



## Duke University Health System Bereavement

### How Family and Friends Can Help – After the Loss Of A Baby



It is painful to watch those we love grieve the loss of their baby. We may feel helpless about what to do or say to comfort them. The following suggestions can help friends and family offer sensitive and useful support to bereaved parents.

#### **Things to Consider:**

- Understand that grief is a normal and healthy response to loss.
- Do not expect a bereaved parent to “get over” their grief in days or weeks - it may take months or even years. Mourning is a process. Each person will grieve in their unique way, in their own time.
- The bereaved parent will never be the same person you knew before their baby died. Their perspective and goals have changed forever. Please recognize and respect this profound change.

#### **How To Help:**

- Be supportive – visit and/or call to say that you care.
- Offer specific assistance:
  - Go grocery shopping
  - Baby sit, if there are other children in the family
  - Help with household chores or errands
  - Take the person out for a walk, or go to lunch
- Treat the bereaved couple equally. Men need as much support as women do.
- Do not try to take away the pain. It is not possible. Perhaps your greatest gift is to be with someone in pain without trying to “fix” it. Offer a non-anxious and non-judgmental presence.
- Avoid making assumptions about what the grieving person needs. Ask instead of tell. Avoid using clichés.
- Encourage talking about the baby and recalling memories. Death ends a life, but not a relationship.
- Listen. Listen. And listen again. Repetition is natural for persons in grief. Learn to be comfortable with all emotions.
- Learn about the grieving process. Books are available in the library and in local bookstores.



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#### **Comforting Things to Say:**

- “I’m sorry about your baby” (mention their name if you know it)
- “I’m so sad over your loss”
- “What can I do for you”
- “I’m here, and I want to listen” (make sure that you are able to follow through)
- “I know this must be difficult for you”
- “How are you managing with all of this”
- “Talk as long as you want – I have the time”
- “You do not have to say anything at all – I will just be with you”

#### **What *NOT* to Say:**

- “It’s all happened for the best”
- “You’re young. You can have more children”
- “Now you’ll have an angel in heaven”
- “You should feel lucky that you are alive”
- “Forget it. Put it behind you and get on with your life”
- “I understand” (even if you have had a similar experience)
- “This was God’s will”