

JEW FOR
ABORTION ACCESS PRESENTS:

**IMAGINE
BOLDLY**
a possible world

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM
IS A JEWISH VALUE.

NCJW™

National Council of Jewish Women

Reproductive freedom is a Jewish value.

National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) has been working for reproductive health, rights, and justice since long before *Roe v. Wade*, by writing and passing legislation on the federal and state levels, and — with our over 210,000 advocates and 50 local sections — pushing for expanded reproductive health access and rights. In fact, reproductive freedom has been part of our mandate since NCJW's founding in 1893, and we established some of America's earliest birth control clinics.

As we began to envision a collective Jewish movement for reproductive health care access, we knew how important it was both to contemplate what our tradition teaches about reproductive freedom and to bring the whole Jewish community together to talk about these issues — to break abortion stigma, inspire meaningful action, and celebrate reproductive health.

Abortion bans impact people along every part of their reproductive health journeys — those seeking to become pregnant and those seeking to end

pregnancies, those beginning their IVF journeys and those completing the process of miscarriage. And, as we'll discuss, bans are a religious liberty issue as well. (There's a lot to say about that.)

We have created this guide to bring conversations about Judaism, abortion, and reproductive freedom to your family, friends, programs, and community — complete with art, prayers, texts, stories, and ways for you to share your voice.

When we learn, grow, and act together, we are joining Jews across the country in creating a powerful Jewish movement for reproductive freedom.

Our individual actions are made that much more powerful when they are done in community with other Jews.



National Council of Jewish Women

Why is creating a world with true

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

important to you?

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We've written this guide with flexibility in mind. There are many ways you can make use of the content — alone, with friends and family, as a program, or in the broader community. You may choose to:

- **Savor the story.** Go ahead and read the guide from cover to cover. Explore it on your own or in a group - for instance, you may decide to use this guide as your Shabbat discussion companion over a Friday night dinner.
- **Lean into serendipity.** While the elements of this guide work together as a whole, they also stand alone. Open the guide to any page and see where it takes you!

→ **Follow your muse.** Write, doodle, add stickers, cut it apart, staple extra pages to the end... bring your creativity!

(And if you do, take a picture to share online! Tag @NCJWinc on Facebook or Instagram, and @NCJW on Twitter, to show off your work.)

→ **Magnify to amplify.** Is there one portion of this guide that speaks to you, or that might resonate for a program or with a larger group? Run with it! Take the elements, reimagine them, and create something new.

Need a hand? NCJW is here to help. Just email connect@ncjw.org

"Martha [Graham] always said, the body never lies. There is no artifice; there is no pretending. You can only be who you are. And you know, the Jewish neshamah (soul) is that."

Rabbi Mira Rivera

WHAT IS NOW IS NOT WHAT MUST BE.

Another world is possible. A world of bodily autonomy, dignity, equity, and justice. A world of safety and joy, wholeness and holiness.

The world needs your expansive vision.
We can create this possible world, together.

Let us gather and
IMAGINE BOLDLY.

"Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. **Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.**"

Gloria Steinem

"We look to the lived experiences, to the real stories, of people who can become pregnant as our motivation. We do this work for each of them. We do this work for our communities, our societies, so we work toward a world of justice, safety and love. So we create the world we want to live in."

Rabbi Liz P.G. Hirsch



**PERSONAL
STORIES,
experiences,
AND ART**

"Everyone loves someone who had an abortion"

Renee Bracey Sherman,
founder of We Testify

This is an invitation to say the word “**ABORTION**,”

For many people, phrases like “reproductive freedom” feel broader, encompassing of more kinds of experiences.

So why is it important to say the word, “abortion”?

- Why is it there is there stigma around saying the word “abortion”?
- Who benefits when we are hesitant to do so?
- How do you feel about the idea of working to break the stigma? In your head? in your heart? In your body?

Regardless of what you feel — remember, feelings can change — we invite you to try saying the word.

We can only break stigma when we work to actively normalize the idea that this is both routine and essential health care.

Sometimes abortions are difficult decisions — but sometimes they aren't. And there is no one way to feel about one's abortion. For some, their abortion may be a joyful or liberating experience; for others it may be

confusing, sad, other things, or a mix of feelings.

And we all love someone who has had an abortion — if you think you don't, it's likely more accurate that there's someone in your life who has not (yet) shared their abortion story with you.

And if you have had an abortion and you have shared those stories with anyone in your life, you're giving them a gift.

Abortions will happen, they always have and they always will.

