

If you are like many parents, the moment you had a positive pregnancy test was a moment that changed your life forever. Finding out that you are going to be welcoming a new baby into your family can be a joyous, exciting, and even a scary time and can bring up many different emotions. Perhaps you were not expecting that a new baby would be joining your family and were initially worried about how your life would be affected. In any case, your baby became an important part of your future.

Then, the unthinkable happened and your baby died. The feelings you may be experiencing are often more overwhelming and intense than you, as well as those around you, expect. The death of a baby at any stage is a very real loss. When your baby died, all of your hopes and dreams for your future died as well, and your emotional and spiritual healing may take much longer than your physical healing.

This pamphlet has been provided as a source of support for those who have experienced the death of a baby any time during pregnancy or in the first few months of life.

How can I expect to feel?

Many times, the discovery that your baby has died is a complete shock and the emotions you have may be overwhelming. Your emotions and feelings will more than likely be constantly changing; your feelings may change from day to day, or even moment to moment. Everyone's experience and way of grieving is different, and it is important to keep that in mind in the coming weeks and months. People often think of grieving as going through stages that progress in a linear fashion. However, as you read the following array of emotions and thoughts that can make up the grief process, know that it is very unlikely that you will experience these feelings on a certain timetable or as "stages."

While the average time frame for intensely grieving the death of a baby is 18-24 months, these feelings may occur at any time. You may experience one or more of these emotions at

the same time. You may at times re-experience an emotion you have already felt, and some aspects of grief may last a lifetime. There may be thoughts and events that trigger an emotion you have not felt for a while. This is all normal and to be expected. Also keep in mind that the intense, heart-wrenching grief that you may be feeling in the early days will not last forever. While it may be difficult to believe now, there *will* come a time when your heartache will be less painful, and you will be able to incorporate the death of your baby into your life. But, in the coming months, you may feel some or all of the following emotions:

Shock and numbness—You may experience shock for many different reasons. During this time, you may feel as if you are moving around in a fog or that this is not really happening. You may have difficulty making decisions and have difficulty communicating.

Helplessness—You may question decisions that were made and wonder if there was anything you or the doctors could have done differently. You may have known there was a chance your baby could die and feel helpless that you were not able to prevent it.

Denial—If you found out your baby had no heartbeat and were induced, you may have thought the doctor was wrong and not believe that the baby would be born still. If your baby died early in the pregnancy, you may still feel pregnancy symptoms, especially if you have not actually miscarried yet.

Confusion—You may be confused as to how you should be feeling. If your husband/partner is not feeling the same way you are, and if other people are underestimating the extent of your grief, you may think something is wrong with you.

Disillusionment—You may have done everything one is told to do in order to have a healthy baby, and it can shatter your hope for the future when your baby dies.

Low Self Esteem—It is not uncommon to think there is something wrong with you. You may feel like you are a failure and wonder what

you did to deserve this.

Anger—Anger is a common emotion one experiences after the death of a baby. You may be angry at medical staff, God/higher power, your partner, or yourself. You might be angry at your doctor because you feel he/she could have done something to prevent the death of your baby. You may also direct your anger toward your friends, family members, or your partner, who you feel are not being as supportive as you would like them to be. If you find yourself becoming angry with your partner, it is important to remember that everyone grieves differently and on a different timetable. It is okay to be angry, but if you find yourself unable to move beyond the anger you feel, you may want to talk to a grief counselor who can help you deal with these feelings.

Guilt and/or Self Blame—Frequently, one or both partners feel guilty after their baby has died. It is not unusual for women to blame themselves. If no cause for your loss could be determined, you may blame yourself and question things you did or did not do, especially in the days and weeks preceding it. Even if you do know the cause for your loss, you may still blame yourself and wonder if there would have been a different outcome if you had done something differently. It is also not uncommon to experience feelings of guilt if there was an issue with your health that resulted in your baby being born prematurely and/or with severe health concerns.

Sadness/Depression—It is common to feel sad or depressed when your baby has died. You may find yourself crying frequently, sometimes for no apparent reason. You may want to isolate yourself from the outside world, even your close friends and family. You may feel lethargic and unable to concentrate or take care of what you need to do each day. Some of this may be due to the hormonal changes your body goes through after delivery. You may be afraid to let others know how sad you are because of your fear of how they will react or because you do not want to make them uncomfortable. It can be helpful if you have at least one person you can talk to when you are feeling down. If your depression or sadness becomes too severe

and is interfering with your ability to function, please talk to your doctor or see a professional counselor.

Frustration—There are many reasons for feeling frustrated after your baby has died. Perhaps you went through infertility treatments or tried for a long time to get pregnant. If so, it can be extremely frustrating to go through tests and treatments, often costing thousands of dollars, and then have your baby die. Many women say they are frustrated when their baby dies because it makes them feel as if they have no control over their body.

Jealousy—It is not uncommon to feel intense jealousy toward those who have babies and/or older children as well as other pregnant women. It can be difficult to deal with these feelings, especially if those around you do not understand why you are feeling the way you are. Again, know that this is a normal way to feel, even as time goes on.

Fear/Panic—You may have fears about your ability to have more children in the future or about the safety of your family, friends, loved ones and other children. You may be afraid to leave the comfort and security of your home and go back out into the world of work and other responsibilities, and you may find yourself not wanting to be away from your partner or other children.

What helps?

The grief and healing process can be lengthy and difficult, and incorporating your loss into the fabric of your life takes time and patience. It is important to be gentle with yourself and give yourself the time you need to begin to heal. Gather people around you who are supportive and caring when you need them.

Take good care of yourself. While it can be challenging to eat well and exercise, it is important as studies have shown that people who are grieving are more susceptible to illness. Make sure you go to your follow up doctor's appointments. Take the time to nurture your relationship with your partner. Some people find it helpful to keep a journal.

Finally, finding some meaningful ways to memorialize your baby can be very healing.

It may seem hard to believe in the early days when the intense grief can consume your life, but as time goes on, you WILL begin to feel better, even though you may continue to feel the void in your life from your baby who died. You will begin to have good days and moments of joy, and you will begin to be able to remember your baby without the deep, profound pain that you feel in the early days after your baby's death. However, even once you have begun to heal and feel a bit better, there may still be times that your emotions are as intense and as raw as they were in the early days, even if you have had another baby. It can often come as a complete surprise when unexpected moments or events trigger feelings you thought you had dealt with and moved on from. This can happen even years down the road on days such as your baby's birthday, holidays, anniversaries, milestones such as the first day of school, as well as times when your friends and family members have babies. Embrace both the sad and joyous moments, and allow yourself to experience and express these sometimes complex and varied feelings.

Understanding the Grief Process



A brief reference on the grief process after experiencing the death of a baby through early pregnancy loss, stillbirth, or in the first few months of life.