



Understanding Grief

Pregnancy loss or the death of a newborn is devastating and unique. Rather than grieving the past, the death of a child during or shortly after pregnancy represents a loss of the future. You likely began creating a “story” that is full of the hopes and dreams for your child when you discovered you were pregnant. When your baby died you may have been faced with unmet dreams.

Pregnancy loss can be very isolating. Remember, you are not alone! Unlike other types of losses, the loss of a pregnancy is often a taboo subject. In addition, early pregnancy loss is often not seen as a legitimate loss by society. Regardless of the stage of pregnancy, your loss is valid!

Although each person’s grief experience is unique, there are many commonalities among people experiencing a loss. Psychologists have identified 5 stages of grief; however, there is no order to the process. Grief is not linear, and you may alternate between the stages or even re-experience a particular stage.

- Denial -Feeling as though this is not happening, or feeling as though you are in a dream-like state.
- Anger - You may feel mad at yourself, your partner, your doctor, or a higher power.
- Bargaining - You may be asking yourself "what if" questions.
- Depression - Feeling a lack of energy or low motivation.
- Acceptance - The loss becomes part of your story but not the focus of your daily life.

There is no “right” way to grieve, nor does grief have a timeline. You may initially feel numb and detached or you may feel overwhelmed. It is common to feel a variety of emotions such as:

- Guilt
- Anger
- Shame
- Resentment
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Despair

It is also common to experience physical symptoms of grief such as:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches
- Rapid heart rate
- Restlessness
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Memory lapses/confusion
- Difficulty concentrating

Grief is a very personal experience. Recognize that you and your partner may have different ways of coping with grief. Mothers may want to talk about their baby or relive their birth experiences, while fathers often grieve in silence. Also, fathers may feel left-out because so much attention is devoted to the mother.

Remember, physical healing occurs before emotional healing. The grief process can take months or years. While you will never get over a pregnancy loss, it does become more manageable over time. It is important to note that grief is very different from clinical depression. Clinical depression is characterized by hopelessness, despair, withdrawal and isolation that does not lessen over time. Contact your care provider if you experience these symptoms.

Please contact the National Suicide Hotline by dialing or texting **988** if you have suicidal thoughts.



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Coping with Grief

- 1 PRACTICE SELF-CARE.**
Make sure you eat, stay hydrated and get plenty of rest and exercise.
- 2 BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF.**
Understand that there is no right way to grieve and there is no timeline. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotion you are feeling when you are feeling it.
- 3 SEEK OUTSIDE SUPPORT.**
Seek the support of a professional counselor or attend an in-person or virtual support group. It may help to hear from people who have similar experiences.
- 4 EXPECT A ROLLERCOASTER.**
Grief is not a linear process. You may pass through the stages of grief multiple times.
- 5 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR LOSS.**
Talk about your baby with your partner or trusted friends and family members. Find ways to memorialize your child.
- 6 ACCEPT HELP.**
Allow family and friends to help with practical tasks, such as grocery shopping, preparing meals, or mowing the lawn.



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