

# fact sheet

## How To Support A Parent Through Grief & Loss



FSCOGESPPRT01

If someone you care about has lost their baby during pregnancy, birth or the early parenting period, it can be difficult to know what to say or do. You may worry about saying the wrong thing, intruding, or not doing enough. While you cannot take away their grief, your compassionate presence can help them feel less alone.

You do not need to have the perfect words. What matters most is showing up with kindness, patience and care. A gentle message, practical help, or simply sitting alongside them in their grief can be comforting.

Grief after the loss of a baby or child is deeply personal and incredibly painful. It may include sadness, shock, anger, guilt, numbness, anxiety, longing, exhaustion or moments of feeling disconnected from everyday life. The parent may want to talk often, or they may need some quiet or space. They may want their baby's name spoken, or they may find this too painful at different times. Try to follow their lead and let them know they are not expected to grieve in any particular way.

### Simple Ways To Start The Conversation

It is okay to feel unsure about what to say. A simple, honest acknowledgement is often more supportive than trying to find the perfect response. You could say:

- I am so sorry. I am here with you
- Your baby matters, and so does your grief
- I do not know the right words, but I care about you and I am here
- Would you like to talk about your baby, or would you prefer some quiet company?
- There is no right or wrong way to feel, and I can keep checking in if you'd like this
- I am thinking of you today. You don't need to reply but please know I care

### How To Have A Supportive Conversation

A supportive conversation is not about fixing. It is about creating a calm, safe space where the parent feels heard, respected and supported.

- Choose a quiet time with few interruptions and let them set the pace
- Listen without rushing to reassure, problem-solve or move the conversation on

- Use their baby's name if they have shared it and if they are comfortable with it
- Acknowledge both parents' grief, including dads, partners and co-parents
- Respect cultural, spiritual and family practices around grief, remembrance and mourning
- Allow silence, tears or strong emotions without trying to make them stop
- Ask what kind of support would feel most helpful, rather than assuming

### Offer Practical Support

Grief can make everyday tasks feel impossible. Practical support can ease some of the pressure and show the parent they are not alone. Instead of saying, "Let me know if you need anything," try offering something specific like:

- Drop off a meal, groceries or household essentials
- Help with laundry, cleaning, school drop-offs, pet care or errands
- Offer to sit with them, go for a short walk, or attend an appointment with them
- Check whether they would like help communicating updates to others, so they do not have to repeat painful details
- Remember important dates, such as due dates, birthdays or the date their baby died
- Continue offering support in the weeks and months ahead, as others return to everyday life

### What To Avoid Saying

Even well-meaning comments can unintentionally minimise a parent's grief. Try to avoid phrases that look for a silver lining, compare losses, or suggest they should feel differently. Avoid saying:

- At least you can try again
- Everything happens for a reason
- At least you were not further along
- You need to be strong
- I know exactly how you feel
- It is time to move on

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If you say something that does not land well, gently acknowledge it and try again. You could say, "I'm sorry, that did not come out the way I meant it to. I care about you and I want to support you."

### If They Do Not Want To Talk

Not every parent will want to talk straight away. They may feel numb, exhausted, overwhelmed, angry, or unsure of what they need. Try not to take this personally. Continue to offer gentle, low-pressure support.

- Send a short text that does not require a reply
- Let them know you are available whenever they are ready
- Offer practical help without expecting conversation
- Keep checking in over time, especially after the first few weeks and months
- Respect their boundaries if they need space

### Supporting Their Physical And Emotional Wellbeing

If the parent has been pregnant or given birth, they may also be recovering physically while grieving. This can include bleeding, hormonal changes, milk coming in, disrupted sleep, pain, medical appointments and decisions about memory-making, funeral arrangements or returning home without their baby. As a support person, you can gently encourage them to speak with their GP, midwife, obstetrician, maternal and child health nurse or another trusted health professional about their physical and emotional recovery.

Grief can also affect partners and other family members in different ways. One parent may want to talk often, while another may cope by staying busy or needing quiet. These differences can be hard on one another, but it doesn't mean one person is grieving more or less.

### When To Encourage Extra Support

There is no timeline for grief. However, extra support may be helpful if you notice the parent feels unable to cope, is very isolated, is struggling to sleep or eat, is experiencing intense anxiety or guilt, or is finding it hard to get through the day. You can gently encourage them to speak with a trusted mental health professional with experience in perinatal loss.

### How Gidget Foundation Australia Can Help

If someone you care about is grieving the loss of a pregnancy or baby and may benefit from mental health support, Gidget Foundation Australia provides free individual psychological therapy services with a perinatal mental health clinician, delivered in-person at one of our Gidget Houses or via our telehealth program, Start Talking.

### Other Support Services

You may also wish to share these services with the parent.

- **Bears of Hope:** Provides support, resources and grief counselling for families who experience miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal or infant death
- **Beyond Blue:** Provides free, confidential 24/7 mental health support by phone and online chat, as well as information and resources
- **Lifeline:** Provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention support for anyone in Australia who is feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping
- **Miscarriage Australia:** Provides evidence-based information and support for people affected by miscarriage, including partners, family and friends
- **PANDA:** Supports parents and families during pregnancy and throughout the first year of parenthood, including families following pregnancy loss
- **Pink Elephants:** Provides miscarriage and early pregnancy loss support, including resources, peer support, online communities and a pregnancy loss helpline delivered by PANDA
- **Red Nose Grief and Loss Support:** Offers free specialised bereavement support for anyone affected by the loss of a pregnancy, baby or child, including 24/7 phone support
- **The Royal Women's Hospital:** Provides information and bereavement support for families experiencing miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of a baby

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000. If urgent mental health support is needed, call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14 or **Beyond Blue** on 1300 22 4636. 🌸