When we let abortion opponents make “abortion” into a profane word, we allow their morality to define our language and shape our world. We allow them to send a message that abortion is about shame and sin.

But we know the truth. Say “abortion.”

Say it and know that abortion is about bodily autonomy and agency and equity and love.



Art by [Ayeola Omolara Kaplan](#)

Notice the five Hebrew phrases included in this piece: *kavod habriot* (dignity), *briyut* (health), *tzedek* (justice), *pikuach nefesh* (saving lives), and *tzaar* (avoiding suffering). Why did Kaplan include these in her work? How might they connect to the values featured in the corners of the piece: diversity centered reproductive education, safe and healthy communities, resources and healthcare, and affordable and accessible abortions?

→ What do you notice about the people in the center of the painting?

→ How do you react to the five Jewish values in this artwork? Which one resonates the most?

ASHLEY'S ABORTION STORY

Many people have many, many different experiences with pregnancy endings; you'll see several stories throughout this resource. Here's the first:

A piece from **We Testify** storyteller, Ashley, from Cleveland, OH:



I had my abortion on April 15, 2016. It was an unplanned pregnancy with someone I didn't see myself with for a long-term relationship. At the time, I had begun working on a pro-choice coalition project and felt lucky to use my degree in a work environment that was both exciting and supportive. I had accomplished a few significant milestones (obtaining my masters, traveling out of the country, moving into my own place) however, getting an abortion felt like my first adult decision, and my first parenting decision.

The unplanned pregnancy gave me the opportunity to really think about the path I wanted my life to take, and the life I want to give my future children. I am grateful for my abortion because it was my moment of clarity.



→ How does Ashley describe feeling about her decision to terminate her pregnancy? Does this surprise you, or not at all? Why or why not?

→ She describes abortion as her first adult decision. What was your first adult decision with regards to your reproductive life? How did you feel about it? Was it empowering? Stressful? Did you feel proud?

Relieved? Resigned? Frightened?
Something else?

→ What are moments of clarity that you've had around your reproductive life and choices? Where are places where you may still feel, well, less clear?

Learn more about [We Testify](#).

According to Jewish law, is abortion healthcare?

Yes, Jewish sources explicitly state that abortion is not only permitted but is required should the pregnancy endanger the life or health of the pregnant individual. Furthermore, "health" is commonly interpreted to encompass mental health as well as physical health.

“ When I reflect on the people I know in the Reproductive Justice movement, from abortion providers to doulas, from community organizers to abortion fund volunteers, I think about the sacred work of Shifrah and Puah, and I feel strengthened. ”

– Excerpts from [“Abortion Activism Brought Me Back to Judaism”](#) by Nina Henry

Art featuring the biblical midwives Shifrah and Puah who saved Israelite babies from Pharaoh, Miriam the prophet, symbolic midwife at the birth of the Israelite People through the Red Sea, and texts that inform Judaism’s approach to abortion access, by [Emily K](#)



Prayer, art, and poetry are powerful means of conveying a message. They also help us mark transitional times for ourselves. If you or someone you know is experiencing, or has experienced, a pregnancy ending, this poem, "Threshold," by the poet Maggie Smith from her collection *Goldenrod*, may resonate as something to read, hold, and/or recite:

Threshold

Maggie Smith

You want a door you can be
on both sides of at once.

You want to be
on both sides of here

and there, now and then,
together and—(what

did we call the life
we would wish back?

The old life? The before?)
alone. But any open

space may be
a threshold, an arch

of entering and leaving.
Crossing a field, wading

through nothing
but timothy grass,

imagine yourself passing from
and into. Passing
through

doorway after
doorway after doorway.

DRAW A DOORWAY

Maggie Smith's poem asks us to imagine ourselves moving from one place to another, from one kind of life to another.

If our goal is to provide those seeking care for pregnancy endings with the comfort and support they deserve to mark this important transition in their lives, what should that door look like? Who might be opening it for them? What might they see on the other side?

-
- Once complete, talk about the doorway you created with the people you care about. Keep it in mind as you hear others' stories.
 - Imagine it as you fight for reproductive freedom and the ability for everyone to safely access it, step through, and reach the other side.

**Imagine, and create — in a sketch, a collage,
or whatever medium you choose — what that
threshold might look like.**

"Those of us with the chutzpah to stand up, even when they try to take it all away from us, are the true torchbearers of the project of this country."

