Duke University Health System
Bereavement

Helping Yourself - After The Loss Of A Baby

Grieving can be an overwhelming experience. It affects every aspect of your life. During your journey towards healing, it is important to take care of yourself - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

How do I take care of myself?

Be gentle with yourself in the coming days, weeks, and months,

- Mourning takes time – sometimes longer than you might think.
- Give yourself the needed time. Treat yourself as you would a best friend.

Carry or wear a linking object – something that belonged to your baby (picture, footprints, lock of hair), if this is comforting to you.

Take care of yourself physically

- Eat a healthy diet – including milk, protein, vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.
- Get needed rest
- Exercise daily – physical activity can refresh you and take your mind off your pain for a while. The activity may be walking, swimming, working out, or whatever you enjoy doing.
- Avoid over-use of alcohol or medication. They tend to numb your emotions and delay your grief work.
- *Talk about your thoughts and/or feelings,* as you need to. It can be with your partner, family, or friends. Consider talking to someone outside the family - counselor, faith leader, social worker, nurse or your doctor.

Write down your thoughts and feelings – some people find this more helpful than talking. Ways of doing this are:

- Keeping a journal or diary.
- Writing letters to your baby, and/or about your thoughts and feelings.
- Writing notes or poems.

Read - books, articles, or poems that comfort you. Reading about how others have dealt with their grief will let you know that you are not alone.

Look to your faith (whatever you perceive that to be) – and maintain your spiritual bonds. Consider the following:

- Religious services and/or ceremonies (memorial service).
- Quiet prayer and meditation.
- Involvement in activities in your place of worship.

Accept comfort and help from others – admit when you are feeling lonely or are in pain. Your family and friends love you and want to help. Share with them what does and does not help.

How do I take care of myself? (con't)

Give yourself permission to laugh, as well as cry – both are healing.

Consider postponing making major life decisions (for at least a year, if possible) such as moving or selling property and belongings.

Should I try to forget or keep my memories alive?

- After your baby dies – he/she will **always** remain a part of your life. Memories are all you have now – ***treasure*** them.
- Share your memories with family and friends who can support you.
- Collect objects that remind you of your baby and that comfort you. Consider keeping these precious things in a *memory box*.
- Begin rituals to serve as a tribute to your baby's short life, such as:
  - Lighting a candle at mealtime in your baby's memory.
  - Plant something as a living memorial (flowers, bush or tree).

What can I do if I need help?

Some people find it helpful to talk about feelings and thoughts with someone outside the family. There are people available who understand and care about you.

Some suggestions include:

Support groups – A safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

Religious/Spiritual community - People who can help identify spiritual resources that may be comforting for you.

Bereavement counselors - Specialists, who help people adjust to the death of a loved one, try to find a therapist who has experience working with victims of homicide.

Duke Hospital Bereavement Services –Bereavement Services provides a clearinghouse for information, resources and support about grief, loss, dying and death. (877-460-7969).

Local mental health associations - To get more information and referrals.

When do I need to call my doctor?

- If you are unable to take care of yourself or your family.
- If you have persistent thoughts of or are planning to hurt yourself.
- If you become very depressed and are unable to do activities of daily living.
- If you are unable to sleep or have questions about sleeping.
- If you think that you need medication.