

Helping a Friend Through a Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Early Infant Death

Do's

Comfort us

- **Send cards, notes, letters, e-mails, etc.** *But don't expect an answer right away. Lots of people may be contacting us, and we are in survival mode right now.*
- **Cry with us.** *It comforts us to know that our grief touches you.*
- **Hug us.** *A loving touch communicates so much.*
- **Pray for us.** *Pray that we will know God's peace, that we will sense His love, that we will heal physically and emotionally; pray for the spiritual issues we may wrestle with in the weeks and months to come; pray for wisdom for you and others to know how to help us and what to say.*
- **Send a note to the grandparents, too, if you know them.** *They not only lost a grandchild, but they have seen their own son or daughter go through intense emotional, and maybe physical, distress.*
- **Listen more than you talk.** *We don't need chatter to fill the empty spaces. We need to talk and to express ourselves. Let us do that.*
- **Tell us if you have lost a baby, too.** *Let us ask you for the details - we may not be ready to hear them - but it helps to know we're not alone. And it helps to know who we could talk to in the future if we need to.*

Stay connected with us

- **Ask how we are doing.** *And be prepared to really listen to our answer.*
- **Remember us on important and painful dates – Mother's Day, Father's Day, our due date, the anniversary of our loss, holidays, etc.** *Not just the first year, although that may be the most painful. We will miss our child for the rest of our lives. There will always be a hole in our hearts and in our home where he or she would have lived.*
- **Encourage us to take care of ourselves and to be patient and gentle with ourselves.** *We are apt to put expectations on ourselves that are not realistic. It helps to hear others say that we can take a break for a while.*
- **Call us.** *But keep it short unless we invite a longer conversation. It's hard to be social right now.*

Help in practical ways

- **Send meals, other food treats.** *If you are part of a group we all belong to, maybe you or someone else can coordinate this. Food is a blessing, but not if we get three dinners on one night and need to figure out how to store it.*
- **Offer to help in specific ways.** *We don't know what we need, and we feel funny asking for help with things like laundry when we feel physically capable of doing it, but emotionally need a break from daily tasks.*
- **Offer to get preliminary information from funeral homes.** *We may not be strong enough to make those calls.*
- **Offer to take us someplace for a change of scenery.** *It's hard to leave home and face the world again. Friends want to talk. Pregnant women, babies, and strollers seem to be everywhere. But if a friend wants to take me someplace safe, it might help.*
- **Encourage us to rest.** *Grief is exhausting.*
- **Pass along resources that may help.** *Give us a book to read. Or a list of websites that could help. Or information about a support group. Then give us the freedom to follow up on them now or later, when we are ready.*

Honor our child's memory

- **Donate to something in our child's name.** *Ask us for ideas, or just do it. It will be such a precious memory.*
- **Use our child's name.** *Parents love to hear their children's names. We seldom will. Hearing you say it affirms that our child lived, however briefly.*
- **Attend the memorial service or funeral, if there is one.** *It means so much to see our friends and family supporting us.*

Understand

- **Forgive us if it's hard to be around babies or pregnant friends.** *We are happy for you, but it also makes us think of what we have lost and it intensifies our pain. Don't avoid us, but understand if we need some space.*
- **Let me be quiet.** *Sometimes we don't know what to say. We need the freedom to sit and cry, or just sit and be quiet with our thoughts, without obligation to fill the silence.*
- **Let us cry; let us feel angry.** *Our emotions are up and down and all around. We are angry. We are disappointed. We are heartbroken, confused, sad,*

lonesome, dejected. It helps us to know people around us are okay with that.

Don't's

Don't minimize our loss with your words

- **Don't tell us we can have another child.** *First, we don't know that. It may have taken a lot of time, effort, and finances to get pregnant this time. But even if we can, a person is not replaceable like a car or a house. If your spouse dies, you aren't comforted by the thought that there are lots of other men or women out there and you can find another one. And when a child dies, you don't just replace it with a new one. We wanted this child, not just any child. Our child. We need to grieve our child's death before we are ready to think about the future.*
- **Don't tell us about someone else's sad story.** *There are so many stories out there that are similar to ours, and many that are "worse." But hearing other sad stories right now just intensifies my pain. And although griefs can't be compared, hearing about someone who had it worse makes me feel guilty for the grief I am experiencing, as if I should be grateful that I don't have it as bad as someone else.*
- **Don't tell me to be thankful for what I have.** *I am thankful, and it bothers me that you might think that I'm not. But what I have, even other children, does not change that I have lost something infinitely precious.*
- **Don't tell me that God is crying with me.** *Is He? Then why didn't He stop this? I may have mixed feelings toward God right now. I understand someone crying with you when they were helpless to change the outcome. But God is powerful enough to have done something about it, and this image just makes me more confused.*
- **Don't tell me that God is in control.** *I know. And my baby still died. This might comfort me later, but probably not yet.*
- **Don't quote Bible verses that will make me feel better.** *You could give me a list that I can look at later. But when you quote Scripture, I feel like I need to agree with you (who's going to argue with God?). And I might not be there yet, so please don't put me on the spot like that.*
- **Don't say you know how we feel.** *Even if you have lost a child, you are not us. You did not lose our child. You don't know our personal circumstances that may have compounded the grief we are experiencing. Do not take our grief from us by making it partly your own.*

