

Professionally Speaking ...

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Grandparents Grieve Twice

I often think of grandparents as the “forgotten mourners.” Grandparents rush to the bedside to comfort their child who has suffered a miscarriage or stillbirth. The attention is always on the parents who have lost the baby - especially the mother. Parents are so consumed with their own grief that they don’t recognize the pain that the baby’s grandparents are feeling. It is important to remember that the grandparents also had hopes and dreams for this new life. They feel the pain of losing their grandchild, and they also feel the pain of witnessing their child’s grief over the death of their baby. It is especially challenging for grandparents to hold their own grief, while trying to support their children in their suffering.

Grandparents may feel the same feelings that the baby’s parents feel. Some of these feelings may be: shock, sadness, anger, disbelief, confusion, bitterness, isolation, and hopelessness. There is one other feeling that is unique only to the mother of the baby. Mothers almost always feel guilty. While there is nothing that they did to cause a miscarriage or stillbirth, mothers always blame themselves, because it was their body that failed to protect their baby. It is heartbreaking for grandparents to hear this, but it is a real feeling for the mother, and one that needs to be heard. One of the needs of mourning is to process the loss and find meaning for what happened. Gently remind the mother that she has done nothing wrong.

Grandparents also experience physical problems such as fatigue, stomach problems, increased blood pressure, headaches, and sleep disturbances.

Here are some ways that grandparents can support their children:

- *Encourage your children to talk. Be ready to listen attentively without judgment. Allow them to talk about their baby and about their baby's death. Never say, "You shouldn't feel that way!" All of their feelings are legitimate and should be honored. The greatest gift you can give your child is to listen with a loving heart.*
- *Don't try to keep them busy in an attempt to keep their minds off of their loss. Parents think about their babies every minute of every day. Parents want to feel their grief. It is the closest connection that they have to their baby.*
- *Say the baby's name in ordinary conversation so that the parents know that they are not forgotten.*
- *Don't force your children to attend social events. It will take some time for them to feel comfortable in public. Gatherings such as Weddings, Funerals, Birthday parties, Christenings, and Baby Showers are all places in which parents who have lost a baby feel very vulnerable. They worry about what people will say to them. They worry about having a burst of grief in front of others. They worry about seeing other pregnant women or infants. Outings can be a land mine of possible griefbursts.*
- *Remember the baby's birthday every year. Support your children in thinking of ways to honor the baby's date of birth. Many parents seek to find ways to keep their baby's memory alive.*

Here are some suggestions:

- ~ *Plant a tree or flower garden with a garden stone with the baby's name on it.*
- ~ *Donate a gift to the Labor & Delivery Unit of the hospital where your grandchild was born.*
- ~ *Give the baby's mother a necklace with the baby's name or initials on it.*
- ~ *Purchase an angel statue for the parents.*
- ~ *Give the parents memorial wind chimes to remind them of their baby.*

- *Order a personalized candle with the baby's name. Light the candle at every family gathering to symbolize the presence of the baby in the family.*
- *Display a photo of your grandchild in your home, along with your other living grandchildren's photos.*
- *Attend Walks to Remember and Infant Memorial events with your children.*
- *Visit the cemetery and leave a small token of your love, if your grandchild is buried. If your grandchild was cremated, purchase a small symbol of your love to be placed by the urn.*
- *When telling someone how many grandchildren you have, include the baby who died. You may say, "I have 3 living grandchildren, and one who died before birth."*
- *Know that your children will never be the same. As much as you try to help them return to their normal, happy selves, they will have a "new normal" which may look very different from before their baby died.*

With a grandchild's death, you face one of the most painful kinds of grief. It will break your heart to see your son and daughter as "bereaved parents." Recognize that their hearts will always be broken, but in time, and with much support from you, their hearts will continue to beat. The scar will always remain, but they wouldn't want it any other way. The scar represents their precious baby.