

Helping someone who is grieving

Be a good listener

Grieving people need to talk about their loss, acknowledge that they have been through a difficult experience. You can't fix their grief but you can be there, hear their story, and share their journey.

Be a shoulder to cry on

Allow them to cry with you, crying helps the release of emotions and this helps with healing.

Be in touch with them

Drop in, telephone and say "I was thinking of you today" write a letter, send an email, remember special days like Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries.

When someone has experienced a loss, there will be big and small adjustments to be made in their lives. These could bring uncertainty, frustration, fear, sadness and change as each new day comes along. Grief is about adapting to change in life, thoughts, hopes, beliefs and the future.

Be a friend

Often being there is all that is needed to support someone who is grieving.

(Adapted from the writings of Doris Zagdanski)

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Death of a Baby

Grief reactions associated with
stillbirth and the death of a baby

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Pregnant couples usually expect birth to be a joyful event not a sad one. In a normal situation no-one expects a baby to die. The death of a baby brings many intense feelings.

Parents

Parents often feel a strong desire to talk about their baby. Many want to be with others who have suffered and survived a similar loss. Many bereaved parents seek help from a support group from around 6 weeks or so after their baby's death. This is because until that time most bereaved parents feel at least some support from their family and friends. However after a few weeks most family and friends are able to get on with their lives and activities whereas the bereaved may feel they cannot get on with theirs.

In the months and years after a baby is stillborn the parents may still note when their baby may have been walking or should have been going to school. Christmas and family birthdays may also be painful reminders of what should have been. Parents may feel particularly sad during these times. Many will remember and think about their dead baby for the rest of their lives.

Many bereaved parents will go on to have another baby. Most will endure an anxious pregnancy. It is common for bereaved parents to believe that the subsequent baby will die too either during pregnancy or infancy. The length of time between the death of their baby and the next pregnancy does not appear to affect the level of anxiety felt during the pregnancy. However if another pregnancy occurs within twelve months, then parents have to deal with an active grieving phase as well as anxiety caused by the next pregnancy. It is very common for family and friends of the bereaved to believe that all is well once a new baby is born but the bereaved parents will still grieve for the baby who died.

Men suffer too

Men also suffer after the death of a baby. Both parents grieve but the way they act and feel is not usually the same. Many bereaved parents say their relationship changes after their baby dies. Some find their relationship strengthens as a result of the tragedy while others drift apart. Couples who say their relationship strengthened are usually the couples who freely talk to each other about how they are feeling.

Children also grieve

Children also grieve for their baby sister or brother. Most seem to cope. It is common to include the baby's brother or sister when visiting

the baby in hospital and going to the funeral. Children usually like to talk about their baby. It is often helpful to encourage children to discuss their loss both at home and at school.

The baby's grandparents may also grieve for their grandchild. They often suffer because their child is suffering and grieve because their grandchild is dead. Sometimes relationships in a family become strained after a baby has died. It is helpful to talk through issues before they become problems.

Many bereaved parents feel they have been emotionally strengthened by the experience of losing a baby. Most find they understand more about themselves and what they really value. They know they can rely on themselves and their partner when times are tough. Some find new friendships and understanding amongst other bereaved parents.

Many no longer take what they have for granted and are more sensitive to their family and friends when they, in turn, grieve. Bereaved parents who are further down the track can often look back and say "I survived when I never thought I would".

Adapted from Grief Link resources website: www.grieflink.asn.au