

# **Grieving Together Through Miscarriage or Stillbirth: A Resource for Men**

Your partner has been meeting with a small group of women who have suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage or stillbirth. The purpose of this group is to help each woman move forward in her healing process. We want to remove any shame, the hesitancy to talk about miscarriage, and the tendency to mourn in solitude. Each woman has a unique experience and processes her grief differently. The same is true for men, but the way men grieve can look different.

We've created this resource for two reasons: first, to assist you as you seek to help your partner in her grieving process. Second, to help you as you grieve the loss of your baby.

## **Did You Know?**

Pregnancy changes a woman physically, mentally, and emotionally in profound ways. When a woman becomes pregnant, she becomes a mother. The physical connection in the womb is provided by the placenta, built of cells from both the mother and developing child. Cells can migrate to the mother's body through the placenta, so that she may carry the baby's cells for the rest of her life. This creates an inseparable bond between mother and child that transcends emotion.

As early as six weeks into the pregnancy, the baby's heartbeat can be detected. And as early as 12 weeks, the mother may begin to feel the baby move. Miscarriage or stillbirth abruptly transforms her anticipated joys and dreams into a dark nightmare of pain and grief.

## **The Need to Grieve**

Grief is a normal response to great loss and must be allowed full expression to provide emotional healing. Healthy grief expresses itself in sadness, a sense of deep bereavement and mourning. We may feel "lost" or experience profound emptiness. Unhealthy grief may numb or threaten to overwhelm us. It can also be complicated by denial or anger.

Not allowing ourselves to grieve is like leaving an open wound uncared for. Cleaning an open wound is painful but necessary. In the same way, grieving is not a pleasant process either, but it does bring healing.

Grieving with someone who understands our pain is vital, and partners can be the number one comforter and supporter of a woman following a miscarriage or stillbirth. An important part of the partner's role is to help validate the loss both of you are feeling.

Don't try to minimize it, thinking it will ease her pain. Women who experience miscarriage or stillbirth often complain that people around her don't know how to react or what to say. By not saying anything they trivialize her loss. But some people say hurtful things like, "At least you have other children," or "There must have been something wrong with the baby, so it's for the best." The message behind these words is, "Get over it." Such heartless comments do not help a mother get over it. You can help by acknowledging your partner's pain and emotions and by grieving with her.

Below are some things you can do to help your partner through her grief:

- Hold her and let her express her emotions freely.
- Be understanding and patient with her. Her hormones are still raging inside her.
- Listen actively to her as often as she wants to communicate.
- Take on some responsibilities around the home that she would normally have done.
- Speak words of love, comfort, and affirmation to her.
- Gently explore meaningful and tender ways to memorialize your child. It's important to validate the personhood of your child even if you don't know his or her gender. Think about naming your baby. Your partner may have a sense of your child's gender, or together you could consider a name that would work for a boy or girl.

## **Men Need to Grieve**

When a couple experiences miscarriage, a man often sets personal grief aside to focus on helping his partner with her trauma. As a result, he may neglect his own emotions due to a strong desire to comfort and protect.

But men need to grieve, too, and yours may look very different from that of your partner. Sometimes men are hesitant to share their feelings, but you may be helping your partner by expressing yours. A lot of healing can result as you help each other through the grieving process.

## **Steps to Take Together Toward Healing**

1. Give yourselves permission to grieve together. Allow each other to weep, mourn, and express your sense of deep loss.
  - This will most likely look different for each of you, and that's okay.

- Avoid: “If only I had done this or if I hadn’t done that...” Blaming yourself or your partner for this loss isn’t constructive to the relationship and doesn’t move your healing forward.
2. Men, acknowledge the loss your partner has gone through. There are many elements that a woman must process due to the death of a baby that her partner does not.
    - The physical loss itself
    - The hormones that are flooding her system
    - The stress of any procedures that were involved
    - The ongoing doctor’s appointments that need to be completed to ensure she is healthy
  3. Women, acknowledge that your partner has as much right and need to grieve as you do.
  4. Consider arranging a memorial service or create some kind of memorial together:
    - Plant a tree or a flower.
    - Paint a garden rock.
    - Choose a name for your baby or babies.
  5. Look to each other for any support you need.
    - Go to your partner first to work through challenges before you consider looking to other people.
    - Resist substances like alcohol or drugs.

### **Questions to Discuss Together**

**Take turns addressing each question, listening carefully to each other.**

1. What emotions did you experience when you learned about your miscarriage or stillbirth?
2. In what ways have you expressed your grief since then?
3. What have you found troubling about your grieving process?
4. What do you need your partner to do to help you through this?