



*Grieving parents will never be who they were before. This experience will change them forever.*

## Understanding Your Spouse After Loss Men and Women Grieve Differently

The loss of a child causes profound grief for both parents and can be devastating to a marriage relationship. However, couples who receive adequate support from others often develop even stronger marriages. Finding others to help each of you in the grieving process prevents one of the parents from having to assume the caregiving role all the time.

Taking the time to understand and honor how your spouse is grieving can be difficult in the midst of your own grief. In order to maintain and strengthen your bond with your spouse during this time, it is important to understand that the loss of your baby affects each parent differently. Spending quality time understanding and listening to your spouse will help your marriage become the rock that anchors you in the midst of this storm.

### The Bereaved Mother

- Mourns more than she grieves.
- Constant physical reminders of baby during pregnancy help her quickly develop a strong emotional attachment to baby.
- Physical changes after pregnancy serve as daily, and even hourly, reminders of the loss.
- May feel guilty - as though she has somehow failed her child.
- More verbally expressive about the loss.
- Finds comfort in talking about the events of the loss over and over again.
- May feel like she can think or speak of little else.
- Seeks out support of others.
- Often displays signs of grief for a longer period of time.
- Experiences extreme anxiety at the thought of future pregnancies.

### The Bereaved Father

- Grieves more than he mourns.
- May not have emotionally bonded to the baby as strongly because he has not experienced the same physical effects of the pregnancy.
- If the pregnancy in any way threatened the mother's health, he may feel relieved at the outcome. This relief becomes a source of guilt.
- May feel guilty for making too many demands on the mother or not doing more to help her rest during the pregnancy.
- Often has a difficult time finding an outlet for his emotions and will keep busy with work, projects, etc.
- Fewer people speak to him about the loss, except to ask how the mother is doing.
- Generally has a weaker support system than the mother.
- Tends to be action-oriented and wants to "solve" the problem of his wife's grief. May withdraw from her when he cannot fix her pain.

# Understanding Your Spouse After Loss

## Conflict

The differences in the ways men and women often grieve can lead a grieving mother to believe her husband doesn't care about the loss of the baby because he's not showing it, while a grieving father may feel his wife is an emotional wreck because she is always in mourning.

During times of crisis, such as the time surrounding your loss, stress increases and patience decreases. Unresolved emotions connected to the loss can lead you to seek an outlet for your feelings by fighting with your spouse over even issues that are unrelated to the loss. The loss can cause conflict in your marriage, but taking time to understand the way your spouse is grieving - which may be different than the way you are - can help you to cope and overcome these types of conflicts quickly.

## Blame and Anger

Blaming and scapegoating are very destructive after the loss of a baby. The anger of grief may be displaced onto your spouse (or another family member) who becomes the target of all wrath. The stresses of your life are compounded by your grief and may leave you with little patience. This impatience can lead you to say things without thinking, including blaming your spouse for the loss or for not supporting you in your grief.

It is important to remember that while anger is a normal and healthy response to grief, blame is not. Most pregnancy losses do not have a reason, and you may never know why your baby died. Even if you do know the medical reasons for the loss, the bigger whys (Why did this happen to us?) will not have an answer. Healing can begin much faster if you stop yourself from blaming your spouse or making him/her the target of your anger.

## Sex After Loss

Difficulty with sexual intercourse often becomes a problem after miscarriage or stillbirth. The reality of the mother's empty womb sometimes overcomes the desire for intimate relations. The fear of another pregnancy may lurk in one or both of your hearts. Realize that your problems in this area are not unique. Many couples struggle with marital intimacy after the loss of a baby. Being open and talking with one another about your fears and anxieties will help lessen them.

Always check with your medical provider to confirm it is appropriate to resume sexual intercourse. Once the mother has physically healed after the miscarriage or stillbirth, try easing back into intimacy in a softer and slower fashion. Recognize that emotions will likely be high for both of you, and do not put the added pressure or burden of high expectations. If you focus on reading your spouse's cues, you will find that marital intimacy can assist emotional healing for you both.

## Helping Each Other Heal

**Share your grief.** Be clear about when you need space to grieve privately, but be cautious about spending so much time apart that it becomes a habit to grieve alone or become isolated.

**Spend time together.** Be open about discussing the loss and your grief, but do not feel you need to focus on it. Do something that brings you both joy.

**Express your love** with words, gifts, physical touch and acts of service.

**Listen to your spouse** without making judgements. Let your spouse know that whatever emotions he or she is feeling are alright to share with you.

**Find a friend of the same gender** to help support you when your spouse cannot. It can be particularly helpful to find another mother or father who has experienced the loss of a child.

**Draw close to God.** Attend Mass and participate in the sacraments together. Pray with and for each other asking your child in heaven to intercede for your marriage. Ask your pastor for the "Blessing of Parents after Miscarriage," found in the *Book of Blessings*.