

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE THROUGH THE LOSS OF A BABY

Miscarriage | Stillbirth | Infant Death | Loss of a Multiple



When someone you love loses a baby....

...the pain feels too great to bear, the loss profound. But this grief can be isolating because others didn't know the baby as the parents did. Often, the only experience of the baby was in the womb or through the walls of an isolette. This type of grief can be difficult for others to understand and know how to support. Remember that nothing you say or do can take away their pain and they don't expect you too. What you can do is show support, encouragement and understanding. You can validate just how deep and intense the grief is and can make space for them to share this grief with you if and when they are ready. You can also help with details that are overwhelming, things as significant as cleaning out the baby's room or as simple as going to the grocery store.

You can ask...

It is often helpful for people to have guidance in thinking through activities of daily living. Who will help them eat and rest and take care of the home? Who can help them manage difficult situations and people? What is mom going to do to take care of her physical recovery? Does she know what she will experience?

Self Care:

Grieving parents cannot make space for your grief. You can let them know how you feel but please find a place to share that experience with others so when you are with the grieving parents, you are able to focus on what they need. Your tears need to be ones of comfort, not of your own need. Check in with yourself to make sure you are doing okay. Focus on your own self care. Sleep, eat and exercise regularly. Process your feelings with trusted others. Watching and experiencing someone walk through grief is a sacred experience. Your ability to be fully present for them in their need will significantly impact their journey. But you can only do that if you take care of yourself too.



What not to say...

“I know how you feel” (even if you have experienced a loss, each person’s story is different). Instead say: “It sounds like you feel...”

“I can’t believe...” (or any sort of shock around medical care, treatment or relational experiences). Instead say, “I can tell you have a lot of questions/anger/concern about this. Is there someone you can talk to?”

“Everything happens for a reason.” (People often try to find meaning in things to make sense of what feels like a senseless thing. But that does not help). Instead, say, “Sometimes terrible things happen for no reason.” If and when appropriate, remind the parent they didn’t cause this. Parents often feel an intense sense of misplaced guilt related to their loss.

“God has a plan.” Instead ask: “What role does your faith play in your experience of grief?”

“You are so strong.” or “I don’t know how you are doing this?” (Grieving parents don’t feel strong and they don’t know how they are surviving. They feel overwhelmed and scared). Instead say, “This may feel like it is too much to take. Somehow you will take one step at a time and hopefully feel supported by others around that can help you. Please let me know if I can help you in any way.”

“Your baby is in a better place.” (There is no better place for a baby than in it’s parents arms). Instead you might say, “Your arms may ache to hold your baby right now. It’s okay to grieve that empty space.”

“You can try again.” (Parents know that; they don’t want another child. They want the one they lost. Even if there were physical challenges that made that child’s life unsustainable, they long for that child). Instead say, “Let’s try not to focus on the future but instead make space for all the grief and feelings you have at this moment.”