- **Don't tell me this will bring me and my spouse closer.** *Was our marriage so bad that we had to lose a child to make it better? Is that why people lose children? I don't think so...*
- **Don't tell us that things happen for a reason.** *I can't see the reason through the pain in my heart right now. I can't see how the world would have been the worse for having my child live. And I'm angry that we were made to suffer for some reason that I may never know.*

Don't make us explain ourselves

- **Don't make us feel funny for naming our child.** *Naming our child may have been an important step for us, even if we weren't sure if our child was a boy or a girl. It helps us feel more connected to the child we will never hold.*
- **Don't make us feel funny for not naming our child.** *If we haven't named our child, it may be because we just didn't feel the need to, or didn't feel comfortable doing this, maybe because we didn't know the gender, or it was an early loss. It doesn't mean we are grieving less or love our child less.*
- **Don't be surprised or uncomfortable at our tears.** *Crying helps.*

Don't stress about our reactions

- **Don't worry if we cry. We need to.** *Crying doesn't mean we are doing worse. Sometimes it helps us to do better.*
- **Don't forget about the baby's father.** *My husband has lost a child, too. He has also lost dreams and future memories. He is grieving, too, but so many people are focused on me and my health that he is getting lost in the process. Please don't forget him. He needs guy friends to take him out for a change of scenery, and to take care of the lawn so he can focus on me and our family. He is trying to hold our family together, but he is tired, too.*
- **Don't pass judgment on our emotions.** *We don't understand our own emotions right now. We need time and space to let our emotions settle down.*
- **Don't feel like you have to have an answer to our questions.** *Most of our questions don't have answers. The big ones, for sure. Sometimes our questions are not really questions; they are laments. If you think you have an answer, you might check to see if we really want to hear it first.*
- **Don't avoid laughter.** *Laughter isn't bad, it just can't be forced. If I laugh, don't think that means I'm over my grief. Grief is complicated and hits me in waves. Laughter and tears are so closely related.*

Don't have expectations we can't meet

- **Don't expect us to "get over it".** *Our child died. We will never "get over it." We will survive and get through it, but we will never forget.*
- **Don't have a timetable for our grief.** *We hear that it takes 18-24 months to do the hardest part of grieving the loss of a child. But we are not everyone. We don't know what to expect, and we need the freedom to do this our own way.*
- **Don't talk about things getting back to normal.** *We will never go "back" to normal. There is no going back, and the old normal is gone. We will go forward to a "new normal." But we won't know what it is until we get there.*
- **Don't assume that I know what I need.** *I don't. I haven't "done" this before. Even if I've lost other babies, I haven't lost this one before. And previous losses only compound my grief.*
- **Don't expect me to call you if I need anything.** *I don't know what I need, and I'm not likely to feel comfortable asking for it at that moment.*

Don't inadvertently rub our faces in our loss

- **Don't complain about your children.** *I may not know what it's like to be a parent, or to have your children. But I would give anything to have a little one to complain about.*
- **Don't complain about being pregnant.** *Sorry, but I would give anything to have your morning sickness and swollen ankles rather than having my pregnancy end earlier, or at least more tragically, than it should have.*
- **Don't talk about not wanting children.** *Okay, you may not want children. Or you're trying to make me feel better about not having any. But I do want them. I want mine. Please don't try to change my mind or say something that sounds like I should be glad my child died.*

Don't avoid my grief

- **Don't leave me alone.** *I need you. Having people avoid me makes me feel sad and guilty.*
- **Don't avoid talking about my baby or change the subject if we want to talk about our child.** *We won't have very many natural opportunities to talk about my baby. Talking about my baby may bring tears, but it doesn't make me sadder than I already am.*
- **Don't try to be funny to lighten the mood.** *I don't need to "feel better" necessarily.*
- **Don't try to cheer us up.** *You can comfort us without cheering us up. Let your goal be to love us in our pain, not make us smile.*

Words that hurt

“Things happen for a reason.”

“At least it was early in your pregnancy. I knew a woman...”

“This is nature’s way of weeding out severe abnormalities.”

“It’s probably for the best.”

“It’s better for this to happen now than later, after you knew the baby.”

“It wasn’t really a baby yet.”

“You’re young. You can have other children.”

“At least you have your other children. You should be thankful for them.”

“God needed another angel with him in heaven.”

“Someday you’ll understand why this happened.”

“God causes all things to work together for good.”

“Remember to give thanks in all things.”

“God must have something he wants you to learn from this.”

“I know how you feel.”

“It must have been God’s will.”

Referring to the baby as “it” instead of “he” or “she”.

Words that help

“I’m so sad for you.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your baby [use his or her name].”

“This must be so difficult to go through.”

“I wish I could make things better.”

“I wish you weren’t going through this.”

“I’m here. I can listen if you want to talk.”

“How are you doing?”

“This wasn’t your fault. It just happened.”

“You were wonderful parents to your baby. He/she was blessed to have you for as long as he/she did.”

“I’ve experienced this kind of loss, too. Would you like to get together and talk sometime?”

“I really wish [baby’s name] was still with you.”

“I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“Can I call you back next week to see how you’re doing?” (then do it!)

“I don’t know what to say, but I want you to know I care.”