

# Call Exhale

to talk freely about your  
experience with abortion.

## 1-866-4-exhale

1-866-4 394253

Monday – Friday  
5 p.m. – 10 p.m. PST

Saturday – Sunday  
12 p.m. – 10 p.m. PST

Additional languages are available.  
Nuestro servicio está disponible en español.

## We're here to listen.

### MISSION STATEMENT

Exhale creates a social climate where each person's unique experience with abortion is supported, respected and free from stigma. Exhale provides services, training and education to empower individuals, families and communities to achieve post-abortion health and well-being.



an after-abortion counseling talkline

484 Lake Park Avenue #63  
Oakland, CA 94610

- 📞 510-446-7900
- 📞 309-410-1127
- ✉ info@4exhale.org
- 🌐 www.4exhale.org

### TALKLINE

Toll-free: 1-866-4 EXHALE  
Toll-calls: 1-510-446-7977

# If someone you care about had an abortion

... support and respect are  
just a phone call away



If you are reading this pamphlet chances are you have a friend, family member, or a loved one who has had an abortion. Whether the abortion occurred yesterday or years ago, and whether or not you were directly involved in the decision-making process, it is possible to give and get support.

Supporting a loved one through an abortion experience can feel isolating and you may have some questions about what's going on. We hope this brochure will be useful in helping you find what you need.

**Abortion is a common experience** for women and girls, worldwide.

You are not alone in your experience. Lots of women have abortions: women of all races, religions, and sexual orientations and a wide range of ages, education and income. Abortion is one of the most commonly performed gynecological procedures in the United States, where about 1.3 million abortions are performed annually. Women have abortions for a number of different reasons and, while many women's reasons are similar, each person's experience is unique.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- Over 1/3 of women in the U.S. will have an abortion by age 45.
- Women of all ages, races, economic backgrounds, and religious beliefs have abortions.
- Over one million abortions occur in the United States every year.
- The lifetime average is about 1 abortion per woman, worldwide.

\*Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2003.

You will have feelings after the abortion and your feelings may be different from hers. Significant others can feel love, care, pride, relief and hope for the future. Some also feel anxiety, a sense of failure, loss of control, guilt, fear or anger. You may experience several of these feelings and they might differ from what you'd expected. That's normal. Your feelings may also change over time.

## Take care of yourself.

It's important to take care of yourself physically and mentally. Make sure to get enough sleep, eat complete meals and do the things you enjoy. Try not to depend on your loved one for support immediately after the abortion. It may take some time before she's able to take care of anyone but herself.

Give yourself permission to take as much time as you need to work through your own feelings about the abortion. There are many ways to do this. Talking to a trusted friend or family member can help relieve feelings of isolation and give you some perspective. Calling the Exhale talkline, writing, reading a book, listening to music, taking a walk or going to the gym can also be very helpful. What's important is that you find something that works for you, and that fits your life, beliefs and needs.

Friends, Husbands, Moms, Boyfriends,  
Partners, Sisters, Fathers, Cousins...

#### WHAT IS SHE FEELING?

It's normal for women and girls to experience a range of feelings after an abortion. Sadness, happiness, empowerment, anxiety, guilt, relief and grief are some of the emotions your loved one might feel. She may experience several feelings all at once – and her feelings may change over time. She may worry about how you are doing, wonder about her future or have religious concerns. She might feel confused about what she "should" be feeling. It's important for you both to know that there is no "right" way to feel after an abortion.

Reactions to an abortion often depend on one's personality, cultural traditions, religious practice or economic situation. Some women will be glad it's over and want to move on without ever mentioning it again. Others may withdraw and not be as emotionally available to consider your needs as usual. She may want to talk about it all the time, cry, watch TV, read or enjoy a good meal. Your relationship may not "get back to normal" right away; try to be patient with each other and yourself.

#### WHAT CAN I DO FOR HER?

Ask her. If she wants to talk, listen. If she wants to pray, give her room to pray. If she wants to be alone, it's OK to leave. Try to avoid judging statements and phrases like "you should," "why don't you?" or "what you really need is..." You don't need to have all the answers. Sometimes just being there — and being a loving presence — is enough. If you want more ideas about how to support her, feel free to call Exhale.

If the abortion was recent and you're an intimate partner, she cannot have intercourse for two weeks. Be sure to read and follow all the after-care guidelines from her abortion provider.

Last but not least, breathe! You're doing a great job. Your support during this time is the best gift you can give yourself and her.