

Practical suggestions after loss



Support after early or late miscarriage, or ectopic pregnancy

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When you've just lost your baby

It's okay to grieve - whatever the circumstances, whatever happened to your baby to cause him/her to die, however you lost your baby, what stage of pregnancy you were, or how long ago you lost your baby. Remember: no-one ever says that they are expecting a bunch of cells, or an embryo, or a foetus.

Look after yourself

You need time to recover from your pregnancy, the loss of your baby, and surgery if you had it. You will probably still be bleeding. Take it easy. See your doctor if you feel unwell or have any health concerns.

Be honest with yourself

It can be easier to say that you're okay when people ask you, even if that's the opposite of how you're feeling. Keeping up the pretence that all is okay can be very draining, and stressful. If you have to put on a "mask" to the outside world, balance that by being true to your feelings, either in private, with trusted family or friends, or a support group.

Funerals & memorial services

The thought of having to deal with burying your baby is a tremendously painful one; it rebels against every instinct, which tells us that the natural order of things is that we have children, grow old, and die, and our children out-live us. Even though it's painful, can be helpful to have some kind of ceremony, which will allow you say goodbye and move on in your grieving. You can have your baby's remains back if you lose the baby in hospital; you may wish to arrange your own burial or involve the hospital chaplains in organising a burial for you. They will help you arrange a memorial service if you have no remains to bury or cremate. You can take your baby's remains home or keep them if you lost the baby at home, and do what feels appropriate for you.

Remembrance services

Services are held in different areas every year: Watford in April; Cambridge in March & May; St Albans/Hemel Hempstead in October, Hoddesdon/St Albans in November; Luton and Dunstable in November. Do contact me for dates.

Take things easy

You may be feeling low, like a failure. Perhaps you want to just give up trying to do anything, or else to be driven to achieve major changes in your life. Remember that you've been bereaved, and try to resist rushing into any significant changes too quickly. Sometimes, you may feel that a holiday from your normal surroundings will help you; at other times, you may just crave being in the security of home. This can be very confusing, because you may veer from one thing to the other; just go with what you feel. Try to make time to grieve, or the feelings will just remain, untouched.

Be aware of new fears arising

When you have lost someone very precious, you start to wonder what bad thing will happen next – we wonder whether we will lose our partner or other close family member as well. It's very common to feel like this. It will pass.

Do something positive with your energy

It can be very frustrating to be overwhelmed with love and grief, and not be able to do anything positive with these feelings. It can be helpful to take care of something, a pet, a garden. Plant a tree or garden in memory of your child.

Get help when you need it

Your emotions may vary wildly, from utter despair to apparent normality. This can be confusing for you and those around you. Not only that, it can also be difficult to gauge when you need help and support, or what sort of help and support you need at any one time. Try to find out what you need, and don't be afraid to ask for help and support.

Build your support network

Dealing with any major trauma in life is made a lot more bearable if you have people who you can be honest and open with about how you are feeling. This may be your partner, your family, friends, your GP, counsellor, or a support contact. If you would like to talk to a local support contact, you are welcome to call me on 01763 249243. I've lost babies too and I'm happy to hear from you whenever you are ready to talk. I run support group meetings regularly – see the Newsletter for dates and venues. I run some private Internet support groups for pregnancy loss, and pregnancy after loss, if you can't make the meetings or want to share your experiences with others going through it at the same time. If you would like to meet for private sessions, that can be arranged. A charge is made for these.

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Free support materials available

These include: a quarterly newsletter, giving local support information, and a copy of the Support Booklet containing ideas like these, as well as stories and poems about people's losses. Contact me for copies on 01763 249243 or by email janet.support@ntlworld.com – these are free but if I print and post them to you, rather than email, a contribution towards printing and postage would be welcome.

Plan how to deal with other people

Decide if you want to tell people yourself or if you'd rather someone else did it. You may want to talk about what has happened, or not. It's up to you. You may find that people don't know what to say; they may be afraid to upset you. People can say some surprisingly trite things, which feel like they are telling you to pull yourself together and not be upset about it. Try to remember that they mean well!

Dealing with your feelings

We can get stuck with how we feel and not know what we can try to do so we feel better; there may be other issues that block us from dealing with the loss. Perhaps we feel that it's best to ignore what happened, or push thoughts of it away because it's too painful; some women cope by putting all their energy into getting pregnant again so they don't have to face the fact that their baby has gone; we may be told "time will heal" but I believe that it's not just the passing of time that makes the difference, it's what we **do** with that time. Whatever your situation, remember that we all grieve in our own way, and what is right for one person may not be right for another. The challenge is to find your own way.

Here are some suggestions to help you:

It is terribly hard to grieve for someone that you haven't met. Losing a baby in pregnancy, especially early on, or through having surgery, gives us little chance of having physical reminders that there was a baby there at all. This lack of 'evidence' makes the baby more unreal and dream-like, which makes it harder to grieve and feel better.

I believe that there are two aspects to our losses: firstly, what has happened to us in losing our baby – adjusting to the fact that the baby won't be born into our lives alive and so we cannot parent that child; there may be practical changes you were going to make that are not needed any more e.g. changes to work, making space for the baby in your home; you may be afraid of having further losses or never becoming a parent to a live child; you may be worried about what caused the baby to die and what could have been done to prevent it happening or to avoid further losses.

Secondly, there is the baby him/herself. This is a unique individual who has died, who, for whatever reason, is not going to be sharing their life with you. Finding ways of creating an identity for your baby, even if it feels odd at first, can be an important step forward for you in dealing with what's happened to your baby. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Name your baby. Even if you're not sure what gender the baby was, go with your instincts.
- Create a special place where you can have time to focus on your baby.
- Start a journal, a notebook where you tell the story of your pregnancy, your hopes and dreams of parenthood, and what happened during your pregnancy. Include as many details as you can, such as when and where the baby was conceived, when you did the pregnancy test; how you felt when you found out, how you told your partner and other people, what the pregnancy was like and what happened when things started to go wrong.
- Make a Baby Box, a place for your ultrasound pictures, photos, hand and footprints of your baby if you have them, a copy of your medical records, hospital bracelets, appointment cards, letters, cards or emails that you receive from people, a copy of the newspaper on the day you lost your baby.
- Buy or make something that will remind you of or signify your baby to you: a toy, ornament, piece of art, a plant; you could find a piece of jewellery with your baby's birthstone in it.
- Keep fresh flowers in a special place.
- Add your baby's details to the 'book of remembrance' at the hospital chapel or your local church or chapel.
- Put a memorial notice in the newspaper; do it every year for the anniversaries.
- Create a web site as a memorial to your baby, or add your baby's details to a memorial site.
- Commemorate the baby's due date, and the anniversary of your loss, by doing something special, either on your own or with your partner; quietly at home, or visiting a place that is special to you.
- Release helium balloons with a message on.
- On special occasions, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, or religious holidays, do something in honour of your baby so that you're acknowledging him/her as well.
- Remember that you did your best to keep your baby alive, and s/he did their best to hold on, and what has happened is a terrible tragedy for all of you.