



## Questions about Grief

For many families, the instant you knew you were pregnant, your life changed forever. Whether you were feeling joy or apprehension, this new baby was an important part of your future. The feelings you have after the death of a baby can be overwhelming and intense, as the death of a baby at any stage is a very real loss. You will not only begin a journey of recovering physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

The following are frequently asked questions of bereaved parents, family, and friends. They have been provided as a source of some of the questions you may have, and also to realize the normalcy of all the emotions and fears you may experience during your grief journey.

### Parent's Grief

*I feel like I am sad all the time. Is this normal?*

Experiencing the death of a baby can be shocking, and the many emotions you have may be overwhelming. The intense feelings of your grief will not last forever; there will come a time when the heartache is less painful. It is important for you to know that what you are feeling is normal for you. Give yourself permission to grieve. Intense feelings associated with grief can last up to 2 years, but not all that time is spent in deep grief. Incorporating your loss into daily life takes patience and time.

*Is it normal to feel like I am going crazy?*

Grief can be tiring and overwhelming... There are so many emotions associated with grief. It is very unlikely that you will experience grief in stages or as steps. 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 feelings.

You may feel...

- Overwhelming shock
- Confusion
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of control
- Disappointment
- Jealousy
- Anger
- Guilt and/or self-blame
- Frustration
- Sadness and/or depression
- Physical symptoms related to hormonal changes

Finding ways to express your grief and finding support can help you feel less “crazy.” When a baby dies, so many expectations and hopes were shattered, and now you are finding ways to put the pieces of life back together when some of them don’t fit anymore.



For some bereaved parents, attending support meetings and connecting with other bereaved parents helps lessen the feelings of loneliness or “craziness.”

*Is it normal to feel so tired? How can I feel better?*

Your health and wellness are important to positive grieving. Your doctor will give you specific directions for your physical after care. Taking care of your physical health is just as important as taking care of your emotional and spiritual health. You may experience mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate or irritability. Your energy levels may not be consistent, as well as your appetite. Eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water, and maintaining a regular rest routine is important. There are many support resources out there to help you find some comfort. Sometimes a good friend with great listening skills will help, as well as support groups, or online organizations. You may also feel a need for spiritual bonds during this time. Contact clergy or simply set aside time for reflection or relaxation. Some people enjoy reading and writing, or journaling your experience could be part of the healing process.

*It seems like my spouse isn't grieving for our baby. Why are we so different?*

The death of a baby can be difficult for both parents. It is important to give yourself permission to grieve the way you need to grieve, and to allow the same for your spouse. You and your partner may have similar feelings, yet you may feel miles apart. You may even have difficulty understanding how your partner is grieving even though you both lost this baby. As much as some people would like one, there is not a step-by-step process for grieving. Everyone grieves differently. Some people are quiet in their grief, choosing solitary activities. Others may be more expressive in how they show grief and may be more assertive in grieving, such as sharing openly, crying, or sharing and making memories. For the quiet griever, they may be perceived as cold and irritable, or even depressed. Your partner may wonder why you don't feel the same emotions at the same times. You may need to take a long walk alone, while your partner may need to be held and hear that you are sad too. It is normal to question your spouse, or for your spouse to question where you are in your grief. People want to know that they are all right and that you are too. Finding ways to express to your partner how you grieve or what you need to get through the death of your baby is invaluable to your relationship.

*I am just too sad to be intimate with my partner. Will I ever feel better?*

It is sometimes difficult to bear the weight of several strong emotions at the same time. Everyone is different when it comes to being intimate again with his or her partner. Your doctor will give you direction on your healthcare and guidelines for sexual intercourse. He or she may permit intimacy with your spouse, but you may not be ready. You may have fears of how it may feel, future pregnancy, or allowing yourself to feel good. Being hesitant is normal, but giving yourself permission to love and be loved is important, whether intercourse is involved or not. It is important to communicate with your spouse your fears or feelings as to why it's just not comfortable yet. It is normal also to have the same feelings after having intercourse. You may cry or want to be alone. These more intense feelings you may have will lessen with time. Listen to your body and your heart to decide what is right for you.



*Nobody seems to understand that I am still grieving, what can I do?*

It is difficult for someone who has never lost a baby to comprehend what you are going through. Some people may not know what to say to you or understand the intimate relationship you and your baby already had since they were not able to experience the same tangible bond while you were pregnant. The best way to deal with others when you are grieving is to be honest and tell people what you need. Some bereaved parents have found it helpful to write notes or letters to family or friends explaining the circumstances surrounding their loss and what they need from them. Sometimes people can be surprised at the depth of your feelings. Even if others are having a difficult time understanding your loss, allow yourself time to remember and honor your precious baby.

*How do I cope with other people? How will my coworkers understand when I go back to work?*

Even for someone who has experienced the loss of a baby, your experience is different and unique. Many times they don't know what to say, and don't understand you lost a part of you, including the future you were planning together. They may say things they feel are comforting, but make you angry. Most people are not trying to be insensitive to you; they just don't truly understand the impact the death of your baby had on you. The best way to communicate with your friends, family, and coworkers when you are grieving is to be honest and specific in what you need. If you are not a verbal person, write a note telling them how you feel, what you have been through, or how you need to be supported. Depending on the relationships you have built, going back to work may be difficult. It is normal to have feelings of confusion, crying, having difficult days, or having trouble concentrating. Grief can make a normal day of work unbearable. Do your best to find appropriate ways to communicate your needs as a grieving parent and coworker/friend. As you continue grieving and remembering your baby, days will begin to fall into a new normal pattern.

