

After a Loss in Pregnancy

*Miscarriage,
Stillbirth & Termination*



Bereavement Support Service

After a Loss in Pregnancy

A miscarriage, stillbirth or termination can be a traumatic event involving both birth and death, and can have a major impact on both parents. You will need time to adjust to what has happened.

Although feelings and reactions appear to vary greatly, any combination of the following responses is considered to be a normal part of coming to terms with what has happened.

FEELINGS OF GRIEF AND LOSS

Grief is a normal and healthy response to miscarriage, stillbirth or termination. Emotions can be very strong, and often involve many feelings:

- **Shock and disbelief** (“This is not really happening” ... “It can’t be true”)
- **Anger** (“Why me?” ... “Why do I have to make this decision?”)
- **Guilt** (“Was it caused by something I did?”)
- **Depression** (“I can’t bear it; the future is hopeless”)
- **Acceptance** (“I am at peace with the memory of the miscarriage ... I can focus again on my present and future.”)

The grief process tends to last longer for women who already held hopes and dreams about the baby they have carried. The feelings of loss can return briefly even years later, particularly after reminders, like the anniversary. Anniversaries may be painful times - especially the time when the baby would have been born.

AMBIVALENCE OR RELIEF

These reactions may be more likely if the pregnancy was to some extent unplanned or unwanted. Some feel guilty if they experience relief rather than sadness. Yet relief may be the most honest and accepting response to the circumstances.

ANXIETY ABOUT TELLING OTHERS

Many worry about how others will react to them. They may try not to talk about it for fear of embarrassing other people. If the topic is raised, some people may indeed respond insensitively. They may ignore the issue, trivialise or make light of it (“There must have been something wrong with it anyway” ... “Oh well, you can always try again!”) Usually people respond this way because, despite the best of intentions, they do not know what to say.

NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO INFANTS OR PREGNANT WOMEN

Pregnant women and babies often act as strong reminders of the loss, and can rekindle feelings of anger or distress. There can be a temptation to avoid places where such reminders are likely to be.

RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULTIES

A miscarriage, stillbirth or termination can put stress upon a relationship. You may become upset with your spouse or partner. There may be a lack of interest in sex and intimacy, and you may find it hard to express your feelings about what has happened. There may not be enough mutual support to satisfy the needs of both partners. Most relationship problems are caused or made worse if the couple do not talk enough about what has happened and its effects upon each person.

ANXIETY ABOUT THE NEXT PREGNANCY

Some women may expect (or be told) that another pregnancy as soon as possible will help resolve the grief. This is often not the case. Waiting until the grief and distress have passed generally reduces the risk of depression after the next birth. It may also make the next pregnancy a less anxious time. Many women fear it will happen again and worry that something is wrong with the next baby, despite medical checks indicating all is well.

Suggestions for help

Although no amount of help will undo what has happened, the following suggestions may enable you to cope during the weeks it takes to readjust, particularly if you feel unsure how to handle the situation.

PROVIDE A FOCUS FOR THE GRIEF

Grieving will take longer to resolve if you try to suppress or ignore your feelings. Grief can be expressed more easily if attention is drawn to the nature of the loss.

You may choose to name the baby, even if the sex was unknown. This removes the impersonal label “it”. A name provides a clear way of referring to the loss.

Sometimes a form of “farewell” ceremony can help establish the reality of the loss; e.g. a service, a gathering of friends and relatives to acknowledge what has happened may be appropriate.

HAVE YOUR MEDICAL NEEDS ATTENDED TO

Regardless of the circumstances, a medical check-up should take place two weeks after returning home.

SEEK INFORMATION

Having an informed understanding about your situation may help you come to terms with it, whether or not the cause can be established.

PARTNER SUPPORT AND FAMILY AND FRIENDS

It is very important in a time of crisis to keep communication channels open, so each partner may be more aware of the needs of the other. Many people, even those quite close to you, may not understand why you are so upset. They may offer false hope or encourage you to forget about it, without realizing this is not helpful. If your friends or family react this way, you may have to help them to help you. Think carefully about what help you need and who might be able to provide it.

GROUP SUPPORT

Support groups can also provide further information on women's health issues and local helping agencies.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Sometimes things can get too much, and professional help can be of benefit. The following two guidelines may help you decide whether this is necessary for you.

THE "COPING RULE"

After a few weeks, are you still unable to face everyday social or work responsibilities? Are friends or relatives expressing a lot of concern about you? Have you considered taking your life?

THE "TIME RULE"

As the weeks pass, are you feeling worse rather than gradually better? Are there problems in other areas of your life that are getting worse? After three months have passed, are you still not feeling measurably better? It may be time to seek help.



BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

The Bereavement Support Service extends the care we give to the families we serve.

Some of our families may not need this additional service, others will need and benefit from it.

Although very important, the funeral is only the first step we take in saying 'goodbye'. As you begin to work through your grief, the road ahead may seem long and lonely.

Relatives and friends will be especially helpful at the time of death and at the funeral. However, as the weeks and months pass after the death, they may not always be available to comfort you and allow you to talk about the person you love and miss so much.

We can provide support; a phone call, a letter or email, or a visit. There is always someone to talk to.



Bereavement Support Service

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