Michaela Williams



THE JEWISH VALUE of
REPRODUCTIVE
FREEDOM

"Building a just society for everyone is a Jewish concern. We must not remain quiet while barriers to health care place any individual's health, well-being, autonomy, or economic security at risk - something which pregnancy so often does."

Rabba Melissa Scholten-Gutierrez

"We fight for **abortion justice** not despite our religious beliefs, but because of them."

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg

Our connections to Torah, and to Jewish tradition, vary greatly. Our experiences may be positive, negative, neutral, or nonexistent. We may feel very comfortable studying Jewish text, or be self-conscious about our level of learning. We may love Torah, or be angry with it and dismissive of its verses - or both.

All of these feelings are real. All of these perspectives are valid.

And all of us are invited to the table when we bring the wisdom and complexity of our tradition to inform our work in the world.

TORAH MEANS TEACHING.

We are meant to learn.

TORAH HOLDS THE NARRATIVE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

We are meant to be active characters in the story.

TORAH IS OUR COLLECTIVE HERITAGE.

We are meant to grow with it, and to help it grow.

The verses we share here are yours to encounter, to interpret, and to wrestle with.

You have a seat at the table. Take it.

THE TORAH OF *reproductive* FREEDOM

Reproductive freedom is a Jewish value. And it begins with our oldest and most foundational text, the Torah. Look at the verses that lay the groundwork for Judaism's approach to abortion. (Please know there is also some discussion of miscarriage below. Take care when reading.)

Exodus 21:22-25

When men fight, and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and a miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, the one responsible shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him, the payment to be based on reckoning. But if other damage ensues, the penalty shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

In other words, if someone accidentally causes a miscarriage to take place, they are obligated to pay financial reparations only; the case is not treated as manslaughter or murder, which would demand the death penalty. The "other damage" that would demand the death penalty ("life for life") would be the death of the pregnant person (or some other serious punishment relating to the damage caused--"eye for eye, tooth for tooth...") Causing the termination of a pregnancy is not, in the Torah, considered murder.

There are many more sources to explore beyond those printed in this guide. Find them here:



Questions for discussion:

1

What is the distinction between the two kinds of punishments described in these texts? What does the distinction tell us about how pregnancy was regarded in the ancient world? What are the implications for our day?

2

Does this text surprise you in any way? What kinds of assumptions might you have made about what the Torah would have written about the status of the fetus — and does this reflect those assumptions?

A prayer for reproductive health care

Jewish tradition is rife with rituals and prayers that speak to many moments in our lives. And when the right words for our specific situation can't be found in the text, we can expand the search and apply the tone we need to the moment at hand.

The prayer below was not written with pregnancy endings in mind, but conveys the hope we have for anyone who seeks health care for such an experience. It may be said for yourself, or on behalf of someone you care about.

פְּרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ

Transliteration:

*Ufros Aleinu, sukat
shlomekha*

English:

*Spread over us the
shelter of Your peace.*

The prayer is also sometimes set to **music**; here is tune that is used with this sometimes, sung by Rabbi for Repro Rabbi Julia Andelman.

Addition to prayer:

May I find, through this process, hope, courage, and acceptance.

I have chosen to affirm my life and move beyond this narrow place.

May I be protected during this sacred moment.

May I find [within myself/from the Divine Source] strength and love in my journey.

Does **Jewish law** assert that life begins at **conception**?

No, life does not begin at conception according to traditional Jewish understandings. Sources in the Talmud note that the fetus is “mere water” for the first 40 days after conception, about 7-8 weeks’ gestation by our contemporary counting. (Interestingly, about 66% of abortions happen within that time.) From 40 days until birth, the fetus is regarded as a part of the pregnant person’s body. The fetus does not attain the rights of personhood in Jewish law until partway through the birthing process.

Now, consider this key source on ending pregnancies:

Mishnah Oholot 7:6

If a woman is having trouble giving birth, they cut up the fetus in her womb and bring it forth limb by limb, because her life comes before the life of [the fetus]. But if the greater part [of the fetus/baby] has come out [of the person giving birth], one may not touch it, for one may not set aside one person's life for that of another.

The Mishnah is an ancient oral tradition known as the "Oral Torah" and was compiled around 150-200 CE in the land of Israel

Questions for discussion:

1

What are the priorities that inform whose life takes precedence during a difficult labor? Whose rights are primary?

2

At what point does the fetus attain the status of full personhood, and accorded full human rights, according to this mishnah?

What does **Jewish law** say about the rights of a **person who is pregnant** and the rights of a **fetus**?

