

Friends and Family: How to support someone who has experienced the loss of a pregnancy or infant

Pregnancy and infant (neonatal) loss can be incredibly devastating for families and those that love them. People often want to support and help their friends or family who are going through this experience but may not know how. While every situation and family is unique, here are some tips and strategies we have compiled from our conversations with grieving families:

Tips for communicating/supporting:

- **Listen.** Often the best thing you can do is be a listening ear, without trying to fix the problem or make the other person feel better.

Brene Brown on empathy: 3-minute clip

<https://www.thersa.org/video/shorts/2013/12/brene-brown-on-empathy>

- Some helpful phrases might be:
 - I'm so sorry that this has happened
 - I'm thinking of you and your family
 - Please let us know if there is any way that you are honoring or remembering
 - _____
 - I am here for you no matter how you are feeling
- **Note important dates in your calendar.** Families may appreciate that others are aware of **important dates** such as the original due date, birthdate, day of passing, etc. Marking these dates in your calendar and sending cards/texts/etc. lets the family know they're not alone in remembering their little one.
- **Listen to how the caregiver is referring to their loved one and their experience.**
 - **For example, with pregnancy loss some families will say "we lost the baby" while others might say "we lost the pregnancy" and others may use a name of the baby.**
 - You can ask permission to use baby's name or specific language to signal to families that you are respectful of their boundaries and following their lead
- **Avoid finding the silver lining.** Don't use "at least"
 - **Some examples of things people say that are meant to be helpful but often aren't received that way include:**
 - "At least you know you can get pregnant"
 - "At least you have other children"
 - "At least you got to have some time with your baby"
 - While trying to find the silver lining or look on the bright side, statements like these can minimize what the family is currently experiencing
- **Avoid talking about future pregnancies during grieving process.** Don't ask about "trying again" unless your loved one brings this up to you. Many families are not yet in a space to even think about future family planning, much less communicate this to others.
- **Avoid asking them to explain what happened.** You can let them know that you want to hear their story whenever they are ready to share it.

- **Continue to check in with the family.** Recognize that there is no timeline for grief and that it is always present (even when families may appear as though they are in a different space). Don't communicate expectations that your loved one should be "over it" or should be fine "by now".
- **Be aware of situations that may be challenging or triggering. Some examples include:**
 - Pregnancy or birth announcements on social media
 - Baby/children's areas in stores
 - Advertisements
 - You can support the other person by stating "I recognize that this may be triggering/bringing up different emotions for you and I wanted to check in with what you need right now."
- **Physical recovery**
 - After the loss of a pregnancy or infant, it can be easy to forget that the birthing parent is still in the postpartum period and experiencing all of the physical changes and challenges.
 - Some of these changes may be traumatic or incredibly stressful, like milk coming in and belly shrinking instead of growing.
- **Pictures, mementos of baby**
 - Many families will choose to have pictures or mementos of their baby from the hospital. Most of the families we work with describe these as extremely personal and therefore may not be ready to share. Follow the family's lead around sharing these items/memories.
 - Pictures and other items can often evoke an emotional response. Be mindful of your own reaction (both verbal and non-verbal) so families don't feel as though they have to take care of you in that moment.

Practical Help:

- Organize a meal train/drop off food
- Offer to help care for children/pets
- If you have access to their living space, consider stopping by while the family is out to clean up, replace supplies/food
- If you are a coworker, offer to coordinate communication with other coworkers/management, shift changes, coverage, etc.

Additional Websites/Resources:

- **Nowilaymedowntosleep.org** - NILMDTS remembrance photography validates the existence and presence of these precious babies by honoring their legacy.
- **Thebeautifulscarproject.com** - The Beautiful Scar Project's mission is to provide families grieving the death of their infant due to miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal death with tools and information

- **Rowantreefoundation.org** - The Rowan Tree Foundation's mission is to provide ongoing support and resources to families who are coping with the devastating loss of a much-loved child. They offer two annual memorial events, engraved memorial program, love notes program, awareness specialty license plate program (Colorado, USA Only).
- **Stillstandingmag.com** - Still Standing Magazine's focus is to give a voice to grief and trauma that comes with loss and infertility, connect people around the world who had similar life experiences, become a resource for friends, family, and medical professionals so they know how to support someone.
- **Courageousparentsnetwork.org** - Educational platform that orients, empowers and accompanies families and providers caring for children with serious illness.

**The Connections Program for High-Risk Infants and Families is not directly connected with any of the above resources/foundations.