



HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE HAVING AN ABORTION

INTRODUCTION

Whether someone is having a self-managed abortion with pills or accessing care in a clinic, compassionate support can make a world of difference. The physical, emotional, and logistical aspects of abortion are easier to navigate with someone by your side. This toolkit offers practical, nonjudgmental ways to support someone through the process with preparation, trust, and care.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This guide is for friends, partners, family members, doulas, mutual aid responders, and anyone who wants to be a steady, supportive presence for someone having an abortion. It's organized into sections you can use as needed: understanding abortion basics, supporting someone self-managing with pills, showing up for in-clinic care, and offering aftercare.

ABORTION BASICS

Sometimes, someone seeking an abortion may feel overwhelmed by the legal restrictions, medical systems, and logistical hurdles involved. As a support person, you can help by understanding what's available and how it works.

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF ABORTION:

MEDICATION ABORTION

Involves taking two types of pills, mifepristone and misoprostol, or misoprostol alone to end a pregnancy.

Depending on state laws, clinic access, and personal preference, the pills can be ordered online and delivered by mail or picked up in person at a clinic after a consultation. In all cases, the abortion process takes place at home.

For more information about medication abortion, see Shout Your Abortion's *Abortion Pills 101* Toolkit.

PROCEDURAL ABORTION

A medical procedure performed in a clinic or hospital using instruments to empty the uterus. About 93% of procedural abortions happen before 12 weeks of pregnancy. These procedures take only a few minutes, but the full appointment often lasts several hours and some state laws may require a separate visit for counseling or consent.

Abortion later in pregnancy is less common, and requires lengthier, more involved procedures that often take 2-3 days. Most clinics require someone else to drive the patient to and from the appointment for abortions at any stage of pregnancy, especially if sedation is used.

Both medication and procedural abortions are safe and effective. The best option depends on gestation (how far along the pregnancy is), ease of access to clinics, cost, and personal preference.

For more information about abortion, see Shout Your Abortion's *Current Abortion Landscape* toolkit.

COMMON BARRIERS TO ABORTION

People seeking care often face a range of barriers (legal, logistical, financial, and emotional) that can make accessing an abortion difficult. These challenges vary widely depending on someone's location, identity, and circumstances. As a support person, understanding these barriers helps you show up in ways that are actually helpful, responsive, and rooted in your loved one's specific needs.

MANY PEOPLE FACE SERIOUS CHALLENGES WHEN ACCESSING ABORTION, INCLUDING:

- Cost of the procedure, transportation, lodging, or time off work.
- Legal restrictions and clinic closures.
- Regulations that make abortion more stressful, difficult or invasive. This might be a mandatory but medically unnecessary transvaginal ultrasound, or being forced to listen to medically inaccurate disclaimers that make abortion seem unsafe.
- Misinformation from fake clinics (Crisis Pregnancy Centers).
- Limited access to providers, especially in rural areas.
- Language barriers, immigration status, or lack of documentation.
- Trans and non-binary people may be misgendered or face discrimination when seeking abortion care, which can make the process more isolating, stressful, and emotionally painful.
- Lack of insurance or coverage limitations.
- Fear of judgment, abandonment, or intimate partner violence.
- Criminalization, especially for self-managed abortion or for those most targeted by surveillance (Black, Indigenous, immigrant, young, and LGBTQ+ people).

People's emotional experiences with abortion are often shaped by the stress and obstacles involved in accessing care, rather than the procedure itself. Being aware of these barriers helps you understand what someone might be going through and offer support that fits their specific situation and needs.

HOW TO RESPOND WHEN SOMEONE SAYS THEY'RE PREGNANT

When someone you care about tells you they're pregnant, your first response matters. Not everyone who shares their pregnancy news is looking for congratulations. Some may feel scared, conflicted, relieved, overwhelmed—or all of the above. Don't make assumptions. Instead, ask how they feel, what they need, and how you can show up.

A FEW EASY STEPS TO TAKE:

- Pause. Don't assume they want to keep or end the pregnancy.
- Say something like: "Thanks for telling me. How are you feeling about that?"
- Offer curiosity and calm.

Let them lead the conversation and focus on making them feel heard and supported. Let them know you're here, no matter what they decide.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORTING SOMEONE HAVING AN ABORTION

1 BE PRESENT AND PREPARED

- Ask how they want to be supported and follow their lead.
- Create a calm, private, judgment-free space, whether you're talking through options, preparing for the abortion, or supporting aftercare.
- Make a plan together: how you'll communicate, what they'll need, and what role you can play.
- Stay available. Whether you're showing up in person, checking in by text, or just being on standby.
- Do your homework. Learn the basics ahead of time so they don't have to carry the extra burden of getting you up to speed.

2 OFFER EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Everyone experiences abortion differently. Make space for whatever emotions come up: joy, sadness, relief, uncertainty. It is normal to feel many emotions at once, or none at all.

Listen with care. Sometimes just being heard is more helpful than anything you could say.

Don't assume what they need. Ask, listen, and follow their lead.

