

Coping With Pregnancy Loss



This booklet is intended for individuals and their support people who have lost a pregnancy less than 20 weeks gestation.

Who you can call for help

Your Healthcare Team

Contact Information:

Your Spiritual Care Provider, Clergy, or Elder

Contact Information:

HealthLink BC

8-1-1

www.healthlinkbc.ca

Crisis Line

1-800-784-2433

We are deeply sorry that you have experienced a pregnancy loss.

The nurses and other health care practitioners (physicians, midwives, nurse practitioners) are here to support you and provide you information. You may have many questions about what to do. Reading this pamphlet can answer some of the questions you may have at this time.

A pregnancy loss, also called a miscarriage, is sometimes described as a “silent loss.” While many people offer sympathy and kind words, it can still feel very lonely. Friends or family may try to help, but sometimes their comments can unintentionally minimize the loss or make it seem like it isn’t something to grieve. Because of this, some people feel unable to talk openly about their experience, and the loss becomes “silent.”

It is important to know that your feelings are valid, and your loss matters. Healing is often easier when you can acknowledge what has happened and talk openly about both the physical and emotional changes you may experience

This booklet was created for those who have been affected by pregnancy loss. It is based on the publication “Silent Grief” by Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network in Ontario, Canada.

Website: www.pailnetwork.ca

We hope this booklet provides comfort and emotional support as you move through your journey after pregnancy loss.

What is a Pregnancy Loss Less than 20 Weeks

A pregnancy loss before 20 weeks of pregnancy is commonly called a miscarriage by healthcare practitioners. While this is the medical term, we understand that a pregnancy loss is much more than a medical event. It can bring feelings of sadness, grief, confusion, and many questions about why it happened.

Throughout this booklet, we will use the term **pregnancy loss**.

A pregnancy loss may result in the passing of pregnancy tissue, the placenta, and the developing baby or fetus.

People use different words to describe their pregnancy and loss. You may think or refer to your pregnancy as a baby, a fetus, your child, or by a name you had already chosen. There is no right or wrong way to talk about your experience. We encourage you to use the words that feel most meaningful and comfortable to you.

The people around you, including family, friends, and healthcare practitioners, should respect and support the language that feels right for you.

A pregnancy loss can be a very difficult experience. Everyone responds differently. You may feel many emotions, or you may not know how you feel right now. Both are normal. Grief can last longer than you expect, and it is common to continue grieving weeks or months after the loss.

Your hospital visit may be brief, and you may leave with questions or feelings that are hard to understand. We hope this booklet provides information, comfort, and support during this time. We also hope it helps answer some of your questions and reminds you that you are not alone.

Why Did This Happen?

Pregnancy loss before 20 weeks gestation happens more often than many people realize. It occurs in about 15-25% of pregnancies.

Most pregnancy losses under 20 weeks happen because of changes in the baby's genes (the body's instructions for growth and development) These changes occur by chance.

There is nothing you did to cause this, and nothing you could have done to prevent it. At this time, there are no treatments that can reliably stop a pregnancy loss once it has started.

Feelings After a Pregnancy Loss

A pregnancy loss can affect people in many ways. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

Sometimes, other people may not understand how much this loss means to you. They may expect you to “move on” quickly or may not know what to say. This can make you feel alone at a time when you need support.

You may need to return to work, school, or other responsibilities soon after your loss. It can be hard to see people who knew you were pregnant—or people who did not know. You may not know how much you want to share about what has happened. It is okay to share as much or as little as feels right for you.

You may experience many different emotions after a pregnancy loss. Some people feel sadness, grief, anger, guilt, anxiety, or emptiness. Others feel numb or have trouble understanding their feelings. Your emotions may change from day to day, or even from hour to hour.

For many people, the loss is not only about the pregnancy. It is also about the hopes, dreams, and plans they had started to imagine for the future. Having those hopes changed or taken away can be very painful. Some people may also feel relief, especially if the pregnancy was unplanned or if there were concerns about the pregnancy. These feelings are normal too. It is possible to feel relief and grief at the same time.

You may feel frustrated or disappointed if there is no clear explanation for why the pregnancy loss happened. You may also worry about future pregnancies and whether another loss could happen. It is common to have strong emotions when you hear that someone is pregnant or when you see babies and young children. These feelings do not mean you are not happy for others. They are a natural response to your own loss.

Many people wonder if they did something to cause the pregnancy loss. You may feel guilt or blame yourself. It is important to know that pregnancy loss is usually caused by factors outside of anyone's control. In most cases, nothing you did—or did not do—caused the loss.

Grief takes time, and everyone heals in their own way. Support from family, friends, healthcare practitioners, counsellors, Elders, or support groups can help as you move through the days and weeks ahead. **Be kind and patient with yourself.**

A Personal Experience

We are sharing the following personal story to offer connection, understanding, and hope. You may find parts that resonate with your experience and others that do not.

Be gentle with yourself as you read.

“The experience of miscarriage is different for every woman because so many other aspects of her life influence how she perceives and responds to her loss. I’m sharing my experience with you to let you know that you are not alone. Many other women have gone through the overwhelming sense of sadness that you are now having.

