

How to support parents after miscarriage

Two pink lines bring a lot of emotions - including the joy of an expanding family. But, for some couples, the joy of pregnancy is soon followed by the pain of loss.

As many as 25 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriage (and many go unreported), which means that it's likely you know someone who has experienced this firsthand.

October is National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, This is a topic that isn't easy to talk about. But thousands of parents experience it at some point - and it can feel lonely and unbearable. If you are walking through this experience with a friend or family member, you may need some guidance. Courtney Watson, chaplain at UnityPoint Trinity – Bettendorf, has spoken with many parents during this process, and shares these tips.

Remember that loss is loss, no matter how early the pregnancy.

Do you think that someone who was newly pregnant should bounce back faster than someone who lost a baby in her third trimester?

Not the case, Courtney says.

"One thing that I have learned is that there is no difference in the amount of grief for an early loss to a later loss. There may be different things that people are grieving throughout the time, but the amount of grief is not different."



You don't need to know what to say.

There's really nothing that can be said to completely ease the pain felt by a couple grieving the loss of their child.

When Courtney works with couples after loss, she spends time talking to them about their hopes and dreams for their family and their child.

"It's not only the child's life that is lost, it's also those hopes and dreams," Courtney explains.

At the same time, remember that it's okay to say, "I don't know what to say. But I know you are hurting and I want to be there for you." Because loss is a very lonely experience. The biggest thing to remember is to never minimize the loss, which can cause more pain.

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Acknowledge the pain.

Many people want to brush the pain away and hide the tears. But grieving is a process, and part of that includes feeling the pain and being supported as you work through it.

"It is way more painful when it's hidden," Courtney says. "Pain is harder when it's not acknowledged." This may be very uncomfortable for you, too. Because most of us want everyone to be happy. But it's important to be a friend who encourages a person to work through the grief, and not just move on. (And this will also set you apart as someone who's there for the hard times.)

Think about immediate needs.

After parents lose their baby, you ask them to let you know if you can do anything. And they never do. Try reframing this question to be more specific to help meet their immediate needs. For example, "I'd like to bring you a meal tonight." It gives them a concrete example of something you'd like to do. (And a warm meal can be a wonderful way to show you how much you care.)

Don't forget the baby.

It can be easy to think that it's better for everyone to stop talking about the baby and the loss. So you zip your lips and avoid the topic at all costs.

"I think one of the biggest fears that parents have is that their baby will be forgotten," Courtney says. "That baby is not a footnote to them."

So don't be afraid to ask them how they are coping with their loss. And if the baby had a name, say it. This is a small way to acknowledge the loss of a precious life.

At UnityPoint in the Quad Cities, there are several other ways to acknowledge and respect the lives lost. Each March, Unity Point hosts a Butterfly Blessings event to support local families in the experience of loss and healing. And twice a year, a burial is held at Jessica's Garden (Chippiannock Cemetery) for babies miscarried before 20 weeks. These events are open to anyone and give parents and family members the opportunity to grieve and remember the lives lost.

Each person responds differently to grief.

Just like every person is different, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to losing a baby.

"Every pregnancy comes into someone's life in a unique way," Courtney says. "So the meaning is their own."

Give a person the opportunity to grieve in the way that makes sense for her. There is no timeline for grief, so give the parents an opportunity to work through it at their own pace. And give them your support along the journey.

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Remove the taboo of asking for help.

You are walking through this valley alongside your friend or family member. And you may notice that she seems to be getting worse, withdrawing or struggling. Be willing to help find help, if needed. This could mean talking to you, joining a support group, or talking to a counselor or pastor. But, be willing to break down the stigma around asking for help.

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KEEP CONNECTING.

Thank you for caring enough about your friends or family members to be there for them after a miscarriage. This is a lonely and dark time, and your support matters.

So, keep the lines of communication open and be there for those who need you. You may never understand how much it truly means.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 10/26/16. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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