Judaism values life and affirms that protecting *existing* life is paramount at all stages of pregnancy. A fetus is regarded as *potential* life — and therefore does not have the rights of personhood. The pregnant person takes precedence.

Here are a few more recent texts that show some of the ways in which the Torah and Mishnah texts above have been applied:

RABBI MORDECHAI WINKLER, a leading Hungarian rabbi of his day, writing in 1913.

Mental-health risk has been definitely equated with physical health risk. This woman, in danger of losing her mental health unless the pregnancy is interrupted, would therefore accordingly qualify.

RABBI BECKY SILVERSTEIN, co-founder of the Trans Halakha Project and NCJW Rabbis for Repro Advisory Board Member, 2022.

The discussion of who is permitted to eat on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, has much relevant wisdom to offer. Most Jewish people observe Yom Kippur by incorporating prayer into a set of rituals that includes a 25-hour fast. But what happens if someone is ill and cannot fast on Yom Kippur? The Talmud invokes a verse from the biblical Book of Proverbs, “Lev yodea marat nafsho,” or “The heart knows the bitterness of its soul,” to teach that the sick person is actually the expert who should make this decision. The text of the Talmud even says that nobody can possess more expertise on such a question than the sick person themselves... In this way, Judaism’s principle of “Lev yodea marat nafsho” authorizes as experts both pregnant people who want to end a pregnancy and trans people seeking gender-affirming care or the right to live as their true selves. It demands that we honor the self-knowledge of those individuals.

PROFESSOR MICHAL RAUCHER, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies, Rutgers University, 2022.

Unless you support a person’s right to bodily autonomy, then you are supporting a system wherein someone else determines what you or anyone else can do with their bodies. It does not matter whether that person is a lawmaker, a judge, a contemporary rabbi or one from 2,000 years ago. It does not matter whether that person would permit most abortions or even require some. A religious argument based on Jewish law and rabbinic texts only goes so far. [Unencumbered support for abortion justice] may not be an argument rooted in Jewish law, but it is a Jewish argument — and it’s time to make it.

How might you describe the Jewish approach to abortion, based on these sources?

What's one thing you're taking away from this conversation?

→ How do these texts build on the sources you've seen so far? How do they extend them?

→ How do these sources interact with the real world of people today, and their needs, feelings, and reasons for terminating pregnancies?

→ How do these sources compare to the popular cultural and media narrative about religion and abortion?

→ What might some policy implications be of all of these sources, together?

Mikveh & Abortion

Immersing yourself in a [mikveh](#), a Jewish ritual bath, is a powerful ritual for marking transitions.

“The mikveh is a ritual bath designed for the Jewish rite of purification. The mikveh is not merely a pool of water; it must be composed of stationary, not flowing, waters and must contain a certain percentage of water derived from a natural source, such as a lake, an ocean, or rain.”

([Mikveh | Jewish Women's Archive \(jwa.org\)](#))

Jewish tradition teaches that there should not be any barriers between the person and the water during mikveh immersion.

Ritual immersion in a mikveh can be incredibly healing for some people and could provide closure after a pregnancy ending, or to mark any important moment in one's reproductive healthcare journey.

These are the [traditional mikvah blessings](#) that are said when one immerses in a mikveh.

Preparing for mikveh is a private moment for a person to be in their body as it is right now and acknowledge the physical, emotional, or spiritual transitions they are going through. The following kavvanot, or intentions, may speak to the moment of immersion after a pregnancy ending.

→ *Hineni. I am here. Hineni. Here I am. Hineni. I am here, taking care of myself. I am here, honoring this transition, honoring this moment. Hineni.*

→ *My existence is sacred. I am created in the image of the Divine, *b'tzelem Elohim*. My body is sacred.*

→ *I am grateful for my body and how it sustains me. I am grateful for my ability to journey to and through this moment. I recognize the good within me, *hakarat hatov*.*

With our partners at Mayyim Hayyim, a community mikveh in Newton, Massachusetts, we created a resource to guide you through your immersion.



If you have questions about mikveh in general or navigating your visit, please contact action@ncjw.org and we would be happy to connect you with a Jewish Clergy for Repro member who can support you or answer any questions you may have.

"It is no coincidence that the Hebrew word for womb is *rechem*: compassion. When it comes to wombs, when it comes to the decision to choose to build or not build a family we need to operate from a place of understanding and compassion."

Rabba Sara Hurwitz

Abortion is not only permitted in Jewish law, but it is required when the life of the pregnant person is in danger.