I started spotting when I was twelve weeks pregnant. I am a nurse so I knew what this might mean, but I comforted myself with the thought many women bleed in pregnancy and go on to have a healthy baby. When the spotting turned to heavy bleeding I knew I was losing the pregnancy, my baby and my hopes and dreams for the future.

My husband and I were devastated. It had taken us a long time to conceive and we were enjoying my being pregnant. He had been cooking for the baby and me, and he had taken on more of the household chores. I had been eating and resting to grow the healthiest baby possible. The only thing that we had disagreed about during the pregnancy was that I had been unable to reduce my hours in my busy job. I think my husband partly blamed my commitment to work for my miscarriage. We talked a lot about this and we were able to work through these feelings.

I went to the hospital after I had been bleeding for over a day and knew I had lost the baby. An ultrasound revealed that there were still pieces of the placenta left in my uterus. By the time I had the ultrasound I just wanted to go home

and get on with grieving my loss and with my life. My doctor decided to do a minor surgery called a dilation and curettage (D&C) so I was admitted to the hospital for the day.

The D & C itself was a painless procedure under a general anesthetic. I had very mild cramping afterwards and bleeding that resembled a menstrual flow. What surprised me was how tired I felt weeks after the miscarriage. I don't know if it was the loss of the pregnancy or the general anesthetic, but it took some time to get my energy back. I returned to work very quickly and that may have been a mistake. If you feel you need to take some time off work, take it. It will probably speed your long-term recovery.

Emotionally, it takes a long time to get over a miscarriage. At first I could feel myself start to cry whenever I looked at a mother and her baby. There seemed to be pregnant women and babies everywhere, a reminder of my own loss. I thought a lot about the baby on the due date and a year after the miscarriage. It took three months before I really began to feel like my old self again. I had never been depressed and didn't recognize at the time how down I was.

Six weeks after the miscarriage, I had my first period. My doctor said we could try to get pregnant again after two normal periods. It was hard even to think about sex at first – there hardly seemed any point if we had to use birth control. It took a lot of time talking to work this one out.

We now have an eighteen month old daughter and a baby on the way. My first pregnancy after the miscarriage was full of anxiety. I didn't really relax until I was about eighteen weeks pregnant. I think you appreciate the miracle of a pregnancy and baby even more when you have experienced a loss. You don't take anything for granted when you have experienced a problem the first time around."

A Partner's Emotions

A pregnancy loss can affect both you and your partner. While the physical experience happens to one person, the loss can be deeply felt by both partners.

Partners may experience sadness, grief, disappointment, anger, or a sense of loss. They may also feel helpless as they watch someone they love go through physical and emotional pain. Some partners may feel pressure to “be strong” and may put their own feelings aside while supporting others.

It is common for partners to grieve in different ways. One person may want to talk about the loss, while the other may need time and space to process their feelings. One person may show their emotions openly, while the other may keep their feelings private. Neither way is right or wrong.

You may not always understand your partner's reactions, and there may be times when you see things differently. Try to be patient with each other. Listen, talk openly when you can, and respect each other's feelings and ways of coping.

Sharing your thoughts and emotions can help you support one another through this loss. Although grief can sometimes create distance between partners, it can also bring you closer as you move through the experience together.

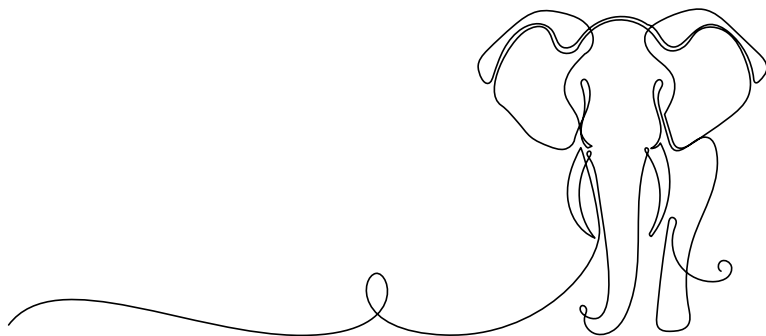
Talking to Children About a Pregnancy Loss

If you have other children, you may wonder how to explain the loss to them. What you say will depend on their age, understanding, and whether they knew about the pregnancy.

Children often notice when the adults around them are sad or upset, even if they do not understand why. Simple, honest explanations are usually best. You might say that the baby died, or is no longer with us, and that this makes you feel sad.

Children may ask questions or want the same information repeated more than once. Answer their questions honestly and using words they can understand. It is also important to reassure them that they did not cause the loss and are not responsible for your sadness.

Let your children know that it is okay to have feelings and to talk about them. They may express their emotions in different ways, such as through play, drawings, questions, or changes in behaviour.



The elephant is a powerful symbol of wisdom, strength, and patience. It is often said that an elephant never forgets the ones it loves.

