

BOOKLET

HOW TO SUPPORT A LOVED ONE THROUGH PREGNANCY LOSS

1. What not to say

2. What to say

3. What to do

4. Check-ins





MEET THE AUTHOR

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Wife and mother of 3 children on Earth and 2 in Heaven, with another in utero. I fell into a pit of depression after my first loss. Here I share how you can help someone through this hard season of loss.

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How To Support Your Loved One Through Pregnancy Loss

You have been given this booklet to help you be there for your loved one who has lost a baby. This booklet will go through the following:

- 1. What not to say
- 2. What to say
- 3. What to do
- 4. Check-ins

When is a baby a baby

- Most parents either believe it is at conception
- or it is as soon as they see that pink line.

Some Things To Know About Pregnancy Loss

- It is imperative you understand that it doesn't matter how early or late the pregnancy loss occurred. Loss is loss.
- It's not just the loss of an unborn baby.
- It's the loss of all the hopes and dreams they had of that baby.
- It opens the mind to the possibility that they may never become a parent.
- The dream of becoming a parent was something we were almost guaranteed as kids, but not everyone gets to have a living child.
- There is no easy fix for infertility or pregnancy loss.
- Know that nothing you say or do will take away the pain, but it can make it worse.

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WHAT NOT TO SAY

"Just try again, your young it will happen," or "just relax," basically anything with "just..."

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- "I just lost a baby. How can I go through that again."
- "Can you not see I'm hurting?"
- "If my age has something to do with it, and youth will help me, and you think it'll happen because I'm young, then why did I lose a baby in the first place?"

- Not everyone gets a rainbow (a baby after pregnancy loss)
- Age isn't always a factor in infertility.
- This can feel like undermining or dismissing what your loved one has just been through. Validation of the loss is reported to be one of the most healing things a person can do when they have been through a pregnancy loss.



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"At least it was early," or "At least it wasn't a stillborn," or "At least you know you can get pregnant," basically anything with "At least..."

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- "My baby is still dead."
- "So, it's good my baby died?"

- Again, this dismisses what your loved one has just gone through.
- It is important to note that no matter when the loss occurred, the body still has to go through a delivery and postpartum. If it is super early on, perhaps, it is, as many health care professionals say, like a heavy period, but if it is further into the first trimester, it most certainly is not. Recovery can be a long-lasting process, especially with later losses; be mindful of this as well as the changes in hormones and her body.

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"There was probably something wrong with it anyway," or "You didn't even want a child."

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- Wrong with it? It was my baby.
- You don't know
- Oh my gosh! Did I will this to happen
- I just lost my baby. You can see I'm upset; how can you say I didn't want the child?

- These are dismissive and can be very harmful to your loved one.
- In pregnancy loss, the mother still experiences all of the pregnancy hormones and emotions, so she might find your words harsher and more confronting than usual.
- Grief can make our brain do some interesting things, including finding
 answers to things that just aren't true. Many women report feeling as if they
 caused their pregnancy loss either by willing it to happen or by something
 they did or didn't do.
- If you truly believe she didn't want a baby before this moment, take note of what she looks like and how she is feeling. If she is hurting, her thoughts on children have likely changed. Also, even if it's something she didn't want now, she might have had plans for children in the future.
- Wanting or not wanting a pregnancy doesn't change the fact that losing a baby is a traumatizing experience.



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"Do you think you did something to make it happen?"

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- I think about that every day.
- How can you say that?
- I don't know. Maybe, did I?

- Your loved one already has this thought in their head—guilt and 'what if'
 questions can send them spiraling and make the healing process take
 longer.
- She may then feel anger toward you for asking this and adding to the pain. You have just validated the thought that she did something to make this happen.
- There is a possibility this hasn't crossed her mind, but the problem, when it
 comes to pregnancy loss, is most of us never find out what happened. They
 can and will run only so many tests, especially if it's "only" her first loss.
 Sadly, many medical practices won't test until she has had three pregnancy
 losses.

