



Do I Have to Check the Box?

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Facing grief is a difficult process. There are some events in life where there is just nowhere to go with our pain. One of those situations is when a person chooses to terminate a pregnancy. I refer to this as “voluntary pregnancy termination” or “vpt” rather than the common term abortion.

In my experiences working with women over the course of time, I’ve found they avoid the term “abortion” like no other word. Avoiding the “word” seems to keep them safe, which of course is the purpose of denial...keeping us safe.

I know for my own particular situation, I went for my annual check-up (woman’s annual check up with my physician) without ever admitting that “therapeutic abortion” was in my past. I never checked the box. There is just something about “that box” that keeps one from placing the mark there. Is it fear that we are going to be judged, branded or put into a category? Probably. At any rate, I went for years without checking the box. Eventually, I was able to, but only after I was finally given permission to grieve my losses.

I am a licensed therapist who works with women’s issues such as abuse of any sort and trauma and emotion regulation. Most people know that I have a history and a background working with choice decisions. Even with that information, most of the ladies I work with extremely hesitant to ever mention the “A” word to me. Generally, it can take up to nine hours of therapy before they will ever admit, “Oh by the way...you know when the intake form asked me if I’d ever had an abortion?” “Well, I just didn’t have the nerve to check the box.”

Not checking the box in the case of choice decisions is because voluntary pregnancy terminations are disenfranchised choices. There is no place or public venue to grieve an abortion in our culture. This type of grief is called *disenfranchised grief*. Women sit in silence out of fear of being misunderstood or incurring shame or judgment regarding their decision.

We keep our secrets well. This is a sad state for the women of our culture. Sitting in silence keeps us from connecting on so many levels. We’ve taken the issue of “choice” off the streets and out of the back-alley. It is now time to let those who have made the choice have permission to grieve their losses without the spotlight of political or religious dialogue. It is time to check the box and process the loss without fear of condemnation!