

Miscarriage

Supporting families
who experience the
death of their baby or child
during pregnancy, birth and infancy

The Experience of Miscarriage

The loss of a baby at any stage of pregnancy can have a profound impact on parents. The gestational age of the baby is often not what is important. After weeks of dreaming, imagining and planning it is also the loss of those hopes and dreams for the future. To feel sad, empty and bewildered at this time is understandable and normal.

Following miscarriage parents may experience a range of emotions. For many parents, there is no baby to grieve over and few memories of this time. Others may not acknowledge that the baby ever existed and parents may feel left alone in their grief.

Partners often grieve in different ways. Everyone is an individual and what is right for one person may not be right for another. It's important that partners communicate with each other at this time and be aware of each other's feelings and thoughts.

Many women experience bleeding in the days leading up to miscarriage. For others the pregnancy ends suddenly, with no warning at all. Many women experience a see-saw of hope and anxiety during these uncertain times and then find themselves in a state of shock struggling to believe that a miscarriage has really occurred. One day you're pregnant and planning for a future with your child and then within such a short time all your hopes and dreams are shattered.

Parents are often left with many questions. Why did it happen? Will it happen again? Was it something I did?

It can be helpful to ask your doctor or health carer any questions you may have. There may be no answers but you have a right to be informed if the information is available.

Why?

A pregnancy may end in miscarriage for many reasons, including a weakness in the womb or cervix, a chromosomal abnormality, viral infections, diabetes, or placental malformation. Sometimes there is no explanation for the loss of a pregnancy. Nearly all miscarriages are unexpected and are not preventable.

Being pregnant involves adjustments and perhaps mixed feelings about the role of being a parent. The experience of loss may bring feelings of relief for some and confirmation for others that they really were looking forward to this baby.

Feelings of guilt are often experienced and women may feel that they have lost control over their body. Talking to someone about your feelings and anxieties can be a great comfort.

The Days and Weeks Ahead

Facing the reality of everyday life after the loss may be difficult. Parents often feel that their lives have been turned upside down yet it seems for everyone else that life is going on normally. Telling people what has happened can be traumatic and the news may be received with mixed reactions.

- You may find that you cry a lot, or when you are least expecting it. It is okay to be tearful.
- If you need to talk, find someone who will listen and understand. Often talking to other parents who have had a similar experience is helpful.

- Let others know how you are feeling and what your needs are at this time.
- There may be times you need to be alone. You and your family come first at this time.
- There is no 'set time' for your responses to a miscarriage. You may feel shock, guilt, anger, sadness and despair. You may be calm one day and distressed the next.

You have experienced the loss of your baby and your reactions are part of a normal grief response.

Men's Reactions

Following the loss of a baby the emotional needs of the father may be at times overlooked. Fathers may also be experiencing a wide range of feelings; feeling responsible and protective towards their partner, wanting to provide protection from this painful experience and sometimes feeling powerless and excluded. He may be unsure of how to provide comfort and sometimes struggle to imagine what his partner is feeling.

Often in the early days the father may feel he needs to stay strong and not let out all his feelings. He may have to tell family and friends of the death of the baby. His link to the baby is different from the mother's, less physical and immediate. His feelings of sadness and disappointment may be just as strong although he may grieve differently to the mother. It is a time when partners need to support each other and accept their different ways of grieving.

Your Children

Children's reactions to death vary widely. Their response will be influenced by their temperament, parental influences, past experiences as well as their age and stage of development. It is important to talk honestly with children and not hide your emotions from them. Even if a child did not know about the pregnancy they will know that family life has been upset. If parents feel they need some time to themselves in the early days then ask family or friends if they can help provide care for them.

Where to Get Help

SIDS and Kids NSW:

Can provide a range of Bereavement Support Services.

Your Obstetrician/Gynaecologist:

He/she can discuss your experience with you and provide information and ongoing care.

Social Work Department:

Social Workers are available at many hospitals and can provide a safe neutral space for you to talk about your loss.

Chaplains:

Hospital chaplains of all denominations can offer bereaved parents spiritual comfort and rituals.

SIDS and Kids NSW is aware that people need different kinds of support at different times so we offer a range of services.

We Offer:

- **24 Hour Telephone Support**
Trained parent supporters and counsellors are available to talk with bereaved parents, family members and friends on the 24 hour Bereavement Support Line. **Phone 1800 651 186**
- **Parent and Family Support**
SIDS and Kids NSW has trained parent and family supporters who have experienced the death of a baby or young child. They can support bereaved family members over the phone and can arrange to visit if possible.
- **Counselling**
Bereavement counselling from qualified counsellors is available to individuals and families.
- **Support Groups**
Monthly meetings and coffee morning are held in many areas of Sydney and Country NSW.
- **Education**
Presented to health professionals and community groups.
 - Literature
 - Library
 - Memorial Services
 - Newsletters
 - Social Activities

Further information about SIDS and Kids NSW can be obtained from:

Sids and Kids New South Wales

P.O. Box 431 CAMPERDOWN NSW 1450

Tel: 02 9818 8400 or 1300 308 307

Fax: 02 9818 4555

24 hour Bereavement Support Line: 1800 651 186

Email: sydney@sidsandkidsnsw.org

Website: www.sidsandkids.org

If you wish to donate to SIDS and Kids please call

(02) 9818 8400