Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Loss
With our sympathy....

The loss of a baby is a very difficult experience for you and your family. We offer our deepest sympathies and are here to help you. We hope this booklet helps you understand your grief and find ways to help you cope.

The grief of miscarriage, stillbirth or infant loss is not like any other. It is often a silent and unexpected tragedy and there may be no explanation for the loss. When you lose a baby, that relationship did not have a chance to develop. The goodbye came before you had a chance to say hello. You may also mourn the loss of what could have been.

Each grief is unique

Grief is a natural reaction to the death of a loved one, but most of us are not ready for it. People often wonder if they will ever feel “normal” again. Grief is a long process that changes as it goes.

Like a snowflake or a fingerprint, each person’s grief is unique. Grief is not an orderly set of stages. It is different for each person, so only you know what feels right for you.

It is normal to have a range of emotions and reactions.

You may feel:
- Anger and disbelief
- Shocked
- Sad and bitter about lost hopes and dreams
- Confused and numb about your loss
- Full of questions
- Restless, not able to sleep or eat
- Like you’re going crazy
- Alone, isolated or lost
- Uncertain
- Disappointed
- Not able to concentrate or be around others
- Preoccupied with thoughts of the baby

It is normal to have physical reactions. You may:
- Cry
- Feel exhausted
- Have a tightness in your chest
- Feel short of breath
- Feel weak
- Have a faster heart rate or a dry mouth

Websites
- First Candle (www.firstcandle.org)
- HAND: Helping After Neonatal Death (www.handonline.org)
- Honored Babies (www.HonoredBabies.org)
- MISS Foundation (www.missfoundation.org)
- The Center for Loss in Multiple Births (CLIMB), Inc. (www.climb-support.org)
Express your grief

It may help you to sort out your feelings or pain if you talk about your feelings or write down your thoughts. Ask for help from those around you. You can talk to your family, friends, medical professionals, chaplain, social worker or grief counselor.

Support and resources may help in the coming days and weeks. Others may urge you to move on and not to dwell. But don’t cut short the time you need to express your grief so you can begin the healing process.

When you understand how grief may affect you, you can adjust to it. Then you can take care of yourself better.

Your husband or partner

The loss of a baby affects both parents in different ways. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel at this time, and even though you both experienced the same loss you may not feel the same way.

Men may feel they must be “the strong one.” But they may struggle with their own feelings and how to help their wives or partners.

Communication is especially important for both of you right now. But if your partner can not support you because they are working through their own grief, find others to listen. It may help to attend a grief support group or see a counselor.

Reactions of family and friends

Friends and family members may hesitate to mention your baby because it may upset you. They may have a hard time bringing up the subject of your loss.

They may also say the wrong thing as they try to console you. They may say, “At least you have your other children,” or “You can always have another baby.” They don’t understand your hurt and pain. When you can, tell them how you feel and what you need. This will help you grieve and begin healing.

Family and friends may need to mourn your loss too. Grandparents often grieve for the loss of their grandchild and for their child who is coping with so much sadness. As you speak to close family members you can help them share their grief too.

If you have children, include them in your family’s grief rituals. Your children had their own hopes about a baby being a part of their lives. Children will try to tell adults what their needs are but may not have the words. Talk about the baby who died, and show them photos if they ask. Answer questions and give details if you think your child can absorb them. It may help you to talk to your child about infant loss if you use one of the many children’s books that are written on this topic.

Give your children love and support. They may think they caused the death because of angry or jealous feelings. Let them know they did not cause the baby to die. Spend some special time with your children, or ask other adults who are sensitive to your child’s grief to spend time with them.
Creating healing rituals

After an infant loss, parents often use symbols to remember their baby. Some parents plant a special tree as an expression of their love. A toy or gown intended for your baby may also be a special keepsake. You can also create a memory book of your pregnancy as a way of honoring your precious child.

If your baby was stillborn or died shortly after birth, you may wish to take time with your baby. Some options that other parents have found healing include:

- Hold, name and talk to your baby
- Gather important keepsakes such as a lock of hair, family photographs, handprints, footprints, or clothing or blankets in which your baby was swaddled.
- Plan a ritual or service that meets your needs and beliefs. This may mean a hospital blessing, funeral, or memorial service.

Graveside burial

Many funeral homes will offer lower rates and special options for an infant’s funeral. Other ideas that may be helpful include:

- Making your own casket or urn
- Placing a lock of the your hair or a letter with your baby
- Have a special children’s toy or poem shared at the service
- Encouraging a sibling to place a special toy, drawing, or poem in the casket

Social and work activities

It is common for people to have a hard time going back to work or taking part in social events. As you move through grief, you will get better at managing your grief upsurges. Grief is a life-long process, but with support and self-care you will heal.

Anniversary of the birth and death

As time passes, your emotions may not be as intense as they are now. However, as you approach the anniversary of your baby’s death, you may become flooded with emotions that you thought were gone. This return of feelings, especially on special occasions, is a very normal part of grief.