## **Grandparent's Grief**

*Why does the death of my grandchild hurt so much?*

A grandparent's grief can be a complicated journey. Your grief is twofold. Not only are you mourning the loss of your grandchild, you have lost a part of your son or daughter that will never be the same. Many grandparents feel a sense of helplessness because they are unable to prevent the anguish their own child feels. Life may now seem more fragile and unfair than ever. These feelings may be frustrating, but they are completely normal for grandparents and family to feel as they, too, experience the loss of this baby.

*I don't know what to do or say. How can I support my son or daughter?*

Sometimes there is just nothing to say. Just be quiet, be with them, hold their hand, touch their shoulder, or give them a hug. If you can't find the right words say, "I'm sorry," or "I just don't know what to say." Avoid clichés like "Thank goodness you are



young, you can have more children,” or “God wouldn’t give you more than you can handle.” What may seem comforting to you may be very hurtful to them.

Check up on your son or daughter. Be specific in your offer to help. Perhaps offer to run errands, provide food, or do laundry. After a few weeks, people generally don’t stop by as often. Parents need a reminder that they are not alone.

One misconception is that the shorter the baby’s life, the easier the grief process. The opposite is true. Chances are your child is grieving not only the loss of his or her baby, but their pregnancy or hopes and dreams for the future. Acknowledge the baby by using his or her name. This shows you value the short life of your grandchild.

Avoid giving advice. There are no rules that define how one should feel or how soon one will return to the norms of daily life. Your child needs to be heard without feeling judgment or receiving unwanted advice. Grief can make people more sensitive and vulnerable.

It is very difficult to watch your own child grieve, and after some time you may wonder why they have not gotten better. The parents of a baby that dies needs more time to grieve, as the average intense grieving period could be up to 24 months. Parents will go through ups and downs during this time, but allowing them time and being patient will help them grieve.

Remember special dates or holidays. Parents, and grandparents, may be saddened by special events or dates like birthdays, due date, delivery date, Mother’s or Fathers’ Day, because it is a reminder that their baby is not here. Acknowledge how difficult these days may be without the baby, and ask how they are doing. Showing your recognition with hugs, cards, gifts, or special remembrances also helps to create special mementos.

#### *How do I talk to my son or daughter about the future?*

The future is best held in the hands and hearts of your son or daughter. Allow them to share their thoughts on future pregnancies or children without pressure or prodding. Even though you may have good intentions, encouraging or implying that parents should have more children may make the parents feel as though you are minimizing their loss. When the time is right, your son or daughter will share with you their plans, and it will be all right to share your emotions. Just remember, whether or not there are more children in the future for your son or daughter, it is important to remember and honor your grandchild that died.

### **Children’s Grief**

#### *How can I support my grieving child(ren)?*

Children want to share their experience of grief with adults. Your child’s love for the baby may be very special, and it will be unique as to how much they were included during the pregnancy/birth. Open-ended questions can help you talk and listen to what



your child feels. You can ask, “How does that make you feel?” or “What would you like to do for the baby?”

Children need honesty, not deception, when it comes to sharing sad news. Generally, children find ways to cope with grief. It is important to refrain from using clichés, half-truths, and fairy tales that may not explain the mystery of death. Remember that children think literally. Using phrases like “we lost the baby,” “the baby is sleeping with God,” “the baby went on a long trip,” or “the baby is watching over you now” can be confusing because of the literal meaning of the phrases. Use an honest explanation like, “The baby died. That means her heart stopped beating and her body doesn’t work anymore. She is not with us like she used to be, but we will always remember and love her very much.” explains literally what happened. Use simple and honest explanations.

Allow your child to ask questions. Younger children tend to need to repeat the same question again and again. Each time you repeat the answer or story honestly, you are allowing your child to understand it more deeply. Because you too are grieving, this may be a frustrating process. Do your best to be patient and open, as children learn how to cope from your sincere feelings, actions and responses to their questions.

*How will I know if my child needs more help than I can give?*

Children, just as you, will grieve and heal over time. Additional help can come from extended family, close friends, teachers, counselors, social workers, therapists, etc. You may want to seek professional counseling if you have any serious concerns, or if your child...

- Pretends nothing happened
- Develops a fear of school or school work dramatically declines
- Threatens suicide
- Frequently panics or shows excessive anxiety
- Physically assaults other people or is cruel to animals
- Behaves poorly with family members
- Becomes involved in drugs or alcohol
- Begins committing seriously social delinquent acts
- Is unwilling or unable to socialize with other children

## **Friend's Grief**

*I've never experienced the loss of a baby. What am I supposed to do to make my friends feel better?*

No matter what you say or do, there is nothing that will make your friends “feel better.” Fortunately there are some ideas that will help you be a part of their experience and will help them through their grief.



If you don't know what to say, don't say anything. Sometimes just being with them or offering a hug is enough. It's all right not to know what to say. Say, "I'm sorry this happened," or "This is so awful, I don't know what to say."

Respond to your friends' grief just as if any other member of their family had died. Send flowers, sympathy cards, share special remembrances, and make a phone call, make or bring dinner. Even though this baby's life was short, your friends lost their hopes and future too.

*It's been a couple of months. Why aren't my friends over the loss of their baby?*

The death of a baby is very sad and life altering. The intense grieving can take up to 24 months, not all of them spent in deep sadness. The best thing for you to do is help them through their grief. Ask sincerely, "How are you?" and be ready to listen. Sometimes parents can verbalize what they need from you, so you will know what you can do or say to comfort them.

Do your best to acknowledge the baby that has died by using his or her name. This will show you value the short life of their baby and that he or she is not forgotten.

Grieving parents may be saddened at certain times of the year or by special events, like birthdays, due date, delivery date, Mother's or Father's Day, because they are reminded that their baby is not here. Your friends need your support and acknowledgment during these days.

After a while, people stop calling or dropping by, which can be a lonely time because they may feel that people have forgotten their baby. Make a call or write them a note to let them know you care.