



Supporting You Through Your Loss

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Words may not describe the anguish and pain you feel from the loss of your child...

The loss of a baby, whether in the early or late stage of pregnancy, is usually a sudden and unexpected experience leading to feelings such as shock, sadness, confusion and distress. You may also feel overwhelmed by the need to make some important decisions within a short span of time.

This booklet aims to give you some practical options and suggestions to help support you during this difficult period. We acknowledge the reality of your pain and sorrow and sincerely hope that you will find some comfort in the words you read.



Facts about Foetal Loss

There are many types of pregnancy loss — miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death and medically advised termination.

Miscarriage

When the loss of the baby is within the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, it is termed a miscarriage. 15-20% of pregnancies end up in miscarriage, and it occurs mostly in the first 13 weeks of the pregnancy. Some miscarriages take place before a woman misses her period or even prior to being aware that she is pregnant.

The reasons for miscarriages vary, and very often, the causes cannot be identified. Coping with a miscarriage is very hard but we hope you can take some comfort in knowing that most women are able to get pregnant again, and experience a full-term pregnancy.



Stillbirth

A baby is considered a stillborn if it is lost after the 24th week of gestation. In Singapore, there is an estimated 80 to 120 stillbirths a year, or an average of two or three cases out of every 1000 pregnancies.

Neonatal Death

When a baby passes away in his/her first month of life, it is termed as neonatal death. Neonatal death is often caused by premature births – the more premature the baby, the higher the risk, and birth defects cause about 20% of the neonatal deaths.

Some other causes of neonatal deaths include complications involving umbilical cord, membranes and placenta, pregnancy complications, asphyxia (lack of oxygen for the baby during or before birth) and infections.

Critically-ill babies will need to be admitted into the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for treatment and care. Parents should not hesitate to ask the baby's doctors and nurses about the baby's condition and treatments rendered. Parents can also ask their doctors on how they can take part in the care of their baby to bond and build memories of the baby.

Medically Advised Termination

Prenatal screening and diagnostic test results may reveal your baby's congenital conditions with a prognosis that may be fatal. In such a situation, parents will have to make the decision of whether or not to continue with the pregnancy. There may also be times when the pregnancy threatens the mother's life and health, which also poses a difficult decision for parents.

Regardless of the causes or the stage of the pregnancy, the passing of a baby at any stage is a real loss. Although it is likely that experiencing a late pregnancy loss often invokes more intense emotions, the termination of pregnancy is never an easy decision for parents to make, and involves deep grief.

Understanding your emotions

It is completely natural to feel shocked or find it difficult to accept the reality when faced with the news of the unexpected loss. Many parents who faced such losses have shared the confusing mix of emotions they felt while trying to process their loss, especially when they had been joyfully anticipating welcoming a new addition to their family.

Very often, the loss happens without any indication, and not understanding why or how the loss has occurred triggers the feeling of anger in some parents. When we are not able to explain the reason, the innate need to seek explanation for things often mislead one to develop a sense of guilt and self-blame.

Whatever emotions you may be experiencing, acknowledging them and sharing them with someone you trust can be deeply helpful. Talking openly about your feelings with your spouse, family, or close friends can help alleviate the isolation that often accompanies grief and loss.

At the Women's Emotional Health Service (WEHS), we have a team of healthcare professionals who are trained and committed to help you through this difficult period. We are here for you, should you need to talk about and share your grief.



Creating memories

Creating memories and saying goodbye to your baby

During the period of grieving and healing, many take comfort in the memories of the time spent with the baby. The following are some suggestions which may be helpful in creating memories with your baby.

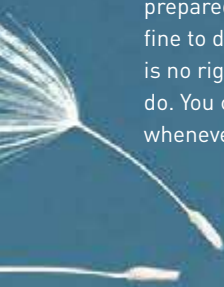
See, touch and hold your baby

See, touch and hold your baby as long as you like, and as many times as you wish. You may unwrap your baby, hold his/her hands, touch his/her face, feel his/her cheeks, plant kisses or talk to him/her.