Grandparents and other Family Members

A pregnancy loss can affect the whole family. Grandparents and other family members may also feel sadness and grief. They may have been looking forward to welcoming a new baby and may be grieving the loss of the hopes and plans they had imagined.

Family members often want to help, but they may not know what to say or do. They may feel helpless as they watch someone they love experience pain and loss.

For some, a pregnancy loss may also bring back memories of a loss they experienced in the past. This can bring up emotions they thought had long since healed.

Comments From Other People

Sometimes comments from friends, family members, or coworkers may not feel helpful, even when they are meant with kindness.

You may hear things like, “Everything happens for a reason,” or “You can always try again.” While these comments are often intended to be comforting, they may not acknowledge the grief and loss you are feeling right now.

Many people do not know what to say after a pregnancy loss. They may not fully understand what you are going through. If you feel comfortable, you may choose to tell others what is helpful for you. You may also decide not to discuss your loss. There is no right or wrong choice. It is important to do what feels best for you.

Living With Your Loss

Over time, the intense pain of a pregnancy loss often becomes easier to carry. However, many people find that they never forget their baby or the hopes and dreams they held for the future.

There is no timeline for grief. You may find that certain dates, places, or events bring back strong emotions, even months or years later. This is a normal part of grieving.

Many people find comfort in creating a meaningful way to remember their pregnancy or baby. This can help acknowledge the importance of the loss and honour the place your baby holds in your life.

Ways to remember your baby may include:

- Choosing a name
- Planting a tree or flowers
- Lighting a candle on special days
- Creating a memory box
- Writing a letter
- Releasing a butterfly or another symbolic gesture
- Taking part in a memorial or cultural ceremony

There is no right or wrong way to remember your baby. What matters most is finding what feels meaningful and supportive for you and your family.



Taking Care of Yourself

Be patient and gentle with yourself. Grief is a natural response to loss, and healing takes time. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Try not to put pressure on yourself to return to your usual routines too quickly. Your well-being can be supported through small acts of self-care and connection with people, places, practices, and supports that bring comfort.

The NESTS tool can help you reflect on ways to care for yourself during this time. Consider writing down simple ideas that may support your well-being in the areas of Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep, Time for Yourself, and Support. You do not need to do everything at once—even one small step can make a difference.

Nutrition - Try to eat nutritious food and sip water throughout the day when you can. Some simple ideas include small meals or snacks, drinking plenty of water, accepting a meal from a friend or family, or having your favorite warm drink.

These are some ideas for me to support my well-being:

Exercise – Even a small amount of movement can help support your well-being. Some ideas include taking a short walk, stretching, sitting in the sunshine or fresh air, gentle yoga, or once physically ready returning to your favorite activity.

These are some ideas for me to support my well-being:

Sleep - Rest is an important part of healing. Some ideas include resting when you are tired, creating a calm bedtime routine, limiting screen time, listening to soothing music or a relaxation recording. These are some ideas for me to support my well-being:

Time for Yourself - Taking a few moments for yourself each day may help. Some ideas include journaling or writing down your thoughts, spending time in nature, reading a book creating meaningful ways to honour and remember your baby. These are some ideas for me to support my well-being:

Support - You do not have to carry your grief alone. Some ideas include talking to a trusted family member or friend, connecting with a counsellor or healthcare provider, reaching out to an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, spiritual leader, or faith community, joining a bereavement or peer support group. These are people and places I can reach out to for support:

Remember, these are only suggestions. Choose what feels right for you. Even one small step can help support your well-being.

What is one thing you can try this week for your own well-being?

Counselling and Support For Pregnancy Loss

BC Bereavement Helpline

<https://bcbh.ca/>

Call 604-738-9950

Toll Free 1-877-779-2223

Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Email: contact@bcbh.ca



Counselling BC

<https://counsellingbc.com/>



Crisis Line Association of BC

<https://www.crisislines.bc.ca>

1-800-784-2433



BC Reproductive Mental Health Program

<http://www.bcwomens.ca/our-services/mental-health-substance-use/reproductive-mental-health>



BC Association of Clinical Counsellors

<https://bcacc.ca/>



Resources for postpartum
depression and anxiety
<https://postpartumcare.ca/>



Okanagan Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support

<https://opil.ca/>

Resources – Knowledge

<https://opil.ca/blog/>



Butterfly Run (Peer Support)

<https://www.butterflysupportnetwork.ca/>



Sunnybrook Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network

<https://pailnetwork.sunnybrook.ca/support-for-families-menu/>



BCWH

Miscarriage information provided in English, Cantonese, French, Mandarin. Punjabi

<https://www.bcwomens.ca/health-info/pregnancy-parenting/miscarriage>



Baby Center

Coping with Pregnancy Loss

https://www.babycenter.com/pregnancy/your-life/coping-with-pregnancy-loss_4006



Podcasts

Many pregnancy loss podcasts are available across various platforms – search “pregnancy loss” or “miscarriage”.

“Each life is indeed a gift,
no matter how short,
no matter how fragile.

Each life is indeed a gift,
to be held in our hearts,
forever.”

– *Compassionate Friends*