

For many families, the instant you knew you were pregnant, your life changed forever. Throughout your pregnancy you may have felt excited; maybe you already picked names or the perfect outfit for the baby, or even prepared the nursery. You may have felt reluctant or worried about how this baby was going to affect the rest of your life. Whether you were feeling joy or apprehension, this new baby was an important part of your future.

The feelings experienced after a neonatal death are often overwhelming and intense. The death of a baby at any stage is a very real loss. You will not only have to recover physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

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 a neonatal loss?

A neonatal loss is the death of a baby who was born alive and died shortly after birth. The baby may have lived for a few days, a few hours or only minutes. The cause often varies, but may include prematurity, infection, defects of major organs or chromosomal abnormalities.

From a mother's perspective...

Whether you are parents who learned before or after birth that your baby may die, the initial feelings you experience are very similar. You now have to go from the highs of awaiting a precious baby, to the lows of deep grief. Your emotions and feelings may be constantly changing with the circumstances of your loss.

If you learned of a life-threatening condition during pregnancy you may have been afraid to bond with your baby during the pregnancy. It is not uncommon for parents to think that if they do not become attached to their baby that it will make the death easier to deal with. The opposite reaction is also normal. After delivery some parents are unable to leave their baby's side, wanting to be with them every moment of their short life, fearing that their baby will die while they are apart. When the death of their baby is certain, some parents benefit from making choices prior to delivery regarding birth plans, baby's care and/or memorial services.

If you did not know your baby was ill until after they were born or if complications occurred suddenly, you may be in shock and have a difficult time accepting that this could have happened. You may have had to make overwhelming decisions very quickly after delivery.

In either situation, it is normal to question your decisions and those of the medical staff, wanting only what was best for your baby; to give him/her the best quality of life. After your baby died you may feel cheated because you were not able to experience his/her life for very long or you may feel grateful for the time that you did get to spend with your precious infant. You may have feel lost and alone. Not only has your baby died, but also the hopes and dreams you had planned for your future together.

You may feel...

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

Although these are the most common responses, it is unlikely that you will experience your emotions in a particular order or in stages. Feelings often ebb and flow and there is no *right* or *wrong* way to grieve. 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.

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.

Find Support – Surround yourself with supportive family and friends. Accept help when offered and seek help from your doctor or professional counselor if sadness significantly interferes with daily activities.

Communicate – Tell others what you need, and be specific. Other than verbally expressing your needs, you can write, sing, exercise and cry.

Take Care of Your Mind & Spirit – Rest, relax and reflect. Be patient. Look for comforting activities. Take part in memorial services.

From the partner's perspective...

You may be experiencing many of the same emotions as your wife/partner, but may also 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. Open lines of communication are 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 may make you upset or angry. Most people do not purposely try to be insensitive; they simply do not understand the impact the death of your baby has had on you. Some people do not understand the intimate relationship you and your baby already had since they were not able to experience the same close, tangible bond while you were pregnant.

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...

You can start by collecting anything that reminds you of your baby to create a memory box, keepsake book, and/or shadow box. Examples of items are...

- Sonogram pictures
- Pictures of yourself pregnant, even if you didn't know you were pregnant or look pregnant
- Pictures of your baby
- Hospital Birth Certificate/ID Bracelet
- Cards of congratulations before your loss
- Cards, flowers and gifts after your loss
- Footprint and handprint papers
- Permanent hand and foot prints
- Crib card, comb, or measuring tape
- Baby clothes and/or blanket
- Naming Ceremony/Baptism Booklet
- Memory Book

In the future you can...

- Arrange a special service or funeral
- Plant a special bush, tree, or garden
- Create a bracelet or jewelry
- Keep a journal
- Make donations to charities in memory of your baby



The Loss of a Newborn

A brief reference for those who have experienced the death of a baby in the first few months of life