3 RESPECT PRIVACY

- Be the kind of person they can trust completely. That means keeping texts, conversations, and details confidential.
- Never share their story, not with friends, family, or anyone, unless they've clearly said it's okay. Even well-meaning conversations can breach trust.
- Understand that privacy isn't just about respect, it's about safety. Criminalization of abortion, especially self-managed abortion, often begins with someone close to the person reporting them.
- If you're unsure whether something is okay to share or do, ask them first. Consent applies here, too.

MAKE A PLAN FOR DIGITAL SECURITY

Make a plan for how you will protect your digital security before, during, and after the abortion. This is an essential part of protecting against any potential legal risk.

START HERE

- Avoid keeping messages, notes, or digital records about the abortion. Delete texts and browser history when possible. Use a private search engine like DuckDuckGo instead of Google.
- Don't call 911 or bring in emergency services unless they specifically ask you to or it's a clear medical emergency.
- You never need to tell medical staff about taking abortion pills. The symptoms of a medication abortion are the same as those of a miscarriage, and medical treatment, if needed, will be the same in either case.
- Know your rights and share resources like the Repro Legal Helpline, which offers free, confidential legal support for people self-managing abortion.

For more information on how to protect you and your loved ones privacy and guard against legal risk, see Shout Your Abortion's [Security for Abortion Seekers 101](#) Toolkit.

WHAT SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE FOR SELF-MANAGED ABORTION WITH PILLS

Abortion pills are an excellent option for many people, but this method also comes with unique challenges, especially in healthcare deserts, states with restrictions, and/or people facing increased legal risk. As a support person, your role can be crucial at every step.

BEFORE THE ABORTION

- **HELP THEM FIND A SAFE PROVIDER FOR ABORTION PILLS.** Start with a trusted resource like Plan C, or local abortion funds that can guide them through their options based on their location.
- **ASSIST WITH LOGISTICS.** This could mean helping with ordering pills online, navigating telehealth options, finding a mailing address, or helping them understand expected timelines and legal risks.
- **SUPPORT WITH FUNDING.** Some abortion funds may be able to help cover the cost of pills, shipping, or related care, but many don't. Offer to research what's available and help with any forms or coordination.

HELP THEM PREPARE

KNOW THE PROTOCOL

- Medication abortion usually involves taking two kinds of pills in a specific order and timeframe: mifepristone first, followed by misoprostol 24 to 48 hours later. Some people use misoprostol alone in a timed sequence when mifepristone isn't available. The timing matters, it helps the pills work effectively and reduces the chance of complications.
- As a support person, knowing what to expect helps you keep things calm and organized. Review the process together ahead of time so your loved one feels confident about what's coming and can focus on their comfort. For more details, see SYA's Abortion Pills 101 toolkit.

MAKE A PLAN TOGETHER

- Decide how and when you'll check in (text, call, or in person.)
- Ask what kind of support feels most helpful: distraction, silence, affirmations, snacks, or space.
- Talk through what to do if they don't respond or if medical help is needed.
- Let them lead the conversation about their needs, but help them think through the details ahead of time so everything feels clear and grounded.

HELP GATHER SUPPLIES

Offer to to gather supplies so they don't have to do it alone.

HELPFUL ITEMS INCLUDE:

- Pain relief, such as Tylenol or Advil
- Anti-nausea or anti-diarrhea medication, such as Dramamine, Emetrol, ginger chews, or Imodium
- A heating pad or hot water bottle for cramps
- Pads, extra toilet paper, and a small trash bag or bin for easy cleanup
- Extra soft towels, since bleeding can sometimes be heavier than expected
- Snacks, drinks, and blankets for comfort
- A water bottle or electrolyte drink to stay hydrated
- A phone charger so they can rest without worrying about running out of battery
- Something for distraction or entertainment such as a favorite movie, playlist, or video game to help pass the time

DURING THE ABORTION

- **STAY CLOSE, BUT NOT INTRUSIVE**

Be available in the way you agreed on, but stay flexible; what feels right to them might change as things unfold.

- **OFFER COMFORT MEASURES**

Set them up with the supplies above and help them keep track of medication timing.

- **RESPECT THEIR EMOTIONAL SPACE**

Some people want conversation; others prefer quiet. Follow their lead.

- **KEEP THINGS LOW-STRESS**

Handle small tasks such as answering the door, feeding or walking pets, managing texts, etc. so they can focus on themselves.

- **WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS**

Medical complications are rare, but you should know what symptoms to look out for and who to call if something doesn't seem right.

The M+A Hotline offers free, confidential support from medical professionals.

Call or text (833)246-2632 or visit MaHotline.org

For more resources, see Shout Your Abortions's *Resource Directory* Toolkit.

AFTER THE ABORTION

CONTINUE SHOWING UP

- **CHECK IN GENTLY**

Ask how they're feeling physically and emotionally over the next few days.

- **SUPPORT RECOVERY**

Offer meals, rest time, or a ride to follow-up care if needed.

- **NORMALIZE THE EXPERIENCE**

Remind them abortion is common and that a range of emotions is normal.

- **PROTECT PRIVACY**

Keep their story completely confidential.

- **STAY CONNECTED**

Continue offering care and normal friendship beyond the immediate aftermath, it helps life feel steady again.

