

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 late-term pregnancy loss or stillbirth 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 as well.

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 stillbirth?

A stillbirth is the delivery of a baby who has died and is greater than 20 weeks gestation. In nearly half of all stillbirths, a cause of death can be determined after evaluating the baby. Possible causes include birth defects, problems with the placenta, or umbilical cord accidents. Maternal circumstances such as an illness or recreational drug use may also be the reason. Unfortunately, in some instances, the cause for the baby's death may remain undetermined. Stillbirth cannot be predicted, nor can we predict whom it will affect.

From the mother's perspective...

From the highs of awaiting a beautiful, healthy baby to the devastating discovery that your baby has died, the experience of stillbirth can be emotionally and physically overwhelming. You have not only lost a baby, but also the hopes and dreams you had planned for your future together.

You may feel...

- Shock
- Confusion
- Low Self Esteem
- Denial
- Anger
- Guilt and/or Self Blame
- Sadness
- Depression
- Relief
- Physical Symptoms
- 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. Because grieving has a physical component, it is very 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 and physical changes as you would if you had delivered a healthy baby. You can expect to experience mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate, 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 find comfort reading and writing; journaling your experience may be an important part of your healing process.

From the partner's perspective...

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

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 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 hard 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

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When A Baby Is Born Still

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