Abortion is also an issue of Jewish values. We must not remain idle while barriers to health care place any individual's health, well-being, autonomy, or economic security at risk.

Abortion bans do not impact everyone equally. Those who already face discrimination and systemic barriers to health care are disproportionately harmed. This most commonly includes Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)

communities, those struggling to make ends meet, young people, disabled people, immigrants, trans men and some nonbinary people.

People denied abortion access are more likely to live in poverty and stay in abusive relationships as a result of that denied care.

We are commanded to create a more just society, and thus must imagine, boldly, this possible world and fight for reproductive health access for everyone.

Reproductive freedom is a Jewish issue.

Do **abortion bans** unduly favor one religious viewpoint over another?

Yes, different religions believe that human life begins at different stages of development. Science can explain developmental timelines, but philosophic and religious viewpoints largely determine what exactly defines “life” or “personhood” for each individual. NCJW believes, as the First Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees, that no one religion should be enshrined in law or dictate public policy on any issue — including abortion.

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."

Shirley Chisholm

RAISING
your voice,
TAKING
ACTION

"Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

"So often, the issues we face can feel overwhelming. But every great changemaker in history started by showing up just once."

Sheila Katz

The data are clear here: One in four women and people who can get pregnant will have an abortion by age 45. And the majority of the people having abortions are parents--people who have stories like: a mom whose physical or mental health would suffer if she were to add another child to the family, or a married couple who can't afford another child. But there are too many reasons, too many stories to possibly cover.

What we do know is this: Abortion is healthcare and healthcare is a human right.

But rights aren't all that helpful if you can't access them.

In the fight for reproductive justice, we must make the personal, political — because this isn't actually a political issue— it's a healthcare issue, and a matter of personal dignity and bodily autonomy.

As Jews, we are taught *tzedek tzedek tirdof*, to pursue justice for all. We know what it's like to be excluded and oppressed. We cannot remain idle while barriers to health care place anyone's autonomy, health, economic security, or well-being at risk.

We must fight for reproductive justice for everyone.

CLAIRE'S ABORTION STORY

In 2009. Claire's mother was in hospice care, and the two of them were watching the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor when Lipschultz's mother, 89, said something that shocked her.

My mother commented that she was really glad a woman — hopefully — would be on the Supreme Court and that there would be protections for abortion. I was really surprised by that.

In 1975, I was going to law school in New York, and I came home on a semester break. Just prior to my coming home, I had an abortion. I was in no situation to have a child. I did not want a child. Because it was 1975 [after *Roe v. Wade* had passed in 1973], I was able to go to a Planned Parenthood clinic in New York City, where I was treated with grace and support. With no shaming, I was able to have the procedure — which went well and I was able to go on with my life.

I had the discharge papers in my suitcase when I went home for semester break. My mother found the papers, and she was utterly livid that I had brought this kind of shame upon the family. How could I? It was shame and disgust and horror. Her reaction was huge and it was terrible. But we went on and never discussed it, and never discussed abortion again until that day in 2009. Then she told me a story that had lived with her for 80 years, and never shared.

Her mother, Clara, my namesake, was an immigrant and a mother of five, and the family was impoverished. My grandmother's mental and physical health was not good, and she found out she was pregnant. There were no options for her to get a safe abortion, and so she sought out anybody who would be able to perform the procedure.

When she came back to the little two-room apartment in Chicago where the seven of them lived, my grandmother was in extreme pain, which became worse and worse. In fact, she was hemorrhaging. My grandfather fled the apartment. He couldn't stand to listen to the howls of pain, leaving my poor mother, who was 9 or 10 at the time, certain her mother was going to die on the bathroom floor. My grandmother did survive. But the trauma was very deep in my mother.

The notion of me having a procedure that had almost killed her mother so scared her that she had been beside herself.

She was able to say, all those years later, that she understood how important it was for there to be safe abortions and that she hoped — because she knew I was an activist — that I would continue to be at the forefront ensuring that all people are able to access abortions when they need one, for whatever reason. In a sense, that was her dying wish.

I was already on the path of being an abortion access activist and advocate, and hearing my grandmother's story was another important element to my commitment that we never, never go back to those ways.

I'll just say, as a postscript, that when I was ready, when I had the right partner, I became a mother, and I was able to pursue a life path as an attorney and an activist that I would not have been able to pursue if I had been unable to access an abortion.

Being part of the National Council of Jewish Women, I became aware of how Jewish law and text support a person's right to bodily autonomy. I first understood abortion access as a constitutionally protected right. I also came to understand the issue as a religious freedom issue.

