

# We Testify: Abortion Storytelling Videos

*A loving reminder to review the Toolkit's language best practices before leading this session.*

During Repro Shabbat, you can use abortion stories to honor the lived experiences of those who have had abortions, to dismantle the stigma surrounding abortion, to encourage others to share their stories, and to highlight the real-life impact of abortion bans and restrictions.

These stories can be used as a set induction to a d'var Torah, paired with the Jewish sources in a more traditional text study above, shared on social media, or used as a stand-alone program. They are designed to be used either in a large group conversation, in smaller breakout groups, or as a combination. You can use some or all of them, whatever works for your plans.

You can find the videos at [ReproShabbat.org/Resources](https://ReproShabbat.org/Resources).

Most of the storytellers here were introduced to us by our partner **We Testify**, an organization dedicated to the leadership and representation of people who have abortions, increasing the spectrum of abortion storytellers in the public sphere, and shifting the way the media understands the context and complexity of accessing abortion care. To learn more about We Testify, to find more abortion stories, or to share your story, visit [www.wetestify.org](https://www.wetestify.org).



**Note:** *These videos address topics such as, racism, transphobia, abusive relationships, harassment outside abortion clinics, and other potentially disturbing content. Those leading discussions should endeavor to create a space where all can engage empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content and where those who are or may be triggered feel safe and supported. **We strongly suggest that you offer the content warning below as you begin this session.***

As you begin, share this content warning:

*This session engages with stories about abortion and topics such as racism, transphobia, abusive relationships, harassment outside abortion clinics, and other potentially disturbing content. Please take care of yourself and know that you can exit this conversation at any time, whether now or at any other time in this session.*

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## Discussion Questions

### HANNAH

Hannah grew up in Brazil, where abortion is criminalized, but noted that those who have the means, however, are able to obtain abortions safely and easily. This is also now true in many parts of the United States.

- In what ways do class, geography, race, age, ability, and other structural factors impact access to safe abortion care?
- How do you think this connects to critiques in the movement for reproductive freedom of the language of “choice” when talking about abortion?

Hannah said that the decision to have an abortion was extremely easy for them.

- Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
- What assumptions do you make about how people make the decision to terminate? Do you know people who have made the decision (or, if you have been part of this decision and feel willing to disclose this, and can do so without violating the confidentiality of someone else, of course feel free to)? If so, were your decisions/ the decisions of those in your life easy or difficult?
- How can we talk about abortion in a way that acknowledges the range of experiences that people have?

Hannah identifies as nonbinary and said that they noticed right away how gendered everything in the process was, and the tension that they felt between wanting to be seen and wanting to just move through things as quickly as possible.

- What are some ways that you can think of that the larger conversation about abortion is gendered?
- What are some ways that it could be changed to be more inclusive of people who are not cisgender women?

# We Testify Abortion Storytelling Videos

Hannah hopes that the Jewish community understands that “supporting abortion goes so far beyond fighting for people’s right to obtain them…” but rather also “caring for and affirming people who have had any number of unique abortion experiences… and that having the right to an abortion doesn’t mean being able to access it..”

- How can we bring a respectful, multi-layered conversation into Jewish spaces?
- In what ways are we caring for folks who have had unique abortion experiences and in what ways are we falling short?

## ANISE

Anise's mother raised her with a strong commitment to *tikkun olam*--the Jewish value of repairing the world--and social justice.

- How might Anise's background have supported her in her decision?
- How can we connect how our community teaches and talks about our tradition's mandate to work for a better world with issues of reproductive freedom? What kind of impact might doing so have on our community? How might doing so impact the work that we do?

Anise spoke about the anger she felt about being bound by a mandated waiting period when she was ready to get her abortion.

- Why do you think that this was the feeling she experienced?
- What other kinds of emotions do you think people might experience during a mandated waiting period? Why?
- How might mandatory waiting periods impact people who work jobs that have inflexible hours or are scheduled on shifts; who have limited access to childcare; who have limited means and must travel from out of state; who are dealing with medical issues related to their pregnancy?
- Do you know if your state has a mandatory waiting period? If you don't know, why don't you know? Do you know what other limitations your state has, if any, on abortion access?

# We Testify Abortion Storytelling Videos

Anise notes that being a Jew of color presents compounding and intersecting challenges.