IMPORTANT! HELP REDUCE LEGAL RISK

- Avoid keeping messages, notes, or digital records about the abortion. Delete texts and browser history when possible. Use a private search engine like DuckDuckGo instead of Google.
- Don't call 911 or bring in emergency services unless they specifically ask you to or it's a clear medical emergency.
- You never need to tell medical staff about taking abortion pills. The symptoms of a medication abortion are the same as those of a miscarriage, and medical treatment, if needed, will be the same in either case.
- Know your rights and share resources like the Repro Legal Helpline, which offers free, confidential legal support for people self-managing abortion.

For more information on how to protect you and your loved one's privacy, see Shout Your Abortion's *Security for Abortion Seekers 101* Toolkit.

HOW TO SHOW UP FOR SOMEONE HAVING AN IN-CLINIC ABORTION

BEFORE THE APPOINTMENT

- **HELP FIND A PROVIDER**

Use a trusted resource like I Need an A, which lists clinics based on location and includes details about each clinic's services, costs, and any state-specific restrictions or requirements.

- **DETERMINE SPECIFICS FOR CHOSEN CLINIC**

Some clinics don't allow support people to accompany patients, while others may permit them only in the waiting area, not the exam room. Call ahead so you both know what to expect and can plan accordingly

- **ARRANGE TRANSPORTATION**

Offer to drive, ride along, or help coordinate a safe and discreet ride.

- **ASSIST WITH LOGISTICS**

Support with costs, lodging, childcare, or taking time off work if needed.

- **PREPARE A COMFORT KIT**

Pack snacks, water, and anything that helps them feel grounded and cared for. If you're waiting at the clinic, appointments can take several hours so bring your own comfort items too so you can stay present and patient.

- **PLAN FOR AFTERCARE IN ADVANCE**

They'll likely want to rest once they're home, so getting things ready ahead of time can make the day easier. Set up a cozy spot with blankets, line up some comforting movies or shows, and stock up on snacks and easy meals.

AT THE CLINIC

- **STAY PRESENT (IF ALLOWED)**

Your calm company can make a big difference.

- **HELP NAVIGATE PROTESTORS**

Offer reassurance, keep your focus on your loved one, and move quickly and calmly past any confrontation.

- **BE A STEADY PRESENCE, NOT AN INTRUSIVE ONE**

Follow their cues and create a sense of calm and safety.

AFTERCARE

- **PICK THEM UP WHEN THEY'RE READY.** Make sure they get home safely and comfortably.

- **SUPPORT REST AND RECOVERY.** Encourage them to rest, hydrate, and take any medications as directed. If you are able to, pick up prescriptions for them from a pharmacy.

- **HANDLE PRACTICAL THINGS.** Take care of meals, chores, or errands so they can focus on healing.

- **OFFER EMOTIONAL SPACE.** Be present, but let them set the tone.

- **CONNECT THEM WITH RESOURCES (IF THEY ASK).** If they seem overwhelmed or emotionally stuck, help them connect with a support line or counselor who can offer professional, nonjudgmental care. **See *Shout Your Abortions's Resource Directory Toolkit*.**

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF TOO

Supporting someone through an abortion can bring up your own emotions, stigma, memories, or worries. Check in with yourself and take breaks when you need to. It is okay to have feelings, but remember your role is to support, not to shift the focus to yourself. Reach out for your own support if you feel drained or uncertain. Taking care of yourself helps you show up with steadiness and care.

Being there for someone in this moment is an act of love and trust. You do not need perfect words. Your presence, calm, and respect are what matter most.

Each act of care, no matter how small, strengthens safety, dignity, and compassion for everyone involved.

RESOURCES

ALL-OPTIONS TALKLINE:

Provides free and confidential support about any pregnancy related experiences.

1(888)493-0092 or [All-Options.org](https://www.all-options.org)

DIGITAL DEFENSE FUND:

Provides information about digital security and abortion so you can have a private and secure abortion.

[DigitalDefenseFund.org](https://www.digitaldefensefund.org)

EXHALE PRO-VOICE:

Text and phone-based emotional support after abortion.

[ExhaleProVoice.org](https://www.exhaleprovoice.org)

I NEED AN A:

A directory of abortion providers, funds, and abortion-related resources in every state.

[INeedAnA.com](https://www.ineedanA.com)

MISCARRIAGE + ABORTION HOTLINE:

Talk to pro-abortion doctors anonymously. Call or text (833)246-2632 or visit [MaHotline.org](https://www.mahotline.org)

NATIONAL NETWORK OF ABORTION FUNDS:

Connects people with local funds for procedure costs, travel, lodging, and other needs.

[AbortionFunds.org](https://www.abortionfunds.org)

PLAN C PILLS:

An information resource for self-managed, at-home abortion with pills.

[PlanCPills.org](https://www.plancpills.org)

THE REPRO LEGAL HELPLINE:

Provides free and confidential information about abortion laws in your state, help you if the police have contacted you about an abortion, or help you if you are being denied an emergency abortion.

1(844)868-2812 or [ReproLegalHelpline.org](https://www.reprolegalhelpline.org)