Should you be concerned about how your premature baby may look, do ask the doctor or the nurse on what to expect. If you do not feel mentally prepared to see your baby, it is perfectly fine to decline. Be assured that there is no right or wrong feeling or thing to do. You can always change your mind, whenever you wish.

**"Sometimes love
is for a moment,
Sometimes love
is for a lifetime,
Sometimes a moment
is a lifetime."**

Martin Luther King



Take photographs or videos of your baby

Photographs are the only tangible images of your baby which you can keep. Do take as many photos as you wish.

You may like to capture special moments of your baby bathing, dressing, in NICU, or of you cuddling him/her on video. To help remember everything about the baby, there are parents who also request to capture the baby's last moments before passing. You may do so if you feel that this will also help you better manage the loss.

Bathe and dress your baby

We understand that there are parents who may want to personally bathe and dress their baby after his/her passing. You may inform our nurses should you feel that you will find comfort in doing so. You may also dress your baby in an outfit that you have prepared or in a white silk dress provided by the hospital.

Take hand and foot prints of your baby

You can take the hand and foot prints of your baby for keepsake. You can ask the nurses for an ink pad to take a few sets of the prints.

Keep items belonging to your baby

You may wish to keep your baby's cot card, a lock of your baby's hair, his/her identification bracelet and his/her umbilical cord peg. Should you wish to retain any personal belonging which is of significance to you or your baby, please let our nurses know.

Performing religious blessing for your baby

You can arrange for your baby to be blessed according to your religion, within the hospital.



Honouring your baby

Parents may choose to hold a funeral or memorial service for their baby, whether following religious rites or creating their own meaningful and special ceremony for their baby.

Here are some frequently asked questions:

What happens after the foetus/baby passes on?

Parents can arrange for their own casket services for cremation or allow the hospital to handle the cremation process on their behalf.

What is the process if parents choose to allow the hospital to handle the cremation process on their behalf?

We respect the different religions and cultures; from the mortuary, the non-Muslim foetuses/babies will be received by the undertakers for cremation at the Mandai crematorium. The foetuses/babies from Muslim mothers will be received by a MUIS-contracted Muslim undertaker who will assist with the burials at Choa Chu Kang Muslim cemetery. Please be assured that the hospital and the undertakers respect and will do their best to ensure a proper farewell.

Informing your family and those around you

Most parents will also need to decide whether or not to inform family/friends of the loss. The following factors may be helpful in making a decision:

- Do they know about the pregnancy?
- Would you prefer to have people around you during this period?
- Would you need practical help from them during this period?

While it is understandable that you may want to be by yourself during this period of loss and grief, social support during such a difficult period has proven to be helpful in most cases.

Allowing your family and loved ones to be involved in bidding farewell to your baby will allow others to understand and provide a safe environment to support you in your loss and pain. In addition, if your family members had been informed of the pregnancy, it is likely that this will be a difficult time for them too, and involving them will help everyone come to terms with the loss together.

However, some parents may find that they need more time by themselves. You do not need to feel obliged to meet your relatives and friends, or feel bad about turning them away. If you need more personal time, you should agree to meet your relatives and friends only when you are ready to do so.



Talking to your spouse

While you manage your own intense emotions, you may also be figuring out how you can support your spouse and many couples find this to be a test of their relationship. Although not always true, men and women tend to grieve differently. Men generally use the problem-solving approach to deal with issues, and may tend to intellectualise the loss, looking for strategies to move on. Women, on the other hand, may need to talk about their experience and emotions. The different grieving patterns between the two of you may create confusion and tension in the relationship.

To be a good support for one another, it helps to remember that before your role as parents, you were friends and companions.