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"God wanted your child in heaven." or "God has a plan," or God anything really.

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- I don't believe in God.
- What kind of God would allow this to happen, or How can God's plan include dead children?
- I don't care what God wants. I want my baby.

- Although these comments are meant well, there are layers of pain and trauma that can make these comments painful.
- Not everyone believes in God or reads the bible, so this could be taken offensively.
- Many people, both believers and non-believers, don't understand how a good God would allow this to happen. You can explain how God is not the author of evil and that bad things happen, and God makes good come from them. Saying something like that won't necessarily help heal your loved one, especially when the loss is new and fresh. Most loss mamas say they hate it when people try to silver line or make good of the loss they are or have endured.
- When loss is fresh, most women, including believers, will experience anger toward God or the mention of God. Just like the point above, "if God is good, why did he allow this?" when grief takes over, saying it's because of the fall might end in more anger and a harder journey to healing.
- All of the above doesn't mean you can't bring up God at a later point, but in the beginning, it may be unwise or unhelpful unless your loved one comes to you with questions and curiosity for God.



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"You should just adopt." or "You should try IVF," or "You should... anything."

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- I don't qualify.
- My husband doesn't want to adopt, or I'm not comfortable adopting.
- It's easy for you to suggest that as someone with biological children.
- I just lost my child. I'm not even thinking about having another baby right now.
- I'm not ready to give up on having a baby naturally.
- IVF is a last resort. Do you even know what's involved?

- Unfortunately, the adoption process is challenging. Only some qualify to adopt or have the money to undergo the procedure.
- Not everyone feels comfortable adopting. They might see the child as someone else's child, but they'll never feel like the child is theirs.
- If you have not adopted a child, it is not really something you should suggest, even more so if you have your own biological children.
- Everyone has their limits when it comes to pregnancy loss and infertility. Your loved one knows the options; if they don't and want your help and advice, they'll ask for it.
- IVF is not an easy process and doesn't guarantee a living baby at the end.

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"Aren't you over it now?" or "When are you going to be back to normal?"

Thoughts she might have after you say something like this:

- The short answer is "no."
- My baby just died. How can I get over that?
- It happened a few months ago.
- I still haven't had a living child.
- I'm still bleeding.

- Grief can take a long time to move through, but even when acceptance is achieved, it's essential to know that grief never leaves us. We will always think about our child either daily or from time to time when triggered. There is no over it. Life gets easier to live with loss and grief.
- "Normal" is over; the person your loved one was is gone and replaced by someone new, but it does get better with support, love, and active work through grief. Most people who have been through loss report changing positively after loss because they actively worked through their emotions.
- Not everyone will have a child after pregnancy loss, so it is essential to understand that this isn't just the loss of one child but the loss of potential children and the loss of the dream of motherhood or fatherhood.
- The process of pregnancy loss is often longer than the professionals say. Bleeding can last months after, and there is a postpartum to pregnancy loss as it is a delivery. Like a pregnancy ending in a living child, pregnancy loss requires recovery and rest, too.



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WHAT TO SAY

"I don't know what to say, But I'm here for you," or "That sucks. I'm so sorry," or "I'm sorry to hear the news." or "I'm so sorry for your loss."

- It's okay not to know what to say. It's better that you say you don't know rather than say something that could cause more harm.
- Pregnancy loss is awful; no words can truly express the pain and sorrow. This is the same as what to say to console someone.
- Nothing you say will make the pain go away or take the ache of loss and the longing for that life. Please don't feel like you have to fix it. You can't. Their baby died. There is no fixing it.

"Would it be okay if we talked about ways I could help you during this time?" or "What can I do for you?" or "Please let me know if there's anything you need." or "Do you need company while you recover?"

- Note that she may or may not want your help at this stage of loss.
- Don't be offended if she wants space.
- If you ask this, make sure you mean it. If she accepts your offer, you don't want to disappoint her.
- Be open and ready for uncomfortable conversations and emotions.



