

A Partner's Grief

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A new baby is supposed to be a time of happiness and excitement. No one expects their baby to die. Bereaved partners commonly experience intense emotions, but often try to block these out in order to protect the mother and keep everyday life functioning.

You may be feeling shocked, disappointed, confused, sad or angry. Perhaps you are feeling inadequacy or guilt about the reasons behind your baby's death, or maybe you are struggling to accept the fact there is no medical explanation.

This is a very challenging time for you, and it is important to remember that you are not alone and that there are many sources of support available.

Your Grief

It can often be incorrectly assumed that as a partner, you do not feel as much grief because you had less physical contact with your baby than your partner did.

However, many partners experience acute grief. This is a normal and natural response to the death of your baby. Grief can be physically exhausting, and you may feel tired, sick and perhaps depressed for a period.

It is important to remember that there is no time frame for grief; it takes as long as it takes. Bereaved parents often recall many ups and downs during the months and years that follow their baby's death. Everybody grieves in their own way, and you are entitled to find yours.

One model that is helpful for understanding grief is the spectrum between instrumental and intuitive grief. Instrumental grievers can find it difficult to talk about their feelings. They generally prefer to problem solve their way through grief. Intuitive grievers are expressive and find relief and healing in talking about their grief. Most people sit somewhere in the middle, but it can be upsetting to grieve along side someone with a different style if you do not recognise this.

Don't feel that you need to take your partner's pain away

Sadly, there is not much you can do to make her pain go away. Allow your partner to express herself — do not feel as though you must ease her crying, or as though you are supposed to have all the answers.

Caring for yourself

Because partners commonly want to stay strong and protect the mother, they often try to block out their feelings and emotions. While it is natural to want to be a reliable source of support, don't forget you also need to express how you are feeling. Be aware that denying your feelings can sometimes prolong the grieving process.

Coping with grief

Give yourself time and space to grieve. There is no need to feel guilty about taking some personal time to process your thoughts and emotions. Many partners take parental leave or reduce their work hours. You may also find it helpful to take a step back from other obligations outside the family unit. Asking for a leave of absence from activities can be a good way to make sure you can return at a later date.

Accept help from others

If you need a break, accept some of the practical support of family members and friends. Try not to feel that you must do everything yourself — give yourself credit for what you are doing. Letting others care for you and your partner is a way for them to show their love and support.

Accept your own feelings

Many people have preconceived ideas about how they might deal with, or want to deal with, tragic or high-stress situations. Accept that everyone is different and there is usually no right or wrong way of getting through this event. Try to worry less about how you think you should feel, and just deal with how you do feel.



Helping each other

Show your sadness and emotion

Putting on a brave face to console your partner may be misunderstood as not caring. By expressing that you too are affected by the death of your baby, you can help to reassure your partner that her feelings are both shared and valid.

Allow each other time to grieve separately

Grieving together may be beneficial to your relationship but do allow each other time to grieve separately also.

Simply being there for your partner — listening and providing a shoulder to cry on — is often what parents want most from their partners.

Honoring your baby

As a couple you may each choose different ways of honouring and remembering your baby. Red Nose has additional factsheets outlining how you might like to do this. It is important to think about what you would like to do as a couple and what is just for you. There may be some aspects of being a parent that you were particularly excited to share with your child that you wish to incorporate. For example, there may be a ritual or a prayer you wish to say at the start of every football season, or you may wish to pick the first flower of Spring in honour of your daughter. As a couple you should also consider if there are stories and memories you want to keep only for your family, or for you as a couple, and what information you are prepared to share with others. Having this conversation up front can help ensure there are no misunderstandings.

Be prepared to seek help from others

Make sure that you have someone you can talk to about your concerns and fears, e.g. a trusted family member, friend or your doctor. Talking to others who have been through a similar loss, such as a Red Nose parent supporter, can also provide reassurance. You may also like to encourage your partner to do this. You do not need to rely solely on each other.

Make time to do activities you both enjoy

Doing something that you as a couple usually find relaxing or rewarding can nurture your relationship and stimulate positive feelings. It's OK to have positive feelings and experiences in the midst of grief.

Your relationship

Following the death of your baby, grief may overshadow normal intimacy, or it may be that you and your partner find intimacy and affection a comfort. Both of these feelings are normal. You and your partner may need different things. Communicate and explore ways to be close and share time together.

Seek professional help if needed

If you feel that your grieving or your partner's grieving is not progressing, and things do not seem to be getting easier after some months, it is important that you seek professional help. A GP is a good place to start.

Facing the Future

You may feel a need to rush back to your regular work routine. While there is some value in resuming your daily activities, try to wait until your partner and family are ready. Workplaces will often offer bereavement leave and the option to work fewer hours.

Think through how you will respond to the unexpected questions people may ask.

Take your time and go easy on yourself. Everyone's experience of grief is unique, so allow the process of healing to occur in ways that suit you. Gradually the pain will become less raw and intense, and you will begin to regain strength. Also remember that grief may reappear at different times in your life, and that this is normal. You can honour and celebrate your child's life in any way you feel appropriate.

“I didn't cry until after the funeral -my wife was furious with me. She thought that I didn't care.”

- Aaron



Red Nose Bereavement Support Services We support anyone affected by the loss of a pregnancy, stillbirth or the death of a baby or child.

24/7 Support Line 1300 308 307

support@rednose.org.au

Support Library rednosegriefandloss.org.au



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