



Resources for Family or Friends Supporting Someone

Who Has Had a Suffered a Stillbirth or Neonatal Loss:

It is so hard to know how to help someone who has lost a baby. Although you can't make the pain go away, there are things that you can do to support the parents and help them deal with their grief.

1. Don't be silent.

In our effort to give people personal space we can inadvertently leave them feeling uncared for. Losing a baby is one of the loneliest events a woman might ever experience and she and her family need to know they aren't forgotten in their pain. Send a hand-written note, make a phone call, or drop off flowers. **At minimum send a text or write an email.** She may not answer the phone or return your text straight away, but that doesn't mean it wasn't appreciated. Don't be silent just because you feel awkward. Instead, just say "I'm sorry" or "I'm thinking of/praying for you" (if you actually are). Even those simple statements can touch people deeply as they are reminded that they are not alone. You can also say, "I don't know what to say." Even that—combined with a hug—can be comforting as you stand in solidarity and identify with their pain.



2. Be available to listen and talk... or not.

There is no way to know exactly what a parent will want or need as she deals with her grief moment-by-moment. She may want to talk it all out or she may not want to delve deep in that moment. She may find comfort in hearing your own story of loss or she may rather you quietly listen. **Follow her lead** as she sets the pace of conversation and continue to gently make it known that you are available for whatever she needs.

3. Give her permission to feel whatever she's feeling.

Grief comes in waves – sometimes in the form of questioning or anger or sadness or blame or a thousand other ways. As she learns to navigate those waves, your friend might also struggle with comparing her pain to another's ("but she lost her baby at birth" or "I only had one miscarriage but she had three" or "she was farther along than I was", etc.) and then feel guilty because she feels worse than she thinks she "should". Help her to know that whatever she's feeling is normal and that her pain is just that – hers. It is what it is – no more or less than it "should" be. In the thick of grief after babyloss **it's important for parents to feel validated** that the life and death of their little one was more than a "pregnancy loss" – it was the death of a child and the death of a future together. Grieving loss of that magnitude will take time and that's okay – there's grace for the process.

4. Refrain from offering pat answers or religious clichés.

A grieving parent doesn't need to hear things like: "God will never give us more than we can handle" or "now you have an angel in heaven" or "at least you know you can get pregnant" or "that baby was too special for earth" or "God will give you another baby when it's time" or pretty much any form of "there is a reason this happened – it must be for the best". When a parent is grieving the death of a baby, it is more than we can handle. That's why we need you and that's why we need God to carry us. We cannot do it alone – it's too much, too hard. And if that baby was "too special for earth" does that mean that we were not special enough for the baby? (See how that might unintentionally heap false guilt on a bereaved parent?) We don't want an angel in heaven, we want a baby in our arms. (I'm not saying you shouldn't bring up heaven, especially if you share a common faith, but do so with a heightened sensitivity.) Although every woman is different, most need to grieve the loss of one baby before deciding she can face her fears and set her heart on trying for another one. Take care that you **don't try to minimize the pain** by encouraging her that she can try again before she's ready or not to worry because "time heals all things". Even though all of these types of sentiments are well-intended they can be damaging for a grieving parent and cause even more confusion and pain during an already murky time.



three little birds

5. Give practical help.

One of the most common things for women who have just lost babies is that they feel emotionally and physically exhausted. Helping with simple things like meals, laundry, watching the children or doing school runs (if applicable), cleaning, etc. can minister so deeply. Some days she needs all her strength just to make it out of bed. **An important tip:** Instead of making a general offer such as “let me know if you need anything”, make your offer more concrete: “I have a dinner planned for you, what night works best?” or “I have set aside some time to clean your bathroom, may I come later today or would sometime tomorrow be better?” As much as the general, all-encompassing offer is appreciated, it’s actually very hard to articulate and ask for specific help when it’s most needed while being tossed around in the waves of grief. To put it simply: general offers can be hard for a family to cash in on, so get specific and then follow-through.

6. Don't assume that someone else is looking after them.

Especially for those that seem to have lots of friends, a large workplace, or attend a large church, it can be easy to assume that someone else is looking after a grieving family... even if that’s not actually the case. No one intends to let things fall through the cracks because of faulty assumptions, but it happens. **Be mindful that you don't miss an opportunity** to support a family after a loss because you think it’s already covered by someone else. They need you now more than ever. (This becomes especially true if their own family is far away or if family relationships are already strained.)

7. If you are a person of faith, pray, .

When we lost our baby we felt so covered in prayer for those first few days. It’s hard to describe, but we felt a tangible presence of God that we’re convinced was directly linked to the prayer of saints. Also, offer to pray for the mother and father in person when you see them during a visit, at church, etc. or pray for them out loud over the phone. Don’t fall victim to the mentality that it’s “just prayer”. Prayer is powerful and critical and brings life and change, hope and encouragement, healing and comfort. Not only will a family need concentrated prayer after a fresh loss, but they will also need prayer **well beyond those initial first few days**. Weeks and months later they might need prayer more than ever—the mother in particular—as the reality and finality of the loss sinks in.

8. Don't forget dad.

Although it’s typically different to the way a woman grieves, men have their own process to walk through after losing a baby. Often he’s busy with work and supporting his wife emotionally as she grieves (as well as other children) and so it may appear that he’s perfectly fine as he tries to maintain the status quo for the sake of his family. I guarantee you that **he’s grieving too**. Hugs, small gestures of generosity (like a coffee or a favorite snack dropped by his workplace), and heart-felt prayer can go a long way. In addition to caring for the mother, ask yourself if there are small ways you can ease dad’s load, validate his pain, or demonstrate your support to him in a personal way.

9. Give her grace around other pregnant women and babies.

When I first miscarried I found it so healing to be around my friend and her adorable newborn. She had wondered if she should avoid me while my grief was so fresh (to protect me from more pain) but I *wanted* to be around them and of course my friend was delighted! At the same time I found it very difficult to be around pregnant women, especially those who would deliver close to my due date. After a period of time it didn’t affect me as much and I found it easier to feel genuine joy (without jealousy) when I heard pregnancy announcements or saw bellies swelling with life. Then, about six weeks or a month before my due date, a new wave of grief came and it became extremely difficult to be around pregnant women again – those newly pregnant and those about to burst. **There’s no way of knowing what capacity your friend will have to be around pregnant mothers and babies** and it will likely vary over time. This is another area where you have to let her take the lead, but it’s also one that you should consider initiating gentle communication about. Let her know that you understand if it’s too hard to attend a baby shower or visit a friend in the maternity ward and ask her what she is and isn’t comfortable with.

10. Mark your calendar.

Anniversaries and other important markers are extremely difficult for bereaved parents. Mark your calendar with the baby’s estimated due date, the date they received a horrible prognosis, the date of the miscarriage or stillbirth, and/or the date of the funeral. As those dates approach, extend special kindness, send a card or flowers, drop by a meal, or make a purposeful phone call. Do something to remind them that you miss their baby too, that you are still sad for their loss, and that you want to support them any way you can. **Knowing that her baby and her feelings of loss are not forgotten** will be a special comfort during those ‘marker’ dates.