



WHEN A BABY HAS DIED

When someone close to us dies, the process of grieving is how we begin to untangle the emotional bonds we had formed with that person. **Grief is the painful but necessary process** that lets us say goodbye.

When a baby dies before it is born or soon after birth, **parents face a difficult emotional task**: they must try to say goodbye to someone they had little chance to know. They must accept that a life has ended, even though it barely began.

You will likely experience some of the common reactions of bereavement to your baby's death. You may go into shock or deny that your baby has died. You will likely become depressed. Even if you were normally a committed, caring person, you would find that **you do not care about anything or anyone right now**.

The grief caused by your baby's death can take a physical toll. You may lose weight, have difficulty sleeping, become irritable, listless or feel short of breath.

There are two normal reactions to death that you will probably experience very acutely: **anger and guilt**. Because a baby's death seems so unnatural, there is an especially strong urge to blame someone. You may be very angry with your doctor, hospital or even God.

You are likely to feel guilty for many reasons. Parents of unborn babies who die often mistakenly blame themselves for the death. The mother may believe she harmed her baby. Both parents may tell themselves they should have sensed something was wrong and alerted the doctor.

You will likely be overcome by a **tremendous sense of emptiness**. Pregnancy brings with it a number of expectations, dreams and fantasies. Now, after both parents are emotionally preparing to welcome a child into the world, you must instead accept the loss of both the baby and all of your expectations for the future of that child.

Unfortunately, you will **for a time be constantly reminded of your baby**. Your home may be filled with baby clothes, bottles and a crib. You are likely to receive coupons for baby food in the mail and perhaps a free subscription for a baby magazine. Photographers may call and offer to take baby pictures. Just waking past the infant-wear department in a store may initiate tears of mourning.

It may be difficult to resolve the grief you feel for the baby you lost. Even before you can accept your baby's death, **you must accept his or her life – the baby's existence as a person**. Remember, no matter how brief your baby's life, you have just as much right to grieve as any other bereaved parent.

Express your feelings. Share them with your partner, your friends and your relatives. Some well-meaning friends may try to comfort you by saying you'll have another baby, but you know another child cannot replace this baby. Other friends will probably be at a loss for words for you. You can bridge the gap by telling them what you need and how they can help.

Most importantly, **talk to your spouse**. The death of a child can strain a marriage. No two people grieve exactly the same way, and you may find that you and your spouse are on such different emotional wavelengths that communication is difficult. It is important that you set aside time to be alone together to talk about your feelings, cry or simply hold each other.

Bereaved parents often find that nothing helps them resolve their grief as much as **talking to others who have lived through the loss of a child**. There is a wonderful organization called The Compassionate Friends with 575 chapters. You can contact them on the web at compassionatefriends.org, call them toll free at (877) 969-0010 or fax them at (630) 990-0246 to find a local chapter near you.

SUGGESTED READING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED AN INFANT DEATH:

EMPTY ARMS By Sherokee Ilse

Coping After Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death

The feelings of parents, newly bereaved, are explained and shared.

ENDED BEGINNINGS: HEALING CHILDBEARING LOSSES By Panuthos And Romeo

FREE TO GRIEVE * By Maureen Rank

MOURNING UNLIVED LIVES * By Judith Savage

STILLBORN, THE INVISIBLE DEATH * By John DeFrain

SURVIVING PREGNANCY LOSS * By Freidman And Gredstein

A helpful and supportive book with information for coping with the emotional consequences of a pregnancy loss.

SUGGESTED READING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD FROM SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME:

SUDDEN INFANT DEATH: PATTERNS, PUZZLES AND PROBLEMS By Golding, Limerick And MacFarlane

COPING WITH SUDDEN INFANT DEATH By DeFrain, Taylor And Ernst

RECOVERING FROM THE LOSS OF A CHILD By Katherine Fair Donnelly

One section of this book deals with SIDS.

OTHER RESOURCES

The Compassionate Friends is a non-profit group that provides supportive grief literature. The 575 local chapters offer support from other bereaved parents. Write for a listing of their books: The Compassionate Friends ~ Post Office Box 3696 ~ Oak Brook, Illinois 60522. You can contact them on the web at compassionatefriends.org, call them at (877) 969-0010 or fax them at (630) 990-0246.

The Centering Corporation has books about infant grief.
Their catalog can be obtained by writing to Post Office Box 3367 ~ Omaha, NE 68103.

* These books are from selections offered through:
Pregnancy and Infant Loss Center ~ 1421 E. Wayzata Blvd. #40 ~ Wayzata, MN 55391 ~ (952) 473-9372