



Family & Friends

It can be difficult to know what to say when someone has experienced a pregnancy loss or infant death. Every situation is different, so be mindful and respectful of the family's individual experience. Although it may be hard for you to understand the grief if you have not experienced a loss, it is important to acknowledge the loss and to offer your support. It's ok to say, "I can't imagine what you are feeling" and "I don't know what to say,". Below you will find several tips on how you can support bereaved parents as well as a list of Do's & Don'ts when communicating with bereaved parents.

Be Present

Following a pregnancy loss or the death of an infant, the most important thing you can do is simply be present. Allow the parents the space and time to grieve but be there when they are ready to talk. In the meantime, there are many ways to quietly support the couple such as giving a comforting hug or providing a shoulder to cry on. When they are ready, listen without judgement. It's okay to not have the right words - just being there is often enough.

Acknowledge Baby

Acknowledging the baby can be a small but meaningful way that friends and family can provide support to grieving parents. Many parents want to be able to talk about their baby, and it is important to create a space where they are comfortable doing so. First ask the parents if they are ready to talk. Let them know that you are interested in hearing about the baby and their experience; however, avoid asking questions such as "what happened?". Most often, the cause of death is unknown. If the baby was given a name, make sure to call the baby by his or her name. It is ok to ask to see photos of the baby but make sure to let the family know how beautiful he or she is. Point out features that remind you of his or her parents.

Remember Baby

For parents who have experienced pregnancy or infant loss, milestone dates can be incredibly difficult. Birthdays, the date of loss, and due dates are painful reminders of the loss. Sending a card can be a meaningful way to let parents know that you have not forgotten their baby. Alternatively, you can call, text, or check-in with the parents to let them know that they are not alone. Mother's Day and Father's Day can be particularly difficult. It is important to validate the role as a parent on these days, especially if they do not have other children.

Practical Ways to Help

Following pregnancy loss or the death of an infant, many parents are overwhelmed with grief and lack the physical energy to complete daily or household tasks. Friends and family can provide practical support to help alleviate these burdens. Ask what would be helpful or you can offer to:

- have meals delivered
- pick up groceries
- care for other children
- mow the lawn
- wash dishes
- do laundry

Do's & Don'ts

Do keep it simple.

- I'm sorry for your loss.
- Thinking of you and your family
- I hate that this happened to you.

Do acknowledge the intense grief that comes with experiencing a pregnancy loss.

- I can't imagine how you are feeling.
- I don't know what to say.

Do realize that already having another child does not lessen the pain of losing another.

Do understand that each child is unique and irreplaceable.

- I can't imagine what it's like to lose a son or daughter.

Do realize that pain associated with pregnancy loss does not differ from the grief experienced with other types of parental bereavement.

Do understand the loss of a child gets easier but does not ever go away.

Don't assume that parents will not want to talk about their baby.

- Avoiding the family to prevent awkwardness.
- Not acknowledging the loss

Don't downplay the loss by saying things such as:

- It's probably for the best.
- It would have been worse if ...
- Everything happens for a reason.

Don't imply that parents should be grateful for the children they already have by saying "At least you have other children."

Don't assume parents will forget about the loss of their child after a new baby.

- You can always have another baby.
- When are you going to try again?

Don't assume that the level of grief is less intense the earlier the loss occurs in pregnancy.

- At least you weren't that far along.
- At least you didn't get to know him or her.

Don't say "Time heals all wounds."



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