- What do you think she means by this?
- What are some ways that Jews of color may experience racism in Jewish spaces?
- How can Jewish communities expand and deepen our understanding of abortion access and reproductive freedom to better reflect the lived experiences of all Jews?

Anise's abortion was in the context of an abusive relationship; for her, abortion was a critical part of being able to get out.

- What might you imagine have been some of the implications for Anise's life if she had not been able to access abortion care?
- What do you imagine the ramifications might be for many women and others who can get pregnant in places where significant barriers to abortion access are present? What might the long-term effects--ten, twenty years down the line--of such bans be?

## NICK

Nick describes the experience of arriving to the clinic for their procedure and being verbally accosted by anti-abortion protesters as "degrading and humiliating to have people examining [their] reproductive health choices in such an invasive way"

- Try to take a moment to imagine what that might have felt like.
  - What feelings arise for you? Take time to sit with and examine your emotional reactions.

Any residual trauma Nick has, they said, comes from the treatment and stigma they received from anti-abortion protesters. This is despite the fact that they do not feel any conflict about their decision to terminate the pregnancy.

- How did the stigmatization change Nick's experience of their abortion? What might it have been otherwise?
- What are other ways that people who terminate pregnancies might experience stigma for having abortions?
- What can we do--as individuals and as a community--to alleviate the stigma around abortion?

# We Testify Abortion Storytelling Videos

Nick said that what helped them was people who listened to them and gave them space to make the decision.

- Bring to mind a significant decision you have had to make in your own life. Were there people who listened to you? If so, how did that feel? If not, what was that experience like?
- Do you think that you would be able to be someone who could be a support to someone making the decision to have an abortion in the way that Nick needed? Why or why not? If not, what blocks are present for you?

Nick notes that when they sought ways to mark the moment ritually, they found existing Jewish rituals that framed the decision to have an abortion as more complex than was Nick's own experience; Nick believes that God was with them and that God blessed their decision.

- Why might a person need spiritual and ritual closure after an abortion?
- How might we think broadly about spiritual closure, particularly for people for whom the decision to terminate a pregnancy is uncomplicated, or affirming, or any one of many other kinds of emotions?
- What is the difference between crafting a ritual that assumes what the person in question is feeling and one that does not?
- How can we as a community more explicitly offer ritual options for those terminating pregnancies?

## ASHLEY

Ashley describes her abortion as the first adult decision she made.

- How do you understand this?
- How does Ashley describe feeling about terminating her pregnancy? Does this surprise you? Why or why not?
- What about Ashley's story feels familiar, like a story you've heard? What about it is new?

# We Testify Abortion Storytelling Videos

Ashley's Christian faith was a critical part of her reproductive choices. She said she felt closer to God than ever before. Judaism, too, points us towards support for abortion rights and access.

- How can our religious traditions be critical means of emotional and spiritual support through the process of engaging key moments in our reproductive lives, including pregnancy termination?
- How can Judaism be more supportive ritually and pastorally for those going through, or who have gone through, an abortion? (Remember, abortion means many things to many people, and there are a range of different emotional reactions and needs that people may have.)
- What role do you think people in religious communities have in the work for reproductive rights?

Ashley talks about Reproductive Justice, the movement founded by Black women and led now by BIPOC women and nonbinary people that is about, as SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective puts it, the "human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities."

- What kinds of things might be included in this definition of Reproductive Justice?
- How does Ashley's story fit in to this?

## CLAIRE

Over time, Claire's mother's views on abortion changed significantly, growing much more supportive of the movement for abortion rights and justice, which came as a shock to Claire.

- Have your own views on, or understanding about, abortion evolved? If so, in what ways, and what caused that evolution?

# We Testify Abortion Storytelling Videos

Claire's abortion in 1975 was discovered by her mother, whose reaction was extremely negative.

- Can you relate to Claire in this moment? Have you navigated challenging family dynamics around personal medical choices, or other personal choices?
- What can Jewish communities do to make discussions about abortion in families easier, especially when there is opposition?

We learn that Claire's mother's negative reaction was rooted in the trauma of her nearly losing her own mother in the aftermath of terrible abortion care before abortion became legal. Silence around reproductive choices is all too common, as is people feeling alone in their own stories.

- What are ways that we can break that silence and allow for all stories to be told?
- What are some of ways that making space for storytelling could impact our communities and our culture?