I feel that it's really important to tell my abortion story because it is important for us to say the word "abortion" and to let people know that people they know and love have abortions. One in four people of reproductive age in this country will have abortions.

If you've had an abortion, say so. Try to be comfortable with sharing your story so people understand that it is our friends, our sisters, our colleagues, our nieces who have abortions.

Kristen Strezo, NCJW activist [National Council of Jewish Women | Righting the Wrongs: Referencing the Injustices That Drive My Activism for Abortion Access - National Council of Jewish Women \(ncjw.org\)](#)

Your reproductive story

Everyone has a reproductive health story--whether we have sought to be parents or actively sought not to be; whether we have the kinds of relationships in which undertaking a parenting journey would be, or has been, easier or more complex; we all have moments and stories in which our lives intersect with reproductive questions in some way. Whether or not we are, or ever will become, or ever wish to become, parents.

Some people use surrogacy and/or IVF; for others, birth control is the main story — and for others still, it's the kind of sexual relationship that's pretty unlikely to yield a pregnancy (including none at all). Some have experienced pregnancy, pregnancy loss, and/or abortion; others have experienced other kinds of losses of autonomy or control, or remarkably smooth sailing, all told.

Every journey is different. Every story is different.

Take a moment to consider your reproductive journey — and, perhaps, that of your family.

→ What are moments of clarity that you've had around your reproductive life and choices?

→ Where are places in which you may still feel less clear?

→ What's a struggle or difficulty that you've had in your own thinking or relationships around your reproductive life?

→ Who has helped you along the way?

→ What, if anything, feels unresolved, now?

→ What are you comfortable sharing out loud? What do you prefer not to share publicly?

→ With whom might you want to share some of your story?

→ How could talking about your own reproductive journey be a way for you to help fight stigma around abortion (whether or not you, personally, have had one)?

Your story in ACTION

Kristen's story is powerful. And it's only one of many stories woven together to create the Jewish movement for abortion access.

We need everyone's stories. What's yours?

Use this MadLib-style framework to think about how your identity connects to the work you do to create a world in which reproductive freedom is the norm for everyone.

As a _____
[parts of your identity that inform your activism]

I believe _____
[your stance on the issue]

Therefore, I _____
[the actions you take]

So that _____
[the kind of world you hope to create]

Example:

As a teacher, a Jewish mother, and someone who's had an abortion for a wanted pregnancy that was not viable...

I believe everyone has a right to access the healthcare they need to care for themselves and their family...

Therefore, I Tell my abortion story publicly, call my lawmakers and tell them to expand abortion access, and encourage my family and friends to do the same...

So that all of us can live in a world full of compassion.

IMAGINE, BOLDLY, a possible world.

The Reproductive Justice Movement was founded by Black women to center their experiences, along with those of Black trans people and of other people of color. SisterSong [defines](#) Reproductive Justice as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”

When reproductive justice is achieved, each person will have the power to make their own informed decisions about their body, sexuality, and future — regardless of race, income, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, or other factors.

This is the lens that we use, and this must be our foundation. Where we meet the Earth. Where we are rooted.

In the Torah, the Israelites who have just been liberated from slavery are commanded to set up systems of care for those in society — including non-Jews — who are [most marginalized](#).

At its core, our Torah teaches the wisdom of Jewish poet Emma Lazarus (“until we are all free, we are none of us free”) and the Black Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hammer (“nobody's free until everybody's free”).

We must not stand idly by while barriers to health care place anyone’s moral autonomy, health, economic security, or well-being at risk.

“Words create worlds.”

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

We know that abortion is a very charged and personal topic for a lot of people, so here are a few guides to some of what’s understood to be best practices for language use, so that everyone in your community can feel as included and cared for as possible:

INSTEAD OF:

“Safe, Legal, and Rare”

SAY/DO:

“Support abortion access”

WHY? Demanding that abortion be “rare” stigmatizes those who do have abortions.

“Women”

“Women and all people who need abortion access” or “patients”

WHY? Some trans men and some non-binary people also need access to abortion care. And some women do not need this access. We can acknowledge the ways in which women are particularly targeted while expanding our language to include everyone impacted; and/or we can simply say, “people,” or “patients,” especially when speaking medically.

“ Pro-Choice”

“Abortion access,”
“reproductive freedom,”
“reproductive health care,”
or “abortion justice”

WHY? Not everyone has the same choices when it comes to abortion; “pro-choice” flattens issues of access, and how immigration, poverty, racism, incarceration, and other issues impact people’s reproductive lives.

