

Finding Your Way After Loss



*Family Support Following
a Pregnancy Loss or Loss of an Infant*

“Grief is a journey,
often perilous and without clear direction,
that must be taken.

The experience of grieving
cannot be ordered or categorized,
hurried or controlled,
pushed aside or ignored indefinitely.

It is inevitable as breathing,
as change, as love.

It may be postponed,
but it will not be denied.”

- *Safe Passages*, Molly Fumia

When Your Baby Dies...

Whether your loss occurred during pregnancy or after birth, you may go through a variety of physical, emotional and spiritual experiences. Your emotions may be unpredictable and unstable. You may dwell on questions such as “what if...” and “if only...” You may also feel:

- 🦋 Numbness
- 🦋 Denial
- 🦋 Confusion
- 🦋 Anger or irritability
- 🦋 Deep sadness
- 🦋 Self-criticism and guilt
- 🦋 Anxiety or loneliness
- 🦋 Difficulty concentrating
- 🦋 Physical sensation, tightness in the throat or chest, shortness of breath, a lack of energy, body aches or heart palpitations

Grief

Remember that grieving is normal and every person experiences grief in different ways. You may experience a range of emotions from sadness to resentfulness to anger. You may have a sense that it is not real and that it never happened. You may feel sad while watching television, listening to music or reading. You may cling to the baby that was lost, think about him/her nonstop, or want everyone to recognize that the baby was real. You may feel resentful about happy scenes of families or believe that the things you see or do have a special meaning connected to the baby who has died (from gardening to dreaming to what you're eating). You may feel anger towards things that remind you of your baby.

Normal feelings also include anger towards and/or jealousy of other pregnant women, friends and family members. You may not want to talk with them and may prefer to be left alone. On the other hand, you may want to talk about what happened with everyone who will listen. All of these feelings and reactions are normal.



Grieving For Your Loss

Although it will be painful, grieving after the loss of your baby is necessary. It can be a long process. Often individuals and couples experience five stages of grief:

- 🌱 Denial
- 🌱 Anger
- 🌱 Bargaining
- 🌱 Depression
- 🌱 Acceptance

These stages can occur at different times for different people. If you would like help dealing with your sadness, grief counseling is available. A Healthy Start representative can talk with you and help link you to appropriate resources. Healthy Start can be reached at **386-254-1226** or toll-free at **1-866-301-2066**. You can also call the Postpartum Depression helpline at **800-773-6667**. Additional resources are listed in the attached resource guide.

Taking Care of Yourself

Taking care of yourself is important. This experience may be overwhelming for the whole family, and you may feel alone at times. Here are some suggestions for taking care of yourself:

- 🌱 **Sleep:** Give yourself plenty of time to rest. Grief is emotionally and physically draining.
- 🌱 **Exercise:** Take walks or exercise frequently. Physical activity can reduce stress and may give you time to gather your thoughts.
- 🌱 **Talk with others:** Consider seeking out others through support groups, church groups, family or friends.
- 🌱 **Cry, cry, and cry:** Tears are very healing. You don't have to cry in front of others. However, sometimes in the deepest of grief, it helps to cry with another person present.
- 🌱 **Honor your feelings:** Embrace your emotions. They may range from anger to sorrow to hope; everyone reacts differently.
- 🌱 **Don't expect to "get over it":** You will begin to experience happy times again in your life, but you probably will never "get over it." It is a gentle and gradual acceptance that happens over many years.

Creating Memories of Your Baby

Depending on when your baby died, you may not have had the chance to see, touch or hold him. You may want to seek opportunities to connect with your baby and create memories of your child.

Save things that remind you of your baby in a special box or a scrapbook. This may become important to you as the days and years pass. Special reminders might include ultrasound pictures, footprints, a hospital bracelet, photos, clothes, blankets or toys. Consider giving your baby a name and refer to your baby by that name.

Talk with your Healthy Start representative to help you get connected with services. For additional information, please visit the following websites:

<http://www.october15th.com>

<http://www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families>

Special things you may choose to do to remember your baby are:

- ✿ Light a candle on special days and holidays.
- ✿ Say a prayer, write a poem, paint a picture.
- ✿ Plant a tree or a small garden.
- ✿ Have a piece of jewelry made, perhaps with the baby's birthstone.
- ✿ Donate to a charity or give something to a needy child who is about the same age as your baby would be.
- ✿ Get involved in a special project dedicated to your baby. For example, raise money to build a swing set in a park in your baby's name or volunteer for a local charity.

You may want a memorial service to honor your baby. This can be a memorial service or funeral at your home or at your place of worship. It can be with just a few people or with all your friends and family. It may include burying your baby or spreading his/her ashes in a special place. A service can give you a chance to say a special goodbye to your baby, and it gives you a time to share your sorrow with family and friends.

Funeral expenses can be quite a burden to parents. Talk with your Healthy Start representative about resources available in your community to support you during this difficult time.