To help with the pain during these special days, you may wish to have a meaningful custom such as releasing balloons, writing your child a note, or buying flowers.
Help yourself heal

- Spend time with those who bring you comfort and support.
- Limit contact with those who do not understand your grief.
- Tell people what you need and accept offers of help.
- Don’t run away from your feelings. Cry when you need to.
- Find ways to deal with stress using soothing activities.
- Be careful using alcohol or prescription drugs. They may numb your grief, but they won’t help you heal.
- Set small goals for yourself.
- Spend time doing something you enjoy.
- Take grief breaks.

Footprints
By Dorothy Ferguson

How very softly
You tiptoed into my world.
Almost silently,
Only a moment you stayed.
But what an imprint
Your footsteps have left
Upon my heart.

Ways to express your loss

- Write in a journal or spend quiet time alone
- Write poetry, paint or draw. Art can be healing
- Have rituals that honor your baby
- Pray or meditate
- Read books about the same sort of loss you experienced
- Create a memory quilt or scrapbook
- Go to a grief support group or meet with a volunteer

Do I need help?

You may want to think about getting professional help if several weeks have passed and you have any of these symptoms:

- Feeling anger or irritable toward others
- A hard time doing the normal activities of work or home
- Becoming distant from your partner, family, or friends
- Using alcohol, drugs, or addictive behaviors to ease the pain of grief
- Ongoing trouble eating or sleeping
- Not able to speak of your baby who died

It is common to have mood swings after a pregnancy and loss. But get help right away from your doctor, counselor, or the emergency room if you have thoughts of harming yourself or others. Reach out to someone who can help you.
Pregnancy after a loss

Couples who get pregnant after a loss can have feelings of fear and doubt. These feeling can be very strong. There is a common tendency to try not to bond with the baby, just in case things do not go well.

Here are suggestions for coping with a pregnancy after a loss:

- Keep a journal. Find a way to express your feelings
- Talk with others who have suffered a loss and then had a healthy baby
- Talk with others who have had babies to remind you that most pregnancies end happily
- Ask your doctor what extra precautions you should take, what subtle signs to watch for, and what extra tests are available
- Remember that it is very normal to have anxiety at this time.
- Realize that it might be hard to be joyful and happy because of your fears and past experience
- Education and awareness can help you feel more in control

Coping as a couple or family

Resolve to be gentle with yourself and other family members as you adjust to the pain of your loss.

Have family meetings and talk with one another each day. Be open and honest about your feelings of sadness, frustration, or guilt. Your partner and other family members may also have these feelings.

Respect that individuals grieve differently. One person may cry a lot or want to talk about the death. Another person may withdraw and ask to be alone. Both of these are normal reactions.

Ask for what you need. Do not assume that your partner knows how you feel. Tell your partner what you would find comforting at a given moment.

This is a vulnerable time. You may feel irritable. You may be absent minded or forgetful. You also may feel easily overwhelmed with the tasks of daily living. This happens because grieving takes so much of your mental energy. Simplify tasks when possible.

Your partner may have strong feelings as well. Try to accept your partner’s emotions and help when you can. Support each other. Simple things like holding hands, wiping a tear, or giving a hug mean so much.

Get the support that you need from friends, a grief counselor, another bereaved parent, or a support group.
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Books available through St. Mary’s Grief Support Library

**For parents**

- After the Loss of your Baby – For Teen Moms by Nykiel, Connie
- Couple Communication after a Baby Dies – Differing Perspectives by Ilse and Nelson
- Empty Arms, Coping with Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death by Ilse, Sherokee
- Healing your Grieving Heart after Stillbirth: 100 Practical Ideas for Parents and Families by Wolfelt, Alan
- Planning a Precious Goodbye by Ilse, Sherokee
- Still birth, Yet Still Born; Grieving and Honoring your Precious Baby by Davis, Deborah
- When Hello Means Goodbye - A Guide for Parents by Schweibert and Kirk

**For siblings**

- No New Baby – For Siblings Who Have a Brother or Sister Die Before Birth by Gryte, Marilyn
- No Smile Cookies Today by Tapp, Kathy Kennedy
- We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead by Schweibert, Pat

**For Grandparents**

- Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother’s Journey Through Grief by Bennett, Nina
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Grief Support Services

Essentia Health Grief Support Services offers a variety of supportive resources to grieving families.

The Parent Grief Support Group for those who have experienced a miscarriage, stillbirth or infant loss is free. It meets every month on the 2nd Tuesday from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. in the 2E classroom on the 2nd floor of St. Mary’s Medical Center, 407 E Third Street, Duluth, MN.

Children’s Grief Support Groups are also available for youth 5-18.

The Person-to-Person program matches trained volunteers with people who have had a similar loss. This is a free program.

Call 218-786-4402 to schedule individual or family grief therapy.

October is Pregnancy and Child Loss Awareness Month. We offer a Families Remember with Love Memorial Service every October in the chapel on the 2nd floor of St. Mary’s Medical Center. You are welcome to attend.

We also have a Families Remember with Love Memorial Garden at Calvary Cemetery. Calvary Cemetery is located at 4820 Howard Gnesen Road in Duluth.

For more information on any of these grief support services, call 218-786-4402 or email us at griefcenter@essentiahealth.org.

You can also visit our website at essentiahealth.org/griefsupportduluth.

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