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Family and Friends



The death of a baby is a devastating experience. The effects of grief can be overwhelming, and parents can be left feeling dazed, disorientated, isolated and exhausted.

You may not have known the baby but to the parents their child was a real person, one they have come to know and love during the months of pregnancy. Although you cannot see a gap in the family there is a real loss.

The sense of bereavement is as profound as with the death of an adult or older child, and more unexpected because death has no place at birth.

The parents' feelings

Both parents will have a mixture of feelings, which are a normal response to loss. These may include shock, disbelief, guilt (either parents may feel their baby died because of something they did, or did not, do), isolation (because no one seems to understand the situation), jealousy and bitterness (because everyone else seems to be pregnant or wheeling a pram), and anger.

How can you help

Do get in touch with them. Don't assume they would rather be alone.

Don't avoid the parents and don't avoid the situation. It will just make them feel more isolated.

You can get in touch by letter or phone to show your concern. Parents often keep sympathy cards with other reminders of their baby such as photographs.

If you are pregnant yourself, or have a small baby you may feel that bereaved parents would rather you didn't visit. Ring up and ask. They may not be ready to face you or your child, or they may be glad to see live and healthy babies and be hurt if you keep your child from them. You won't find out how they feel unless you call.

Visit in person, and let yourself be guided about what to do. Give both parents a chance to talk about their experience. Remember that fathers grieve just as much as mothers. They will usually not need much encouragement and it does help them.

Find out if the baby has a name and use it. It makes the baby seem more of a real person. Ask if they have a photograph of their baby. Don't be afraid to look at it - most babies who have died tragically like this, do in fact look perfectly normal.

Don't be embarrassed to feel guilty if they cry. You did not cause the tears, they were waiting to be shed. Don't be afraid to cry yourself, you are showing that you care. Encourage other friends to keep in touch as well.

What to say

It's more important to listen than to worry about saying the "right" thing and certainly don't worry if you feel you have said the wrong thing. It is better to try to communicate and understand than not to make that attempt at all.

Do say that you are sorry

Do be willing to talk about the baby

Do remember that bereaved parents can be very sensitive (they may not for instance want to hear about a mutual friend's pregnancy or child; they are sure to ask if they do want to know).

Don't say that they are lucky because they have other children or that they can have another one. No other child is or will be a replacement for the child they have lost.

Don't try to blame anyone for the baby's death, even if they parents do so.

Don't say "I know how you feel" unless you have also lost a baby or child.

Don't give advice about what they "should do", but do make suggestions about what they "might want" to do, if you feel it's appropriate.

Grief goes on

Recovery from the death of a baby takes many months, even years. Parents should not be expected to "get over it" in a few weeks, but friends and family may feel that there is little more they can do to help.

Suggest that the parents get in touch with Fife Sands, so they can meet with others whose baby has died. Sands members can understand their needs and offer long-term support and friendship.

You should also be ready to help parents if there is a subsequent pregnancy. This can be a very nervous time, and a new baby will not put everything right. It may bring back a lot of sad memories.

The parents may need extra sympathy and understanding on anniversaries and birthdays, at Christmas and other occasions. They will appreciate it hugely if you are able to remember these dates. They will never forget the child that died, but the sadness will grow less with time.