

For many families, the instant you have a positive pregnancy test your life changes forever. Your initial reaction may have been excitement or wonderment. Maybe you shared your exciting news with family or friends, or maybe you already thought about names or the perfect outfit for your baby. For others, the first reaction may have been reluctance, anger, or worry. You may have been concerned about how this baby was going to affect the rest of your life. Regardless of your initial feelings, this new baby became an important part of your future.

The feelings you experience after an early pregnancy loss are often more intense than most people, including you, might expect. The death of a baby at any stage is a very real loss. Although your physical healing may be a short process, the emotional healing might take much longer.

The following information has been gathered by bereaved parents, friends, and professionals. This pamphlet has been provided as a source for answers to some of your questions, and also to help you realize the normalcy of all the emotions and fears you may experience during your grief journey.

What is an early pregnancy loss?

An early pregnancy loss is defined as any loss before 20 weeks gestation. Most pregnancy losses occur before the thirteenth week, called a first trimester loss.

Loss during this time most commonly occurs because of a problem with the development of the baby or the placenta. If a loss occurs before 20 weeks, you may not be able to determine the gender of the baby without chromosomal testing.

How can I expect to feel?

After an early pregnancy loss, you may feel anything from relief to disappointment to

profound grief. These feelings may constantly change. You might experience a range of emotions at different times, or re-experience an emotion you have already felt. There is no *right* or *wrong* way to move through your emotions. You and your partner may grieve differently, and the community around you may grieve yet another way. And even though there are people who may share the common thread of having a loss, each individual's experience is always different. The following array of emotions makes up a normal process of grief. It is unlikely that you will experience these in an order or as stages. The intense feelings of your grief will not last forever; there *will* come a time when the heartache will be less painful. Incorporating your loss into your daily life takes patience and time. Not all of this time is spent in acute or deep grief. The degree that the varying emotions are felt lessen with time, and healing takes place. You may feel...

- ***Relief***
- ***Shock***
- ***Confusion***
- ***Low Self Esteem***
- ***Denial***
- ***Anger***
- ***Guilt and/or Self Blame***
- ***Frustration***
- ***Sadness and/or Depression***
- ***Physical Symptoms Related to Hormonal Changes***

How are fathers or partners feeling?

This is likely a difficult time for you too. You may be experiencing many of the same

emotions as your wife or partner. Sometimes your feelings may be equally as strong. Even though you may be experiencing the same feelings as your partner, it is not uncommon to feel some detachment from her. You might have difficulty understanding how she is feeling, or, perhaps you have put your feelings aside so you can be there to support her. It is important to remember that you need support at this time too. Even if you have suppressed your grief, it is still there and will resurface again at some point. Another difficult issue you may face is other people downplaying the grief you are experiencing. Partners are not usually given much time off for a pregnancy loss and may feel torn about returning to work. You may not receive the support you need. It is normal to feel frustrated if you are constantly being asked how your partner is doing while it seems no one cares or asks about you.

It is important to know that the feelings and reactions you have are normal. You and your partner will likely grieve in different ways and at different times. You can be supportive to one another, but know it is all right to take the time to grieve without being the strong one. You may find that you get support from an someone you were not expecting it from. Try to be open to receiving that support. Also be willing to seek out people or groups for support if it is not readily available to you.

How do I deal with the reaction of others?

It is difficult for someone who has never lost a baby to comprehend what you are going through. Often people do not know what to say to you, and in their attempts to make you feel better they may say things that make you upset or angry. Most people do not purposely try to be insensitive; they simply do not understand the impact the miscarriage has had on you.

The best way to deal with people when you are grieving is to ***be honest*** and tell them what you need. Instead of saying, "You just don't understand how I feel!" say, "I'm having a bad day, it really hurts my feelings when you say things like that." Some parents have found it

helpful to write notes or letters to their family, friends, and/or coworkers explaining the circumstances surrounding their loss and what they need from them. Often times, people are surprised at the depth of your feelings.

How can I best care for myself?

Take Care of Your Body—Because grieving has a physical component it is very important to eat a balanced diet, exercise (even if it is just a walk around the block), drink plenty of water, and maintain a regular rest routine. Besides your emotional reactions, you will also be dealing with hormonal responses. Your body will go through the same hormonal changes as you would if you have a full-term delivery. You can expect to experience mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate, and/or irritability. Your energy levels can be erratic, as well as your appetite.

Find Support—There are many sources for support. Many people find it helpful to attend a pregnancy loss support group. You can also find on-line organizations designed to help grieving parents. For some, a close friend or relative can be of great comfort. If your sadness significantly interrupts your ability to function daily, it is important to contact your doctor or see a professional counselor.

Communicate—Tell others what you need, and be specific! Other than verbally expressing your needs, you can write notes or letters to friends, family and/or coworkers. Tell people what you need from them, especially when you want to talk about your baby, or even when you do not.

Take Care of Your Mind & Spirit—You may find a need for more spiritual bonds during this time. Contact clergy or simply set aside time for reflection or relaxation. Some people enjoy reading and writing; journaling your experience may be an important part of your healing process.

How can I memorialize my baby?

One of the difficulties of an early pregnancy loss is the lack of tangible mementos of your baby. You can start by collecting anything that reminds you of your baby and create a memory box or keepsake book. Examples of items are...

- Sonogram picture – Call your doctor or lab and ask if you can have a copy if you don't already have one.
- Your pregnancy test results
- Appointment cards from your doctor's office
- Pictures of yourself pregnant, even if you didn't know you were pregnant or look pregnant
- Hospital bracelet
- Cards of congratulations or recognition of your pregnancy
- Cards and flowers after your loss
- Recognition of Life Certificate from Share
- Memorial Booklet from Share

You can also create special reminders of your baby. Some ideas are planting a tree or bush, having a special garden, creating a bracelet or other jewelry, writing a letter to your baby, keep a journal, and/or making donations to your favorite charities in your baby's name. Some parents name their baby, regardless of their knowledge of the sex. Some choose a name based on a strong feeling they had or use a name that could be used for either sex.

Early Pregnancy Loss



A brief reference for those experiencing the death of a baby before 20 weeks gestation.