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"I'm just checking in. Are you up for doing something today?" "I'm thinking of you." "I'm here if you ever need to talk." "Do you need some company? We don't have to talk or do anything. I'm happy to just be there with you."

- She may or may not want to leave the house, and if she does, she may not want to do so alone.
- This offer could give her the chance and permission she needs to get outside and have a sense of normality. Do note that many loss mamas report feeling as if the whole world is moving while they are standing still. Mundane everyday conversations or chit-chat can become an annoyance and something that is deeply triggering.
- Be prepared to listen and not know what to do. Don't try to fix anything; just be there.

"I love you so much, and I imagine you feel [awful] right now, but I just had to remind you of how wonderful I think you are."

- A reminder can go a long way.
- This can be positively or negatively received.
- If it is negatively received, it could indicate guilt and resentment toward herself, which are strong right now.
- If it is positively received, offer a hug or further connection through a meetup, girls' night, etc.

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"Please be gentle with yourself right now and grieve however you need to." or "This was not your fault. You loved your baby so well." or "Sending caring thoughts your way and hoping for peace and healing when you're ready." or "I know how much your baby was already loved. I am so sorry you won't get to hold your little one in your arms."

- These messages can gently remind your loved one that you are there for them and are thinking of them.
- Sending a condolence message can go a long way to validating and comforting your loved one.

"You are one of the strongest people I know, but please don't feel like you need to be strong right now. Being kind to yourself is more important." or "Please don't forget to be as kind to yourself as you can right now. Allow yourself the same grace you would afford anyone else." or "I know it can take a long time to grieve a loss like this. Please know that however long it takes, I'll be with you the whole way."

• Letting your loved one know they can be themselves and feel what they need to with you and you will be there through it no matter what is so powerful and validating. It can go a very long way in helping your loved one heal.



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#3 **WHAT TO DO**

HELP OUT

- See if there is a way you can help out (with funeral plans, bulk meal making, or planning and cleaning)
- Don't push. Know that your loved one might or might not want to have visitors or see many people.

OFFER A SERVICE VOUCHER

- If you can't be there physically for your loved one, can you afford to hire a helper? Many loss mamas agree that having someone take care of those everyday mundane tasks would be super helpful in the early days of loss because the basics are the hardest to do.
- You will probably want to ask your loved one's permission for this, e.g., 'Would you find it helpful if you had someone like a cleaner or cook come over a night a week to help out?' If you don't ask, your loved one could take it as an insult or that you think they aren't doing what they should.



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BRING OR SEND THEM A CARE PACKAGE

 People often do this for a family who has just had a baby, but it is also lovely for someone who has just lost a baby. It shows you care, that their loss is valid, and gives them something tangible through the experience.

Ideas for inclusions in this care package

- Wheat heat pack (if they have a microwave)
- Fluffy socks or slippers
- Hot chocolate mix
- Chocolate
- Tea Mug
- Their favorite herbal tea
- Raspberry leaf tea
- A Diary or Journal, as well as a nice pen
- Massage oil
- Essential oils such as lavender, chamomile, and peppermint
- Moisturizer
- Face pack like a mud mask
- Nail care set with polish
- Candles
- Voucher for an at-home massage or spa day

Think about their favorite foods, cosmetics, and pampering products.

FLOWERS

- Be cautious when buying flowers. When flowers start to die off and brown, it can be triggering. It can be hard to throw away dead flowers after a loss, and it can also become burdensome to take care of them.
- If you want to get flowers, try to get something longlasting or even opt for dried flowers; these symbolize preservation.

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GET A KEEPSAKE

There is nothing tangible to physically hold onto when going through pregnancy loss. You can do a few things to help relieve some of this emptiness.