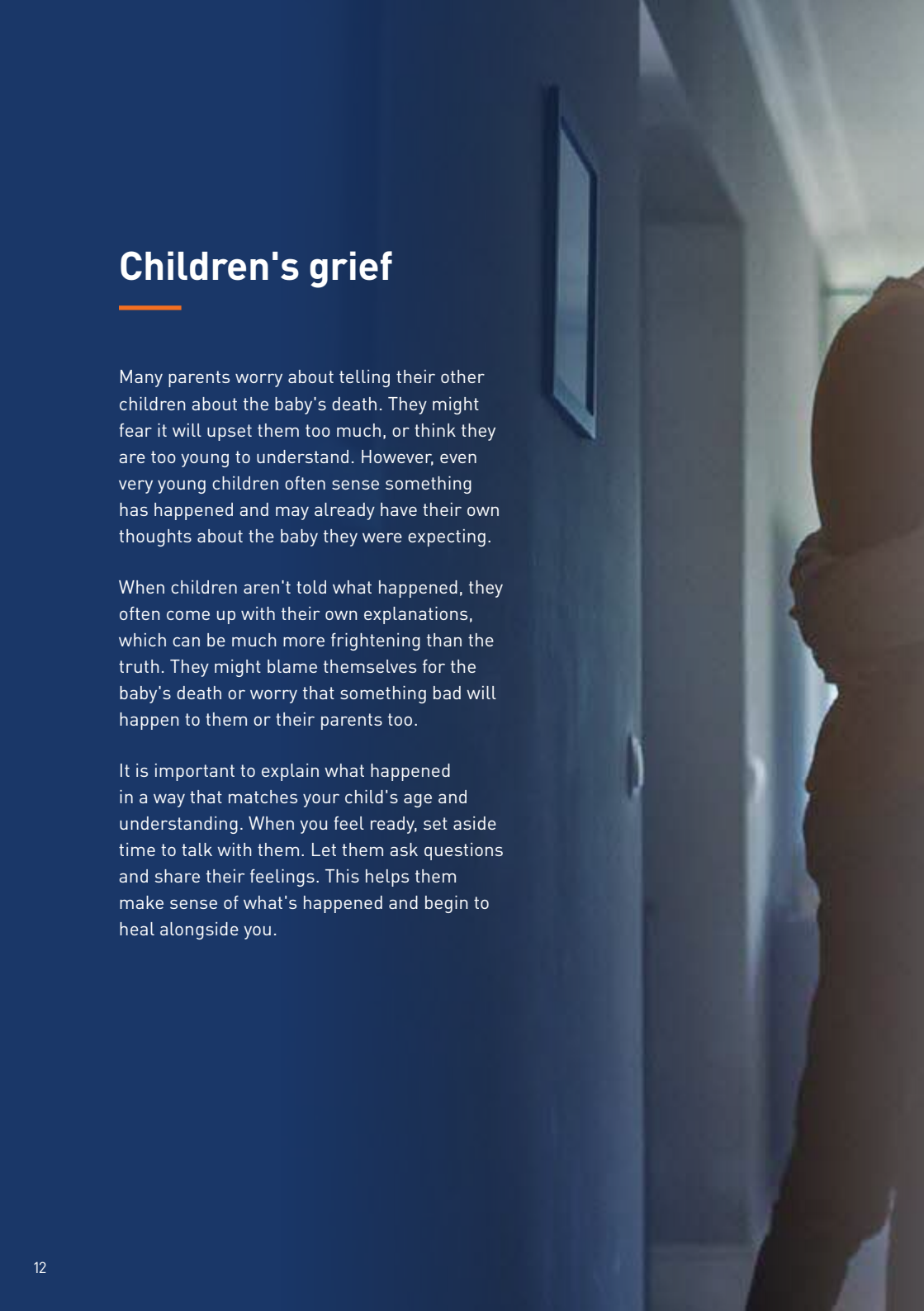
Open communication during this period may be difficult, but it is important. You may feel a sense of helplessness or find it difficult to express yourself, but you can be supportive of one another by lending a listening ear.

While it takes effort to share your feelings, helping your spouse understand your experience can strengthen your bond during this challenging time.

