

Professionally Speaking.....

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Friends Don't Get It

The most supportive friends are those who recognize that your baby's death is a significant and tragic loss. They try to understand what you are going through, they listen whenever you need to talk and they accept your behavior and your emotions without being uncomfortable or judgmental. Having this kind of support can help you cope with your baby's death. (taken from Empty Cradle, Broken Heart by Deborah L. Davis, Ph.D.)

In a perfect world, we would all have friends who supported us in our grief as lovingly as the passage above. However, having listened to parents in my Unite, Inc. Support Group for many years, I know that parents who are grieving the loss of a baby seldom feel supported, and instead feel very lonely. Well meaning people say the wrong things that only complicate your sadness and frustration, while others don't say anything at all. Life goes on and remains the same for most of your family members and friends, while you are left with a gaping hole in your heart. People in your life may actually avoid talking to you because they don't know what to say or how to react. Women report feeling "not complete" in the months and years following the loss of their baby. You are not the same fun-loving, carefree person that they once knew and loved. In fact, on the day that your baby died, you became a new person and your life took on a "new normal" which may be confusing to people in your life. Those who have not personally experienced a loss may wonder why your grief is so profound and they may actually encourage you to get on with your life. Friends and family members do not usually want to hear your story or see your frequent posts on Facebook. Their misguided comments can appear uncaring, yet your friends may not realize that certain statements sound hurtful or unfeeling to you. Their unsympathetic remarks may minimize your baby's importance as they attempt to rationalize your baby's death. Friends also feel helpless because they really do want to be supportive, but aren't sure how. You are often left to mourn the loss of your precious baby

alone – wondering “Where are the people who I thought were my friends?”

I often wish that Unite, Inc. members could be interviewed on a primetime news broadcast to educate America about how devastating it feels to lose a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. I wish that we could teach the world what not to say to us. I wish that people would know that you actually want to talk about your baby and mention their names. I wish that people would know that all they have to say is, “I’m sorry that your baby died.”

The task of educating the world on this topic is overwhelming and probably impossible. I encourage each of you to teach your own circle of friends and relatives what it is like to feel that hole in your heart – to feel incomplete – to grieve every day for your child and the life that should have been. Tell them that you will cherish their sympathetic ears, their phone calls, and offers to help. Although you may feel awkward, try to tell people what you need, and surround yourself with people who are willing to learn the significance of your loss, and how to support you on your grief journey.