- If your loved one has named the baby, you can have the name inscribed on a necklace or ring or sewn onto a blanket or pillowcase.
- Get some home decor items, like an ornament or framed image, to represent the baby in some way.
 @Motherofwilde does a fantastic job of honoring lost babies and helping families heal.
- Perhaps they named their baby, and that name has a
 deeper meaning, or they had a dream that they felt
 was connected to their baby. For me, it was a dream
 about a sunflower field, so I now associate sunflowers
 with my baby. If something like this is the case for your
 loved one, you could try to make or buy something
 representing this meaning or object.
- If your loved one is a Christian, you could commission or have an art piece of Jesus and a baby printed.
- If she produces breast milk, you can get jewelry and other items made using a milk sample. The milk a mother produces is specific to each baby and pregnancy, which may be very soothing for her.



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GIRL'S NIGHT OR RETREAT

- You don't have to have been through pregnancy loss to be there for your loved one. Here is an idea you could do that could help her feel some healing or normality. It is essential not to look at this as a "normal" girls-only event but as a time when you rally together in support of a friend. Necessary steps to consider:
- Ask her first. She may not feel ready for time out and about.
- Organize everything so she doesn't have to think about anything except packing a bag and showing up!
- Make sure anyone participating has this booklet so they can be as prepared as you are, and if they feel they can't be supportive and understanding, perhaps it's best to uninvite them.

NOTE

- She may or may not want to discuss her feelings and if she needs anything. You can cry with her. This can be validating. She may also want to sit silently and have her friends around her.
- Avoid pregnancy and family topics, stick to relationships like husband and wife and friendships, and maybe even future goals non-family-related projects and experiences. Be aware that layers of trauma come with loss; be weary and careful; you can't make it better, but you can make it worse. Being there to lend an ear or shoulder can mean everything.

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GUYS, NIGHT OR RETREAT

You don't have to have been through pregnancy loss to be there for your loved one. Here is an idea you could do that could help him feel some healing or normality. It is essential to not look at this as a "normal" guys-only event but as a time when you rally together in support of a friend. Necessary steps to consider:

- Ask him first. He may not feel ready for time out and about.
- Organize everything so he doesn't have to think about anything except packing a bag and showing up!
- Make sure anyone participating has this booklet so they can be as prepared as you are, and if they feel they can't be supportive and understanding, perhaps it's best to uninvite them.

NOTE

- He may or may not want to talk about his feelings, if he needs anything, etc.
 Be okay with discomfort. If he is hurting or feeling traumatized from his experience, talking about it and having validation can help him heal.
- Avoid pregnancy and family topics, stick to relationships like husband and wife and friendships, and maybe even future goals, non-family-related projects, and experiences. Be aware that layers of trauma come with loss; be weary and careful; you can't make it better, but you can make it worse. Being there to lend an ear or shoulder can mean everything.



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#4

CHECK INS

THE FINE LINE

- Checking in depends on whether they're up for it. Ask kindly, and don't be
 offended if they're not very chatty or willing. Asking makes a big difference
 in their willingness to speak openly and comfortably with you. Asking
 shows you care about their needs and their healing.
- It's also essential to look at the reactions of the loss parents during your interactions with them to be understanding and filtered. It's not about walking on eggshells but about making sure you are helping with the healing process.

FUNERAL AND OR SCHEDULED LOSS

- If your loved one is yet to complete their pregnancy loss and you feel you
 could be a good support person and be there through that difficult time,
 offer your presents and help for that process. Know that this can be
 traumatic for you, and if you offer to be there, it's essential to follow
 through, so don't offer lightly.
- Planning a funeral is hard and something no parent expects ever to have to do for their child. Offering your help in this, planning, and making food could help your loved one so much.

FAMILY BUILDING, ANNOUNCEMENTS, LIFE EVENTS, AND FESTIVITIES

Try to send a personal message to your friends and loved ones who have been through loss before you post on social media! This can lessen the trigger of just seeing it on social media.

MESSAGE IDEAS

"Hey, I just wanted to let you know...

- We are pregnant.
- We are having a baby shower, and we'd love for you to attend, but we understand if you can't right now.
- We'd love for you to join us for the... insert event here. There is no pressure if you're not up to it, but please know we want you there and love you regardless of whether you can or can't make it.

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