Accepting the differences and being understanding towards both your partner and yourself will help you cope and strengthen your relationship. Seeking clarifications with your spouse and learning to see things from each other's perspective will help in couple discussions and prevent misunderstandings.

Grieving need not be a solitary experience. Sharing your thoughts and feelings with your spouse will alleviate the feeling of isolation when you journey through this tough period together. Do seek professional help if your grief significantly affects your ability to function, as well as your relationship with your spouse.

Children's grief

A person wearing a dark hoodie is seen from the side, looking at a small framed picture on a wall in a hallway. The hallway is dimly lit, with light coming from the end of the corridor, creating a somber and reflective atmosphere.

Many parents worry about telling their other children about the baby's death. They might fear it will upset them too much, or think they are too young to understand. However, even very young children often sense something has happened and may already have their own thoughts about the baby they were expecting.

When children aren't told what happened, they often come up with their own explanations, which can be much more frightening than the truth. They might blame themselves for the baby's death or worry that something bad will happen to them or their parents too.

It is important to explain what happened in a way that matches your child's age and understanding. When you feel ready, set aside time to talk with them. Let them ask questions and share their feelings. This helps them make sense of what's happened and begin to heal alongside you.

A person with long dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is seen from the side, looking out over a body of water under a bright sky. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

Stages of grief

One of the difficult challenges you may face is when well-meaning family and friends unintentionally downplay your pain and loss. In their attempts to comfort you, they might suggest that your loss is minor compared to other hardships. You may even find yourself thinking this way at times. However, don't let these words or thoughts diminish the validity of your feelings.

The bond between parent and child begins early in pregnancy and is deeply real, even if others don't fully understand. To heal from this loss, it is important to acknowledge your grief and allow yourself to mourn before moving forward.

Experiencing certain behaviours, reactions and feelings is a natural part of healthy grieving - it's how you cope with and express your pain both physically and emotionally. Since many of these responses may be unfamiliar, they can feel frightening. Understanding these common responses can help you recognise and normalise what you're experiencing.

Some physical symptoms of grieving include:

Difficulty in sleeping, loss of appetite, loss of energy, body aches and pains and having bad dreams.

On a psychological/emotional level:

Grief involves various stages that people may experience differently. These stages don't follow a set order, nor do they occur in isolation from one another. It is completely normal to revisit stages you've already experienced or to feel multiple emotions simultaneously. Some common stages include:

- **Numbing/denial:** Not acknowledging the loss, as you feel unprepared/unequipped to deal with it.
- **Yearning (for the baby):** This can be a physical yearning to hold/cuddle something that feels like the lost baby
- **Confusion/anger:** This can sometimes be directed randomly towards family/friends
- **Depression:** Intense feelings of sadness, despair, and sense of emptiness
- **Guilt:** Blaming yourself unreasonably for what has happened
- **Acceptance:** Coming to terms with the loss and being able to focus on other aspects of life while integrating the memories into one's daily life
- **Bargaining:** Hoping to undo the loss, engaging in "what if"/"if only" statements

Each individual's grief journey is unique; everyone grieves differently and at their own pace. The important thing is to acknowledge the emotions at each of the different stages. Having support from family and friends can help you along the way.

The time ahead

Seeking help

Grief is a universal human experience, and sharing it with others may help you cope better. If it feels too overwhelming on your own, you may want to seek professional help or join a support group.

Taking time to process this loss before planning the next pregnancy can be beneficial for your emotional wellbeing. Research indicates that unresolved grief may contribute to increased anxiety, difficulty accepting a new pregnancy, and challenges with bonding in subsequent pregnancies.

Attend bereavement sessions

Talk about it. You can seek out others who have had similar experience through support groups or community groups such as the Child Bereavement Support (Singapore). By being part of these support groups, you can relate better with your loss and be able to share your feelings more openly. Such sessions can be very emotional but as you share and talk about your struggles within a community of other parents who share a similar loss, it will provide a safe platform for you to grieve and find support.

