

Sexual responses

It is very important for you to be sensitive to the feelings of your partner at this time. Even though you both lost a baby and you both need to grieve for that baby, the mother/birthing parent will also be experiencing physical changes. You may feel that your partner is distancing themselves from you. They may not want anything sexual in your relationship at the moment. This cannot be rushed or forced; it must be worked through slowly, with understanding and care for each other.

- They may feel physically or emotionally unable to be sexually intimate.
- They may feel being that intimate is an 'intrusion'.
- They may not want to risk becoming pregnant while they are feeling so much grief.
- It is important to show your partner affection, without wanting things to go further than they are able to handle.

It is also important to remember that you may be feeling equally uninterested.

Not all couples experience these feelings after the death of a baby, but if you do, remember that sexual intimacy is a common aspect that is affected.

Employment

It may be very difficult for you to return to work. When you return to work, you may find that:

- you're staring into space and are unable to concentrate
- you're making mistakes that you don't usually make
- your fellow workers avoid you

- your fellow workers don't acknowledge your baby
- you feel isolated.

Once you return to work, your partner may feel resentful or perhaps even angry that you can distract yourself with your work, especially if they do not work outside the home or are not able to return to work immediately. Try to understand how they feel – for them days may be long and lonely. If you have other children, their days may be busy but still incredibly sad.

To find out if you are eligible for paid parental leave, you can ring the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment on 0800 20 90 20 for further information.

Distractions

You may find yourself using your work and/or leisure activities as a way to cover up or avoid your feelings. You may bury yourself in these things to avoid issues that have arisen since the death of your baby. You may work until you're overly tired, hoping it will help you sleep. You may work to try and forget your grief. This way of dealing with things can make the situation worse.

Work and leisure can be a distraction and can be a relief, but they are seldom the solution when taken to the extreme.

Some practical suggestions

There are many practical things you can do for your baby. Often these practical things can support your grieving and help to create important memories. These could include:

- photographing your baby
- making your baby's coffin and/or urn to contain the ashes
- co-ordinating the funeral/burial service, choosing special songs, music, readings, etc.
- digging and/or filling the grave
- making a cross or headstone to mark your baby's resting place.

In summary ...

Everyone grieves differently. You may experience some or all of the feelings we've mentioned, and others. It is important that you are aware of your grief and find caring people who can support you.

The death of your baby will become a significant part of your life. You will never 'get over' what has happened, but you will learn to live with it. The pain will slowly lessen in time, but you will always remember the loss you have experienced.

Your local Sands group/supporter can be a great help in supporting you. In most areas, you will be able to talk to other parents who understand what you are going through. Having contact with someone who has had a similar loss may be of help when you again meet workmates, friends and whānau who don't understand your loss.

For a list of groups or contact people around the country, see our website (sands.org.nz) and click on 'Sands Support' and 'Find Your Local Group'.

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
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fathers/partners
grieve too

The death of your precious baby will probably be the most difficult and painful thing you will ever experience. Nothing and no one could ever prepare you for the devastation that follows this experience. The expectation of some family members, friends and a large proportion of society can impact how you express your grief and the way you learn to live with your loss.

Grief is a process that takes time and energy, and will likely continue to come in waves for a long, long time. Try not to be influenced by others who may want you to 'speed up' the grief process. It is better to ignore their comments and keep working through your grief.

This leaflet has been prepared by other bereaved parents to provide some support through the difficult times ahead.

Miscarriage

It is a common misunderstanding that when a loss occurs early in pregnancy, it is not a catastrophe. This attitude is unhelpful and even harmful, minimising the impact of miscarriage and making it difficult for parents to share their grief with those around them.

Many parents build hopes and dreams for their baby as soon as they know they are pregnant. Your baby is already part of your life, and part of your future plans.

Stillbirth

The impact of having a stillborn baby is something that many in society may struggle to understand, and comments from others can

be hurtful and dismissive. Grief is a natural response to love and loss. You loved and love your baby, and you have a right and need to grieve, and to grieve deeply.

Newborn and infant death

Society usually expects those who experience the death of a newborn or infant to grieve. This is often because whānau, friends and others in your community have met your baby and recognise your baby as an important whānau member. They may encourage you to grieve for a period of time, but you may then get the feeling from them that it is time to 'get on with life'.

Feelings

After a baby dies, the partner's grief is often neglected or ignored by society. Many people are uncomfortable with talking about grief, and they may find it easier to ask how the baby's mother/birthing parent is than to ask you how you are feeling.

You may have times of real panic and worry about your whānau. You may have lost confidence and feel out of control. You may spend a lot of time asking yourself, 'Why? What could I have done?'

This will be one of the toughest times in your life, and it's important to take care of yourself and the hurt you're feeling. You may find people expect you to be strong and take control. You may feel that you are making all the arrangements and doing all the work. You may feel like you're taking care of everyone but you. After the funeral/burial, people may expect you to be 'strong' and to 'get on with things'. People may

expect that you will soon 'get over' your loss. They may not understand that what you have experienced will always be with you.

Significant loss, like the death of a baby, results in grief. Because your baby has died, you will grieve. It's as if you have no choice ... you grieve.

The only choice is *how* you grieve and what you do with your grief.

It's okay to feel angry and out of control. Anger is an emotion that everyone has. Anger is a common response when something devastating happens. You may feel angry with your doctor or some other health professional, or angry with yourself or your partner. You may feel angry with your baby. You may feel angry with God. You may not be able to say specifically why you feel angry. Sometimes anger may be directed at your partner or other tamariki simply because they're around. If you have got to the point where you are feeling that you may become violent – get help! Often it is difficult to assess how serious your own anger is. Talk to others you trust, visit your GP or make contact with an organisation that can help.

You may also feel very flat and have no motivation to do anything. This is another common expression of grief. If those bleak and flat feelings continue and you feel as though there is nothing to look forward to in your life and no chance of anything getting better, it may help to talk with someone who is experienced in supporting people in grief. There is a clear distinction between grief and depression, and a qualified professional can help you to separate between these.

Building a new normal

As you begin processing your grief and rebuilding some kind of normality, you may experience waves of grief when you are not expecting them. Things that would not previously have affected you may now trigger emotions of grief:

- something you have read
- something you have seen on TV
- something that someone else has said
- being back in the same hospital or where your baby was born.

Anniversaries are often very difficult. You may notice you and/or your partner becoming agitated or moody in the weeks leading up to important anniversaries or events.

You and your partner

You may be scared about what's happening to each of you and to your relationship, and you may not know what to do about it. You may both be so wiped out with your grief that you can't support each other. Give yourselves time – hold and comfort each other. It is important to respect each other's way of grieving. Some people find it helpful to talk about their emotions and to share their feelings, fears and memories. Not talking about your baby may cause your partner to think that your baby didn't mean as much to you and that you don't care. If talking does not feel like the right way to express your emotions or grief, it is helpful to share this with your partner. It may be that you express your grief through doing things, rather than talking. Most of the time your partner just needs to feel that you do care – they don't expect you to make everything right again. They will appreciate your honesty about the way you feel.