the abortion.
- 8.** Acknowledge her pain, any other issues that may have been involved, and the tragic loss of her child. Acknowledge that it is a personal tragedy that may take a long time to absorb and to heal. Remind her that you are there for her.
- 9.** Encourage her to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, followed by prayer and Holy Communion.
- 10.** Acknowledge that she has lost a child; do not minimize or deny the loss.
- 11.** DO NOT presume that it was a wanted abortion. Do not encourage her to blame others, but do not push her to forgive others, especially since she may ready yet. Each individual's situation and process will vary widely.
- 12.** Before she leaves, try to determine if there needs to practical medical follow-up and direct her to such. Encourage her to seek out the help of post-abortion counselors.
- 13.** With the student's permission, inform your counselor/administrator about the situation. Be sure to follow up with the student or have the counselor follow up.

SUPPORTING A WOMAN WHO HAS HAD AN ABORTION

- Acknowledge her feelings of loss and grief:
"It must be very hard for you to have been grieving this loss by yourself for so long."
- Try not to show any feelings of negativity or shock that may make her feel judged. Try to understand how it was for her at the time she made this decision. "You must have felt really scared/overwhelmed/unsupported."
- The worst advice you can give a woman is to say to her to put it behind her and disqualify or invalidate how she feels about it. Let her know that there are people she can talk to who can help her work through her grief.
- Forgiveness is available. *"How could anybody love me again after what I have done?"* Some will need to be reminded of God's mercy. There are no unforgiveable sins; God wants to forgive us.
- Many women carry their guilt and shame for many years, sometimes decades, believing they are unworthy of good things or even of being loved. It is important that you tell her that forgiveness and healing are available, that there are people who understand her circumstances then and her grief now. "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7).
- Another healthy practice is that of writing a letter to the child, asking forgiveness, expressing grief, and love, and looking forward to eventual reunion in the life to come.

RESOURCES

After Abortion

<http://www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/howtohelp.pdf>

Birthright

<http://www.Birthright.org>

Catholic Organization for Life and Family (CCCB)

<http://www.afterabortion.org/churchawarenessproject/howtohelp.pdf>

Online Care

<http://www.Onlinecare.ca>

Project Rachel

<http://www.hopeafterabortion.com>

Signal Hill

<http://www.TheSignalHill.org>

Watch the video link(s) below with the student or watch them prior and refer to them during your discussion.

Abortion Recovery

<http://abortionrecovery.org/recoveryresources/watchourvideo/tabid/185/Default.aspx>

Rachel's Vineyard

<http://www.youtube.com/user/rachelsvineyard>

CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTRES – LOWER MAINLAND

Vancouver and Richmond: 604 731 1122 <http://www.optionscentre.ca>

Burnaby: 604 525 0999 <http://www.optionscentre.ca>

Surrey: 604 584 4490 <http://www.pregnancyoptionscentre.com>

Fraser Valley: 604 858 9151 <http://www.fvpc.ca>