



11 Tips for Compassionate Care

Providing compassionate care during pregnancy or infant loss is a delicate and emotionally challenging situation. Your role as a healthcare professional is critical in helping individuals and families navigate the emotional aspects of the loss of a baby.

1

Acknowledge the Loss

Acknowledge the loss of the baby by offering your condolences. You can start by saying something as simple as, "I am so sorry," or "My heart is breaking for you." It is better to admit that you don't know what to say, then to ignore the situation or say nothing at all.

2

Use the Baby's Name

If the baby has a name, use it when talking about him or her. This acknowledges the baby as a person. Make sure to treat the baby with the same respect and dignity you would any other baby.

3

Validate the Familial Roles

Address the parents as mom and dad. This acknowledges their role and the significance of their loss. Encourage family member to spend time and interact with the baby in the usual ways such as bathing, rocking, or reading a book to. Make sure to use the familial titles, such as grandma, grandpa, sister, or brother.

4

Validate Emotions

Let the families know that their emotions are valid. Everyone grieves differently, and that is ok. Refrain from passing judgement or making comments about their feelings, even if you do not agree with them. Avoid offering solutions or advice unless they specifically ask. While it is natural to want to help, it is important to remember that sometimes patients just want to express themselves. Avoid "at least" statements. While they may be well-intentioned, they can minimize your patient's feelings.

5

Be Present

Be present and attentive. Let the family know you are available to talk, listen, or just sit with them in their grief. Make sure that the family has your full attention. Show interest by asking open-ended questions. This gives you an opportunity to better understand your patient's needs and concerns.

6

Be Empathetic

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings, perspectives, and emotions of another person. It involves imagining oneself in someone else's shoes, mentally and emotionally, in order to better comprehend their experiences and reactions. While it is ok to cry with the family, you should step out of the room if you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed with emotion.

7

Be Respectful

Be mindful of the words you use. It is important to use language that is clear and easy to understand. Avoid using medical terminology whenever possible. Respect the family's choices regarding viewing, holding, or taking photographs of their baby. Provide them with the information, discuss their options, and support their decisions.

8

Be Culturally Competent

Be sensitive to the family's cultural and religious preferences. Different cultures and religions have varying customs and rituals related to pregnancy and infant loss. Tailor your care considering the needs, preferences, and cultural or religious background of your patients. When in doubt, ask!

9

Be Patient

The family will have many difficult choices to make in the next few days. Be patient, these are huge decisions. Allow the family some time to absorb the news of their loss. Upon arriving to the hospital, give the family some time to settle in. In most cases, there is no need to rush. Allow the patient and family as much time as needed before moving on to the next step.

10

Provide Privacy

Many families need some time along to grieve and process their emotions. Ask them for their preferences, then allow them the space they need. It is a good idea to provide a pen and notepad so they can write down any questions they have. Make sure that the family knows when you will return, that you are available, and how to get ahold of you should they need you sooner.

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Take Care of Yourself

Finally, remember to take care of yourself. You can't take care of others if you don't take care of yourself. Providing care to families experiencing pregnancy loss can be emotionally taxing. It is important to take care of yourself physically and emotionally to avoid compassion fatigue. Sharing your experiences with your coworkers who have experienced similar experiences can be therapeutic.