Have a special time to remember. Pick a date that is meaningful to you. Do something on your own, or bring family and friends together to remember your baby. Help your other children remember the baby by asking them if they would like to share their feelings.

Adapted from: www.pregnancyloss.info, www.marchofdimes.com

Postpartum Depression (PPD)

Following the loss of your baby your chances of having Postpartum Depression (PPD) are increased. Sometimes grief goes beyond what is considered “normal” and PPD occurs. PPD is a clinical diagnosis for intense sadness persisting after the birth or loss of a child. Watch out for some of the following symptoms:

- 🌱 *Loss of appetite*
- 🌱 *Insomnia*
- 🌱 *Overwhelming fatigue*
- 🌱 *Thoughts of harming yourself or others**
- 🌱 *Lack of joy in your life*
- 🌱 *Feelings of shame, guilt or inadequacy*
- 🌱 *Severe mood swings*
- 🌱 *Intense irritability and anger*
- 🌱 *Withdrawal from family and friends*

Although there is no quick fix, PPD is treatable and a common emotional response. It occurs in as many as 25% of women, and the risk is even higher following the death of a baby. If you think you may have PPD, contact your healthcare specialist or doctor immediately.

****If you are currently experiencing thoughts of harming yourself or others, please call the SMA Behavioral, Inc. Hotline at 800-539-4228.***

Family Can Feel Postpartum Depression (PPD)

The difficulties associated with PPD are not experienced by mom alone. Dad and other family members can feel it too, especially after the diagnosis of a child with a disorder or defect and/or the death of a baby. “PPND” or Paternal (father) Postnatal Depression is a condition similar to PPD, and it affects new dads. Although this condition is not as well known as PPD, it can be just as severe. Dad should not have to suffer in silence. If he experiences the symptoms previously listed, he should contact his health care provider or doctor.

For an online support group go to ***<http://www.postpartummen.com>***.

Help is Available

If you or your loved one is experiencing ongoing postpartum depression after the loss of your baby, it is very important that you seek help. These feelings should not be ignored, as they can be emotionally damaging for you and the people in your life. Please, get help. You do not need to go through this alone.

Talking To Children About Loss

It's important to remember that children of all ages grieve. They may be afraid, act out or need special attention and extra time with people they love and trust. Some children may think that they're going to die too. They can cope better with grief when they know what's happening. Here are some ways you can help them understand the baby's death:

- ✿ Talk with them about death using simple, honest words that they understand. You can say things like, "the baby didn't grow," or "the baby was born very tiny." Don't use words that may confuse or scare them, such as "the baby is sleeping," or "mommy lost the baby."
- ✿ Read them stories that talk about death and loss. Resources for children's books include your local library or school. Children's books may help them understand death and learn that other children have had the same experience.
- ✿ Encourage them to ask questions. Give as much information as your child needs. Remember that children think differently than adults and they may have questions over time rather than right away.
- ✿ Be aware of changes in your children's behavior. They may be hurt, confused and angry, just like you. Younger children may be clingy or cranky. They may act in ways or do things that they haven't done in a long time (such as wetting their bed or pants, getting into fights at school, being scared of the dark, etc). Older children may be more worried about school, friends or sports; or they may show no reaction at all to the baby's death. They also may ask questions that you think are rude or uncaring. These are normal reactions. Be as patient and loving as you can.
- ✿ Tell them they are not going to die.
- ✿ Tell them that no one is to blame for the baby's death.
- ✿ Ask them to find their own ways to remember the baby. Older children may want to go to the memorial service or funeral. Younger children can draw a picture or make a keepsake for the baby. These keepsakes can be included in a memory kit or scrapbook.
- ✿ Ask a counselor to meet with you and your children to help all of you understand your feelings. Enclosed are resources available in your community.
- ✿ Tell your children's teachers and other caregivers what has happened.

Adapted from http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/572_15999.asp

Miscarriage

Miscarriage happens anytime before 20 weeks of pregnancy

What is a D&C?

If your healthcare provider decides that you will need a D&C (dilation of the cervix and removal of the fetus) due to a miscarriage, the risks and benefits of the procedure will be explained to you. For some women it helps to have loved ones present beforehand. Your healthcare provider will explain how long the procedure will take. You will not remember anything about the surgery due to the medications given to you. You may be put completely “under”, or you may be given a local anesthetic and nitrous oxide (laughing gas). If you are awake, you may feel some pricking or sucking sensations.

You will spend a couple of hours in a recovery room to wait for the medications to wear off. Some healthcare providers will prescribe antibiotics as a precaution; but many will not prescribe antibiotics unless symptoms of an infection develop.

During the few days following the surgery you can expect some abdominal pain or tenderness, muscle soreness, mild bleeding, grogginess, and sometimes nausea or an upset stomach. Ask your healthcare provider what type of symptoms would require you to call the doctor.

Should I wait or have a D&C?