Name your baby

Naming your baby can be a meaningful way to honour their life and acknowledge their place in your family. Some parents, especially those who experienced early pregnancy loss, may feel uncertain about this step. However, giving your baby a name helps validate their existence and allows you to grieve for them as the unique individual they were. When friends and family refer to your baby by name, it can provide comfort and recognition of your loss in a deeply personal way.

Remembering your baby

The love you feel for your baby will never cease. Everyone reacts differently to the loss of a baby. What matters most is allowing yourself to grieve in your own way and taking each day as it comes. Your pain, numbness, and anger are all natural parts of the grieving process.

Take comfort in knowing that your baby will always remain in your heart. Many parents have found that taking tangible steps to remember their baby provides some comfort and helps focus their grief as time goes by. We hope you find these helpful in your journey.

Keep a journal or diary

Writing can be a powerful way to process your grief. Consider keeping a journal, diary or private blog where you can safely express your emotions. You can write about your daily feelings, compose letters to your baby, or explore the hopes and dreams you held. Many parents find that putting their thoughts on paper reveals the depth of their love and loss, helping them work through complex emotions at their own pace and space.



Keep a memory box

Keeping a memory box can provide a meaningful way to preserve your baby's keepsakes and mementos for when you wish to remember and reflect.

Some suggestions of what you can include in the memory box:

- Your baby's cot card
- A lock of your baby's hair
- You and your baby's identification bracelet
- Sonogram/ultrasound photographs of your baby
- Your baby's pictures
- Your baby's outfit
- The blanket in which your baby was wrapped in
- Sympathy cards
- Hand/foot prints of your baby, or the foot castings
- Your journal or diary containing your feelings and thoughts
- Letters to your baby describing your love



Creating special days of remembrance

Consider setting aside meaningful dates to honour your baby's memory. These moments allow you to celebrate the love you feel while acknowledging your loss. Though your baby's life was brief, it held profound meaning for you and your family, and is deserving of remembrance.

Some suggestions on what you could do on these special dates:

- Light a candle and take a few minutes to sit in silence and remember your baby. You are encouraged to do this with your spouse.
- Gather family and friends and organise a memorial service for your baby. A memorial service can give you an opportunity to say goodbye to your baby. It also gives you time to share your sorrow with your family and friends.
- Donate to a charity in honour of your baby, or volunteer to help raise funds/support for the charity you choose.
- Take a break or holiday and buy something special for your baby. The item you bought can serve as a reminder of your baby.
- Visit your baby's resting place and offer flowers.

Resources

You may visit go.gov.sg/mylegacy-edc to download a death or stillbirth certificate and to find assistance with funeral arrangements.

Some recommended readings:

Miscarriage: Women's Experiences and Needs

By Christine Moulder

Miscarriage: A Man's Book (Paperback)

By Rick Wheat

Child Bereavement Support (Singapore)

<http://www.cbss.sg/>

Farewell my child (online book)

<https://www.cbss.sg/our-children/>

Mommy, Please Don't Cry: There Are No Tears in Heaven

By Linda Deymaz

We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead

By Pat Schwiebert

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart, Revised Edition: Surviving the Death of Your Baby

By Deborah L. Davis

Other resources:

Viriya Grief Support Programme

<https://viriya.org.sg/service/persons-in-grief/>
6256 1311
griefsupport@viriya.org.sg

Whispering Hope

<https://whisperinghope.sg/>
8668 2032 / 8668 0043
contactus@whisperinghope.sg

Angel Hearts

<https://angelhearts.sg/>

Contact:

For emotional support, please reach out to NUH Women's Emotional Health Service (WEHS) at **6772 2037** (office hours) or wehs@nuhs.edu.sg.

Notes

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5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074

OneNUHS Hotline: (65) 6908 2222

OneNUHS General Enquiries: contactus@nuhs.edu.sg

OneNUHS Appointments: appointment@nuhs.edu.sg

www.nuh.com.sg



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