INSTEAD OF:

“Vulnerable”

SAY/DO:

“Impacted”

WHY? “Vulnerable” connotes a savior attitude, rather than focusing on the agency of those in need of abortion access — and all people need abortion access.

Evoking the imagery of coat hangers and botched back alley abortions to connote the dangers of Roe falling.

Acknowledge that we live in a different era than pre-1973.

WHY? Self-managed abortion is safe and effective – that is, self-administered medication abortion works up to 10 weeks and can provide many with an alternative to a surgical abortion. In fact, more than 50% of abortions in the U.S. are now done by medication abortion. The criminalization of reproductive decisions is the newer danger.

“Devastating decision” or “no one wants an abortion”

“Deeply personal decision” and “We don’t know the circumstances.”

WHY? This conveys seriousness without assuming anything about someone else’s feelings.

“We will do, and [then] we will understand.”

Exodus 24:7

You've begun committing to action—by reading this guide, by showing up, by having the conversation. There are so many ways to make change and create a world in which reproductive freedom is acknowledged as a Jewish value, and seen as a norm in American society. What will you do next?

“What’s important is **the action. You don’t have to wait to be confident. **Just do it** and eventually the confidence will follow.”**

Carrie Fisher

Here are some **key resources** to know about and to share:

SPEAK UP about Judaism and abortion with help from the resources at NCJW's [JewsForAbortionAccess.org](https://www.ncjw.org/jews-for-abortion-access)

I NEED AN A helps one find abortion care, with links to abortion funds as well. [Ineedana.com](https://www.ineedana.com)

PLAN C PILLS helps people access medication abortion pills. [Plancpills.org](https://www.plancpills.org)

THE MISCARRIAGE AND ABORTION HOTLINE has trained clinicians answering the phone to help those managing their abortions and miscarriages at home. [Mahotline.org](https://www.mahotline.org)

IF/WHEN/HOW'S REPRO LEGAL HELPLINE offers information about legal rights regarding self-managed abortion. [ifwhenhow.org/repro-legal-helpline](https://www.ifwhenhow.org/repro-legal-helpline)

PRO-TRUTH fight the dangerous and deceptive tactics of fake reproductive health clinics.

Protruthny.org

If you call THE NATIONAL ABORTION FOUNDATION

HOTLINE, a case manager can help support you through the whole process; NAF covers the travel and abortion care of those who lack the funds.

prochoice.org/patients/naf-hotline/

ALL OPTIONS TALKLINE:

unconditional, judgment-free support for people in all of their decisions, feelings, and experiences with pregnancy, parenting, abortion, and adoption.

all-options.org/find-support/talkline

EXHALE: PRO VOICE offers nonjudgmental after-abortion support for those who have had abortions or those who love someone who has had an abortion. Exhaleprovoice.org

You – find Jewish Clergy for Repro in your area by visiting:

RabbisForRepro.org

Read up on abortion policy notes, tailored to different states:

→ Policy Strategies for States with Expanded Access to Abortion:

ncjw.org/expandedstates

→ Policy Strategies for States in the “Middle” on Abortion:

ncjw.org/middlestates

→ Policy Strategies for States Hostile to Abortion:

ncjw.org/hostilestates

Learn more with the NCJW Abortion and Jewish Values Toolkit:

ncjw.org/abortiontoolkit

Donate to the Jewish Fund for Abortion Access:

ncjw.org/abortionfund

Destigmatize abortion and prompt conversation with signs, shirts, and more: ncjw.org/shop

Share your story – If you’ve had an abortion, consider sharing your story — when you’re ready. Perhaps you can tell people in your life. Let them in; let them know that someone they love has had an abortion. And this abortion storytelling guide from WeTestify can help you formulate your thoughts to tell your story more intimately or publicly:

ncjw.org/storyprep

Then head over to the Jewish Women’s Archive’s abortion story project, in partnership with NCJW, to view the prompts and submit:

ncjw.org/abortionstories

Stay involved by becoming a member of an NCJW section near you: ncjw.org/local

A PRAYER FOR **REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM**

May we always remember that each person is created in the image of the Sacred, endowed with the inherent right to autonomy and respect.

May we create a caring and loving community and nation that reveres this dignity in each of us. May we understand our obligations to one another; we are all inherently holy and should be treated as such.

May we find within ourselves the collective will to create a just society in which reproductive justice — the holy right to own the personhood of one's own body, to have or not have children, to raise any children in safety and community — is foundational.

