

Pregnancy Loss - Supporting Your Grief and Loss Journey

Miscarriage occurs in approximately one in every six pregnancies, and one in every two hundred babies is stillborn. Despite this, the experience of pregnancy loss remains a taboo topic, often leaving couples isolated and misunderstood as they struggle with the rawness and intensity of their grief and loss journey.

For couples undergoing fertility treatment, the grief associated with pregnancy loss can be particularly heartbreaking, especially the loss of a long awaited pregnancy. However, every loss is unique and will be experienced by different couples and individuals in different ways depending upon the nature and meaning associated with each personal situation.

One of the most significant determinants for a healthy grieving process is the degree of social support available to help you realise the normalcy of the emotionally charged feelings and fears you may experience as you travel through your grief and loss journey.

Are My Feelings Normal?

There is no right or wrong way to feel after the loss of your precious baby. You and your partner will likely grieve differently, and the family, friends and community around you may grieve in yet another way. You may have feelings of denial, anger, sadness, shock, bitterness, guilt, loneliness, longing and helplessness. You will likely grieve for what you have lost already and for what you have lost for the future, the hopes, dreams and unfulfilled expectations.

You may find that simple activities, such as going to the shop or for a walk, expose you to the painful reality of all that you have lost and so desperately wish for, confronting you with other children, pregnant ladies, or even the baby food aisle in the supermarket. Your grief will likely be charged with intensity and rawness and bring with it actions and reactions that may surprise you and those around you, leading you to question and measure the validity of your grief and coping mechanisms.

Your grief and loss journey will likely be eternal and upsurges of the early rawness and intensity of your grief may surface in the lead up to important milestone dates for the pregnancy. The due date will be the first reached and may rekindle the flames of your grief as you imagine the joy and happiness that you expected to be feeling at that time. Each year on the anniversary of your loss, on Mothers and Fathers Days, you may continue to experience waves of emotion that reignite the rawness and intensity of your early grief experiences.

Family and Friends

It can be very difficult for people who have never lost a baby to understand what you are going through. Family and friends may not know how to help you, and may make hurtful comments unintentionally, trying to downplay the grief you are experiencing in an attempt to speed along your grieving process and see you 'move on'. Family and friends often don't understand that sometimes just a few simple words like "I'm sorry", is enough.

People who you normally trust and lean on may need support to guide you through your grief. Don't be afraid to tell them what you expect and need!

Acknowledging Your Loss

One of the greatest challenges associated with pregnancy loss can be the lack of tangible mementos of your baby. You can start by collecting anything that reminds you of your baby: hospital tag; ultrasound picture; cards you received after your loss; pictures of you whilst you were pregnant; your pregnancy test result.

You can also create your own mementos and establish your own continued bonds with your baby by: journaling; writing letters to your baby; having a symbolic piece of jewellery made; establishing a memorial garden in tribute to your precious baby; or making a donation in your baby's name to a fitting charity.

Sharing your thoughts and emotions

Talking to an independent, professional counsellor, who is not part of your family or social network, but who understands the experience of pregnancy loss, can provide support through some of the more difficult times, and help you develop further some of the coping strategies discussed in this leaflet.

Talking to others who have also experienced pregnancy loss can help reduce feelings of isolation, and help you express your grief with others who understand what you are going through, because they have 'been there'.

IVFAustralia facilitates a monthly pregnancy loss support group in our city clinic, to provide a forum for this purpose. IVFAustralia fertility counsellors are also here for you for individual and couples counselling.

To make an appointment with an IVFAustralia fertility counsellor or for further information about support groups, call your local clinic or visit www.ivf.com.au and click on the **Treatment with IVFAustralia** tab.