



Caring for your Emotional-Wellbeing after a Termination of Pregnancy

Going through a procedure to terminate a pregnancy can be a stressful experience. This experience may be accompanied by many conflicting emotions, regardless of the reason behind the termination. The following includes information about possible reactions that you may have, what you can do, and professional support that you may find helpful.

Dealing with decisions and conflicting emotions

Arriving at this decision to terminate a pregnancy might have been a complex process with various considerations to factor in. Some of these considerations could include financial limitations, relationship status, and feelings of unpreparedness for parenthood, while needing to deal with initial emotional reactions about the pregnancy. For some women, conflicting emotions may also arise depending on the level of support received. Perhaps they may be feeling uncertain, coerced or even pressured to make this decision. While making this decision there may also have been more conflicts with partners or families.





Possible reactions after the procedure

After the procedure, one may experience some physical and emotional changes. The body will need to physically recover from the surgical procedure. At the same time, there will be a period of adjustment to the levels of hormones within the body, which can intensify emotional experiences. A range of emotions could arise. This includes relief, guilt, regret, self-blame, or grief. Often, there may be fears of judgement or blame associated with terminating the pregnancy, which can result in feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Some women also experience other distress symptoms that can affect their relationships, quality of life, how they feel about themselves, and how they function at work or school. These symptoms include:

Reliving the loss or termination procedure (e.g. nightmares, anniversary reactions)	Feelings of hopelessness
Avoidance of external (e.g. people, places, things) or internal (e.g. memories/thoughts, feelings) reminders of the loss or termination procedure	Possible fears of engaging in sexual intercourse or falling pregnant again
Sleep difficulties	Problems with concentration
Drastic mood changes (e.g. irritability, mood swings, chronic anxiety, depression)	Having thoughts, plans or attempts to end one's life or hurt oneself
Feelings of shame	





Coping with emotional reactions

Here are some tips to cope with the emotional reactions that one may experience after a termination of pregnancy:

•Be gentle with yourself

There is no fixed length of time for emotional recovery as it depends on each person and their situation. External and personal pressures to “get over it” may cause one to avoid or suppress their emotions, which may lead to more intense emotional reactions over time. Thus, recognising and acknowledging emotional reactions is a first step to feeling better.

•Speak to a trusted person

A close family member, friend or partner, can be a valuable source of support. Having someone to share one’s experience can relieve one’s emotional burdens and possibly help one see things from a different angle. This can also help one feel less isolated and alone on this journey.



Even with one’s best efforts to try to cope, sometimes fears of judgement and blame from others may prevent a woman from reaching out to family, friends or partner. In other instances, some may also feel pressured by those around to resume usual activities quickly, as others may hold different expectations of how quick the recovery process ought to be. In these challenging scenarios, seeking professional support could be a potentially helpful option to consider.





■ Seeking professional support?

Some signs that you may need to seek professional help include:

- Persistent distress reactions listed above for more than **one month** after the termination of pregnancy
- Having thoughts of harming or killing yourself, and/or hurting others
- Using alcohol, drugs, and/or engaging in risky sexual behaviours to cope
- Repeated observations or concerns expressed by loved ones that you may not be coping well

A trained professional can work collaboratively with you, at your own pace, to understand your perspective, and reduce overwhelming feelings, thoughts, and beliefs associated with the termination of pregnancy. This can help to reduce your distress and improve the quality of your life (e.g. developing closer relationships with the people you care about, resuming activities that you once enjoyed).

■ Where can you seek professional support from?

You can get professional support from a psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor. There are various options for this, including private, community or hospital-based care.

For subsidised care within the hospital setting, consider speaking with your polyclinic doctor or general practitioner (GP) for a referral to a psychiatrist and/or psychologist at a restructured/public hospital.

If you are currently seeing a psychiatrist or medical doctor at KKH, they can refer you to the **KKH Psychosocial Trauma Support Service (PTSS)**. PTSS consists of a team of clinical psychologists who specialises in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children. These forms of support can help you to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

