



HOW TO CARE FOR PATIENTS DEALING WITH INFANT LOSS

Miscarriage | Stillbirth | Infant Death | Loss of a Multiple

You can say...

“I am sorry for your loss.”

“[Name of baby] will be remembered by those of us who had the honor of knowing him/her.”

“When you lose a baby, the grief can be overwhelming. If you need to talk to someone, please know that I am here.”

“Is there anyone you feel like you can talk to about this?”

“Who can help you take care of logistics?”

“Have you discussed how to share this news with others?”

“You may not know what you need right now but I am here to help if you can think of anything. I can also suggest some things if you would like that.”

“Would you like to talk about your feelings or would you like me to sit quietly beside you for a few minutes or would you like to be alone?”

When someone in your care loses their baby...

...the pain feels too great for them to bear, the loss profound. But this grief can be isolating because others didn't know the baby as the parents did. Often, the only experience of the baby



was in the womb or through the walls of an isolette. This type of grief can be difficult for others to understand and know how to support. **Remember that nothing you say or do can take away their pain and they don't expect you too.** What you can do is show support, encouragement and understanding. You can validate just how deep and intense the grief is and can make space for them to share this grief with you, if and when they are ready.

You can ask...

It is often helpful for people to have guidance in thinking through activities of daily living. Who will help them eat and rest and take care of the home? Who can help them manage difficult situations and people? What is mom going to do to take care of her physical recovery? Does she know what she will experience? Are they aware of the various aspects of attending to a baby that has passed away – do they know their options in terms of burial, cremation, etc.? Have they taken pictures with their infant? Gotten a clip of hair and footprints? These are keepsakes they will have forever.

Self Care:

Grieving parents cannot make space for your grief. You can let them know how you feel but please find a place to share that experience with others so when you are with the grieving parents, you are able to focus on what they need. Your tears need to be ones of comfort, not of your own need. Check in with yourself to make sure you are doing okay. Focus on your own self-care. Sleep, eat and exercise regularly. Process your feelings with trusted others. Watching and experiencing someone walk through grief is a sacred experience. Your ability to be fully present for them in their need will significantly impact their journey. But you can only do that if you take care of yourself too. As a caregiver, you may find that there are times you feel strong enough to support a family through this time of loss and other times when it feels too much. It's okay to let your colleagues know when you have reached a limit and need support or space.

What not to say...

"I know how you feel." Even if you have worked with loss for many years, each person's story is different. Instead say: "It sounds like you feel..."

"I can't believe..." Avoid expressions of shock around medical care, treatment or relational experiences. Instead say, "I can tell you have a lot of questions/anger/concern about this."

"Everything happens for a reason." People often try to find meaning in things to make sense of what feels like a senseless thing. But that does not help. Instead, say, "Sometimes terrible things happen for no reason." If, and when, appropriate, remind the parent they didn't cause this. Parents often feel an intense sense of misplaced guilt related to their loss.

"God has a plan." Instead ask: "What role does your faith play in your experience of grief?"

"You are so strong" or "I don't know how you are doing this?" Grieving parents don't feel strong and they don't know how they are surviving. They feel overwhelmed and scared. Instead say, "This may feel like it is too much to take. Somehow you will take one step at a time and hopefully feel supported by others around that can help you. Please let me know if I can help you in any way."

"Your baby is in a better place." There is no better place for a baby than in his or her parents' arms. Instead you might say, "Your arms may ache to hold your baby right now. It's okay to grieve that empty space."

"You can try again." Parents know that. They don't want another child. They want the one they lost. Even if there were physical challenges that made that child's life unsustainable, they long for *that* child. Instead say, "Let's try not to focus on the future but instead make space for all the grief and feelings you have at this moment."