May we endow each other with the strength, resolve, and courage we need as we walk together towards a liberatory world.

May we always follow the leadership of those most impacted by the harms of reproductive oppression. May we listen and learn.

May our country become a place of true liberty and justice for all. May our relationships with each other be ones of care and deep respect. May we walk together on the path of community as we work together to ensure truly accessible abortion care for all.

AMEN.

“ Say these words when you lie down
and when you rise up,
when you go out and when you
return.
In times of mourning and in times of
joy.

Inscribe them on your doorposts,
embroider them on your garments,
tattoo them on your shoulders,
teach them to your children,
your neighbors, your enemies,
recite them in your sleep,
here in the cruel shadow of empire:
Another world is possible...

“ When you inhale and when you
exhale
breathe the possibility of another
world into the 37.2 trillion cells of
your body
until it shines with hope.
Then imagine more...

“ Imagine rape is unimaginable.
Imagine war is a scarcely credible
rumor
That the crimes of our age,
the grotesque inhumanities of

— Excerpts from “*V’ahavta*,” by Aurora
Levins Morales

greed, the sheer and astounding
shamelessness of it, the vast
fortunes made by stealing lives, the
horrible normalcy it came to have,
is unimaginable to our heirs, the
generations of the free.

Don’t waver.
Don’t let despair sink its sharp teeth
Into the throat with which you sing.
Escalate your dreams.
Make them burn so fiercely that
you can follow them down any dark
alleyway of history and not lose
your way.
Make them burn clear as a starry
drinking gourd
Over the grim fog of exhaustion,
and keep walking.
Hold hands. Share water. **Keep
imagining.**
So that we, and the children of our
children’s children may live.

Read the whole poem and access her
other work here.



**"If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?"**

Hillel the Elder, Pirkei Avot

**BRINGING THE
POSSIBLE
WORLD
into BEING**

The text is presented in a bold, bubbly font. 'BRINGING THE' is in yellow on a dark blue background. 'POSSIBLE' and 'WORLD' are in a gradient of orange to yellow. 'into' is in a cursive script, and 'BEING' is in yellow. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue, cloud-like shape with several pink and white sparkles scattered around it.

**"There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new
suns."**

Octavia E. Butler

Does it even need to be said that there are times when one must stand up to the community, and use one's voice in support of an unpopular view? Or that complicity is participation? Sometimes the issue at hand may concern a gross injustice, sometimes it may just be about individual boundaries. Sometimes a dissenting view will be heard and accepted, sometimes it will be ignored. None of this changes our obligation to move through the world with honesty and bravery.

Reflect. Plan. Act.

What resonated most with you in this guide?

What's a question you're left with? What are you curious about?

Name 3 people with whom you can share this guide. How will you introduce it? What do you want them to know?

Imagine yourself one year from now. You're reflecting on the year that's passed, and feeling proud of yourself and your community.

- What have you **learned** more about?
- What **actions** have you taken?
- What **connections** — with people, organizations, or broader movements — have you made?

What might a world where reproductive freedom is the norm look like? What might be possible?

While we fight against the laws and leaders trying to strip us of our bodily autonomy, we must continue to remember, and imagine, what we're fighting for.

Abortion access is and always will be a Jewish value. And imagining a world infused with reproductive justice fuels our efforts to help all of us thrive. Everyone deserves access to the care they need and the ability to make their own decisions for themselves and their futures.

We can build a community with **love**.

We can bring this possible world into **being**.

For 130 years, National Council of Jewish Women has boldly imagined a world where women, children, and families are fully valued and supported.

We've stayed true to our values throughout our history. Whatever lies ahead, our goals remain clear, our resolve is firm, and our dreams are big and bold.

We hope this guide provides you with the inspiration you need to continue this work. We hope it reminds you that we are with you in this fight. We are imagining a new world at your side.

Surrogacy, birth control, **EVERY** journey is different

Some people want to be pregnant, some people have had things happen to their bodies, some people rely on IVF for pregnancy.

Take a moment for your reproductive journeys and your families.

- What are you comfortable sharing outloud?
- What do you not want to share publicly?
- Who comes to mind that you want to share a piece of this from?

Fight stigma from abortion by talking about your reproductive journey.

Bodily autonomy is critical.

Equity is foundational.

Hope is essential.

Liberation is a group project.

Thank you for

IMAGINING BOLDLY

with us.

**JEWS FOR
ABORTION
ACCESS**

JEWSFORABORTIONACCESS.ORG
National Council of Jewish Women