If you and your healthcare provider choose to wait for a natural miscarriage, you will most likely have a range of emotions that may be difficult to discuss. It may not seem real; you may harbor hope that it will never happen. Eventually the cramping and bleeding will begin, and you may react with severe grief and panic. You may feel uncomfortable trying to catch tissue in a jar or plastic bag for testing. All these things are fine. Do the best you can. If all goes well, you will pass all the tissue of the pregnancy and the cramps will get better. Once you believe you have completely miscarried, contact your healthcare provider. Keep in mind that you may not pass all the tissue and may need a D&C to empty your uterus.

How soon can I get pregnant again?

Talk to your healthcare provider and seek interconceptional care.

Will it happen again?

The likelihood of having another miscarriage depends on the cause of this miscarriage, if known. Be sure to ask this question of your healthcare provider. Seek interconceptional care and genetic counseling.

Did I do something wrong?

It is often unknown why a loss has occurred. Talk with your healthcare provider about questions you may have.

Are there books and websites I can read or people I can talk to?

Yes. The information in this toolkit will assist you with finding the help that you need during this time of grief. Please see the resource guide in this booklet for bereavement resources and websites.

Before Your Next Pregnancy

Interconceptional Care

The term “**interconceptional care**” refers to the health of a mother between pregnancies. After the loss of a baby, some parents want to try again immediately; others choose to wait or not to try again at all. It is perfectly normal to be nervous or worried about getting pregnant again.

If you plan on trying to become pregnant again, there are several important steps you should take to make sure that you are as healthy as possible for the next pregnancy. The following is important to do before you next pregnancy:

- 🌱 Talk to your health care provider about how long to wait before trying to get pregnant again.
- 🌱 Make sure your diet is rich in folic acid before getting pregnant. It can help to prevent cancer and heart disease, as well as reduce the baby's risk of neural-tubal defects such as spina bifida. Look for folic acid in beans, rice, leafy green vegetables, oranges, pineapples, mangos, nuts, cereals that say “fortified,” whole grain bread that says “enriched,” and many other foods. You can also take a daily multivitamin with folic acid.
- 🌱 Achieve your healthy weight.
- 🌱 Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco should be avoided when trying to become pregnant. Alcohol takes the folic acid out of your body, increasing the chances of your baby having spinal cord problems. It can also cause fetal alcohol syndrome, miscarriage, and low birth-weight.
- 🌱 See your dentist.

Family Planning

Talk openly with your healthcare provider about your future family plans. Free birth control may be available at your local Health Department for up to two years through the Florida Family Planning Waiver.

Genetic Counseling

You may benefit from genetic counseling if you meet any of the following criteria:

- 🌱 If you or your partner has had a baby with a previous disorder of chromosomes or genes.
- 🌱 If a prenatal screening or test comes back with an unexpected result.
- 🌱 If you, the dad, or any of the baby's relatives had a birth defect/genetic disorder.
- 🌱 If you have experienced two or more miscarriages or infant deaths.
- 🌱 If you will be 35 or older when you have the baby.
- 🌱 If you are concerned about the genetic history of your ethnic or racial group.

Genetic counseling is provided by a genetics specialist and can help you learn more about your body.

Notes

To read more about normal grief after loss visit:
http://www.pregnancyloss.info/how_to_cope.htm

Bereavement Resources

Florida Hospital Hospice Care
Volusia/Flagler: 1-888-991-5477

Halifax Health Hospice of Volusia/Flagler
Bereavement Department Volusia/Flagler
386-322-4738 or 1-800-272-2717

The Lawrence E. Whelan Begin Again Children's Grief Center
East Volusia/Flagler: 386-258-5100
West Volusia: 386-822-4852

The TEARS Foundation
Pregnancy/infant/baby loss Parent Support Group
www.thetearsfoundation.org

Bereavement Websites

www.compassionatefriends.org

www.firstcandle.org/grieving-families

www.floridahospitalhospice.org

www.hovf.org

www.legacy.com

www.october15th.com

www.sidsfla.org

www.thetearsfoundation.org

To Parents and Families:

If you recently experienced the loss of a baby during pregnancy or in early infancy, the Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) Program extends our deepest sympathy. There simply are not words to express the depth of sorrow after such a loss.

The FIMR Program provides support to parents and families whose lives have been affected by the tragic death of a child or loss of a pregnancy. We can provide:

- ✔ Support needed for emotional, physical, spiritual and social healing.
- ✔ Referrals to resources needed immediately following a loss.
- ✔ Information and emotional support to help deal with grief and other emotions following the loss of a baby.

When To Call

If you have experienced the loss of a baby during pregnancy, after birth or up to one year of age, whatever the cause, please call us. We will arrange to visit you as soon as possible.

All services are free of charge and include Emotional/Grief Support Information Resources & Referrals.

For more information call **386-252-4277**



This booklet was produced by the FIMR Program, funded by the Florida Department of Health, with support from the Healthy Start Coalition of Flagler & Volusia Counties, Inc.

For more information, please visit us at www.healthystartfv.org.