Pregnancy *& baby loss*

For anyone grieving a baby through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, the loss of a newborn, or ending a pregnancy for medical reasons.

MOTHER GROUND
YOUR VILLAGE

If you are reading this, you may be grieving a baby you loved and hoped for. Whenever and however your loss happened, **your baby mattered, and your grief matters.** There is no loss too early to grieve, and no right way to feel.

Pregnancy and baby loss are far more common than many people realise. The charity Tommy's estimates that in the UK, around 1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss during pregnancy or birth. Yet it is still rarely spoken about, which can leave parents feeling very alone.

Losses can include

YOUR LOSS MAY HAVE BEEN	WHAT THIS CAN MEAN
Miscarriage	Loss of a baby before 24 weeks, including early loss before many people knew you were pregnant
Ectopic or molar pregnancy	A pregnancy that cannot continue, often with physical treatment and fear for your own health
Stillbirth	When a baby is born sleeping after 24 weeks
Neonatal death	When a baby dies in the first weeks after birth
Ending a pregnancy for medical reasons	An unbearably hard decision, often made out of love, which deserves the same compassion
Fertility struggles	Grieving pregnancies that haven't happened, or the family you hoped for

What grief can feel like

FEELINGS
- Heartbreak, emptiness
- Guilt, "was it my fault?"
- Anger, jealousy
- Shock, numbness

BODY
- Physical recovery
- Milk coming in
- Exhaustion
- A body that still feels pregnant

MIND
- Replaying every moment
- Searching for reasons
- Intrusive memories
- Fear for the future

AROUND OTHERS
- Pain at pregnancy news
- Avoiding baby events
- Feeling misunderstood
- Hiding your grief

Gently *understanding your grief*

"WAS IT SOMETHING I DID?"

This is one of the most common questions after losing a baby. Tommy's notes that in most cases, healthcare professionals simply don't know why a pregnancy loss has happened. It is very rarely caused by anything a parent did or didn't do, such as working, exercising, lifting, stress or a glass of wine before you knew. **You did not cause this.**

Grief that others may not see

Grief researcher Kenneth Doka described **disenfranchised grief** as grief that others don't fully recognise. After pregnancy loss, especially an early one, people may not know what to say, may say nothing at all, or may offer hurtful comments without meaning to. Your grief is still real and deserves space.

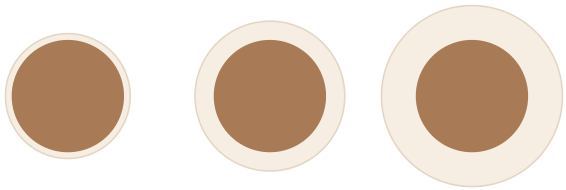
It can affect your mental health

A large UK study led by Imperial College London found that one month after early pregnancy loss, 29% of women met the criteria for post-traumatic stress, and nine months later this was 18%. Anxiety and low mood were common too. If you are experiencing flashbacks, nightmares or constant anxiety, **you are not overreacting**, and support can help.



What we're often told

Grief shrinks over time until it disappears.



What often happens

Grief stays much the same size, and life slowly grows around it.

Many bereaved parents find their grief doesn't shrink, but their life slowly grows around it. Their baby remains part of their story.

Partners grieve too

Partners and non-birthing parents can feel their grief is overlooked, as attention understandably focuses on the person who was pregnant. They may feel they need to be "the strong one". Couples often grieve differently, one wanting to talk, the other needing to keep busy. Different doesn't mean one of you cares less.

Holding on *to their memory*

Many parents find comfort in making memories and marking their baby's life, however short. There's no right or wrong, and it's never too late. Some ideas:

KEEPSAKES

- Scan photos
- Hand and footprints
- A blanket or hat
- A hospital bracelet

MARKING THEIR LIFE

- Choosing a name
- A small ceremony
- Planting a tree or flowers
- Lighting a candle

ONGOING CONNECTION

- A memory box
- Writing to your baby
- Marking their due date
- Jewellery or a keepsake

Your hospital's bereavement midwife can talk you through options, including registering a stillbirth and arranging a funeral or cremation, at whatever pace feels right.

Difficult days

Due dates, anniversaries, Mother's and Father's Day, and friends' pregnancy announcements can be especially hard. It's OK to step back, mute social media, decline invitations, or plan something quiet that honours your baby.

What helps, and what hurts

OFTEN HELPS TO HEAR

- "I'm so sorry about your baby."
- Using your baby's name
- "I'm thinking of you today."
- "There's no rush. I'm here."
- Remembering the due date

CAN HURT, EVEN WHEN MEANT KINDLY

- "At least it was early."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "You can try again."
- "At least you have other children."
- Saying nothing at all

You might like to share this page with family and friends who want to support you but don't know how.

Thinking about another pregnancy

There's no right time. Some parents feel ready soon; others never do. If you do become pregnant again, it's very common to feel anxious, hold back from bonding, or feel guilty for being happy. A new baby never replaces the one you lost. Both can be loved.

Gentle *care*

Rest and recover. Your body has been through a lot. Allow time to heal physically as well as emotionally.

Let yourself grieve. Tears, anger and numbness are all natural. There is no timetable.

Say what you need. Tell people whether you'd like them to mention your baby, and how they can help.

Take your time back to work. You may be entitled to leave. Ask your employer or HR about your options.

Look after each other. Grieve together, and give each other room to grieve differently.

Talk about your baby. Talking to a counsellor can give you a safe space to grieve.

REFLECTION

1. What would I like to say to my baby?

2. What do I need from the people around me right now?

Recommended reading

Ask Me His Name
Elle Wright (2017)
A mother's honest, moving story of love and loss after her son died shortly after birth.

The Baby Loss Guide
Zoë Clark-Coates (2019)
Gentle, practical support for parents after pregnancy and baby loss.

The Brink of Being
Julia Bueno (2019)
A psychotherapist explores miscarriage with compassion, drawing on many women's stories.

An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination
Elizabeth McCracken (2008)
A tender memoir about her stillborn son and the pregnancy that followed.

Looking after you

If you have flashbacks, can't sleep, feel very anxious or low, or have thoughts of not wanting to be here, please speak to your GP, midwife or health visitor. You won't be judged, and support can help. Samaritans: **116 123** (free, 24 hours). NHS 111, mental health option. In an emergency, call **999**.

This information sheet offers general support and is **not intended to replace therapy, or medical or professional advice, diagnosis or treatment.** Statistics from Tommy's, "Baby loss statistics", and Farren et al. (2020), *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.* Draws on Kenneth Doka's concept of disenfranchised grief and Lois Tonkin's model of growing around grief. © Velvet Couch Therapy. For personal use only.