

For many families, the instant you have a positive pregnancy test your life changes forever. Your initial reaction may have been excitement or wonderment. Maybe you shared your exciting news with family or friends, or maybe you already thought about names or the perfect outfit for your baby. For others, the first reaction may have been reluctance, anger, or worry. You may have been concerned about how this baby was going to affect the rest of your life. Regardless of your initial feelings, this new baby became an important part of your future.

The feelings you experience after an early pregnancy loss are often more intense than most people, including you, might expect. The death of a baby at any stage is a very real loss. Although your physical healing may be a short process, the emotional healing might take much longer.

The following information has been gathered by bereaved parents, friends, and professionals. This pamphlet has been provided as a source for answers to some of your questions, and also to help you realize the normalcy of all the emotions and fears you may experience during your grief journey.



What is an early pregnancy loss?

An early pregnancy loss is defined as any pregnancy that ends before 20 weeks gestation. Loss during this time most commonly occurs because of a problem with the development of the baby or the placenta. If a loss occurs before 20 weeks, you may not be able to determine the gender of the baby without chromosomal testing.

From the mother's perspective...

After an early pregnancy loss, you may feel anything from relief to disappointment to profound grief. These feelings may constantly change. You might experience a range of emotions at different times, or re-experience an emotion you have already felt. There is no *right* or *wrong* way to move through your emotions. You and your partner may grieve differently, and the community around you may grieve yet another way. And even though there are people who may share the common thread of having a loss, each individual's experience is always different.

You may feel...

- Relief
- Shock
- Confusion
- Low Self Esteem
- Denial
- Anger
- Guilt and/or Self Blame
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Depression
- Physical Symptoms Related to Hormonal Changes

This list includes the most common responses to grief. It is unlikely that you will experience these emotions in a particular order or in stages. Remember the most intense feelings do not last forever; there *will* come a time when your heartache lessens and healing does take place. Incorporating your loss into your daily life takes patience and time.

Once you begin to feel better, you may be surprised by feelings that resurface. This is common and can happen months—even years—down the road. Your due date may be particularly difficult especially when friends and family have moved on and forgotten. It can help to plan something special, such as a balloon release or other activity for that day.

Caring for yourself...

Take Care of Your Body—Taking care of your physical health is just as important as taking care of your mental health. It is important to eat a balanced diet, exercise (even if it is just a walk around the block), drink plenty of water, and maintain a regular rest routine. Also recognize that your body will go through the same hormonal changes as you would if you had carried to term. You can expect to experience mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate, and/or irritability. Your energy levels can be erratic, as well as your appetite.

Find Support—There are many sources for support. Some people find it helpful to attend a pregnancy loss support group. You can also find online organizations designed to help grieving parents. For some, a close friend or relative can be of great comfort. If your sadness significantly interferes with daily activities, it is important to contact your doctor or see a professional counselor.

Communicate—Tell others what you need, and be specific! Other than verbally expressing your needs, you can write notes or letters to friends, family and/or coworkers. Tell people what you need from them, especially when you want to talk about your baby, or even when you do not.

Take Care of Your Mind & Spirit—You may find a need for more spiritual bonds during this time. Contact clergy or simply set aside time for reflection or relaxation. Some people enjoy reading and writing; journaling your experience may be an important part of your healing process.

From the partner's perspective...

You may be experiencing many of the same emotions as your wife/partner, but feel obligated to “be strong” and put your feelings aside. It is important to remember that you, too, need support at this time.

A partner's grief can be complicated. It may be confusing, with feelings of detachment or helplessness. Not being able to control the situation can be difficult. Another challenge you may face is other people downplaying the grief you are experiencing. It is normal to feel frustrated if you are constantly being asked how your partner is, while it seems no one cares or asks about you. To receive the support you need, you may have to ask for it and it may come from someone you least expect. Try to be open to receiving that support. Remember to talk to your partner. Keeping the lines of communication open is important to the healing process and your relationship.

Returning to work soon after your loss may be expected and you may feel torn about leaving your partner. Some feel that taking some time off is helpful, while others prefer the distraction of “normal” life. Choose what works best for you and your partner.

Dealing with the reactions of others...

It is difficult for someone who has never lost a baby to comprehend what you are going through. Often people do not know what to say and in their attempts to make you feel better they may say things that make you upset or angry. Most people do not purposely try to be insensitive; they simply do not understand the impact your loss has had on you.

The best way to deal with people when you are grieving is to **be honest** and **tell them what you need**. Instead of saying, “You just don't understand how I feel!” say, “I'm having

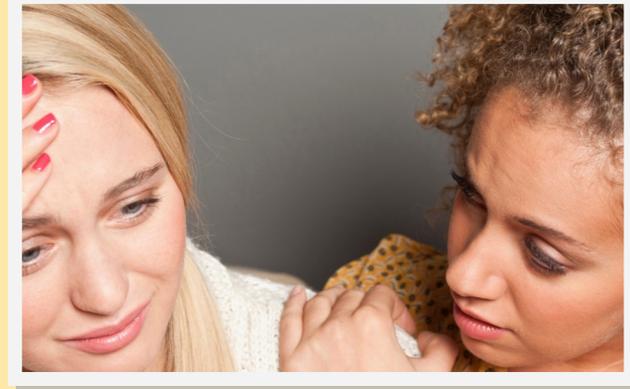
a bad day, it really hurts my feelings when you say things like that.” Some parents have found it helpful to write notes or letters to their family, friends, and/or coworkers explaining the circumstances surrounding their loss and what they need from them. Sometimes people are surprised at the depth of your feelings.

Ways to memorialize your baby...

One of the difficulties of an early pregnancy loss is the lack of tangible mementos of your baby. You can start by collecting anything that reminds you of your baby and create a memory box or keepsake book. Examples of items are...

- Sonogram picture – Call your doctor or lab and ask if you can have a copy if you don't already have one.
- Pregnancy test results
- Appointment cards from your doctor
- Pictures of yourself pregnant, even if you didn't know you were pregnant or look pregnant
- Hospital bracelet
- Cards of congratulations or recognition of your pregnancy
- Cards and flowers after your loss
- Recognition of Life Certificate
- Memorial Booklet
- Knit, crochet or quilt a small blanket

You can also create special reminders of your baby. Some ideas are planting a tree or bush, having a special garden, creating a bracelet or other jewelry, writing a letter to your baby, keep a journal, and/or making donations to your favorite charities in your baby's name. Some parents name their baby, regardless of their knowledge of the sex. Some choose a name based on a strong feeling they had or use a name that could be used for either sex.



Early Pregnancy Loss

A brief reference for those who have experienced the death of a baby before 20 weeks gestation