

Loss of One, More or All Babies

In spite of everyone's best efforts, sometimes parents may lose one, more, or all of their babies. Should this be your situation, the following has been prepared to guide you through difficult decisions and to offer ideas on dealing with the reactions of others around you. There is no right or wrong way to grieve the loss of a child(ren). May you find comfort from these suggestions.

Miscarriage

If you have lost your babies through miscarriage, you may feel empty or angry with yourself or let down by your body. You may blame yourself, your actions or attitudes or even that glass of wine or cup of coffee. It might be that friends, family or hospital staff don't acknowledge either the pregnancy or the depth of your grief. Remember, this has been a very real pregnancy for both you and your partner and you have a right to your feelings. As part of your pregnancy, you likely imagined being with your babies - 'taking them for a walk', 'bathing and dressing them', showing them off to family and friends, among other things. It is natural to grieve the loss of these experiences which will now never happen.

You might try to find out why the miscarriage occurred. If the pregnancy is more than 25 weeks, you might be able to request an autopsy. However, be prepared that there might be no definite answers. Try not to feel guilty. Talk openly about your feelings and the babies with a caring person or professional counsellor. If desired, maintain some contact with your local twin and triplet support group until you feel ready to let go.

Stillbirth/Infancy

Prematurity is still the leading cause of death in a multiple-birth situation. There is no guarantee against premature delivery. In spite of best precautions of you and your doctor, a loss can still occur.

Loss with multiples occurs on two levels: first, the loss of a precious baby(ies) and second, the loss of a unique type of parenting experience. Emotions experienced can be varied and sometimes seem to make no sense at all: "Did I prefer one baby over the other?" "Did I really only want one?" "Did I not want to be pregnant?" Talking with a caring person or professional counsellor can be helpful.

There can be inner struggles in trying to deal with the joy of the birth of one baby(ies) and the loss of another. You may wish to push all thoughts of the dead baby(ies) from your mind and concentrate on the survivor(s). There may be thoughtless remarks from family or friends: 'You couldn't have handled triplets anyway.' 'At least you still have a baby.' 'You have two babies who need you, get on with it!' Children are not interchangeable, each child is valuable and the death of one because others have survived is impossible to ignore. Take the necessary time to grieve. It is a challenge to move forward when you have not grieved what you have lost. Don't feel shy about gently reminding others that you have lost a baby(ies) and have every right to mourn in a way and time frame that is best for you and your family.

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Some important feedback received from bereaved parents includes:

- Name your baby(ies).
- See your baby(ies) if you can and want. Hold, touch, bathe, dress him/her if you wish. Take all the time you need. Such contact can help with integrating the fact that your baby is dead. We cannot say 'good-bye' before we have said 'hello'. While some bereaved parents find comfort and some healing in seeing their baby(ies), others do not want to. It may be that one parent may wish to see the baby and one doesn't. Don't be talked into anything that you do not wish to do or which does not feel right for you. Whatever works for you is the right way to proceed.
- If it is important to you, take pictures of your babies together and alone, as you wish. The photos can be put away until such time as you feel you might like to look at them or, if you feel unable to take the photos yourself, have a hospital staff member or good friend do it for you. Over time, such photos can be very important for a family as they validate a baby's short life plus this is the only time the babies are together. Photos may also become important to the survivor(s), proving for them that they were, indeed, part of a set.
- It may be possible to take foot and/or hand prints. Ask the hospital or funeral home staff about the possibility.
- Ask any questions of your doctor that you might have. Ask until you have answers that you understand. Be prepared, however, for the fact that some questions may have no answers.
- Plan the funeral or memorial service as you wish.
- Don't keep feelings bottled up inside of you. Talk with a caring person whenever you need. Join a local bereavement support group. Such support can be important for both Mom and Dad and perhaps grandparents too.
- As parents, try to set aside some time to spend together to share your grief and lost dreams.
- Be prepared to have 'set backs' – this is normal. You are not the same people you were before the death. There is a new reality to be faced. The loss of a child(ren) will stay with you forever, and the best advice is to learn how to incorporate your grief into your everyday lives so that you can keep on living. Expect that how to incorporate grief and pain may be different for each parent. Be prepared to have feelings triggered for no seemingly apparent reason. Do your best not to ignore your feelings. It is only by going through them that you can eventually begin to feel any peace.
- Consider including the grandparents in some meaningful way in either the funeral or memorial service. You may find each other a valuable support. They have lost a grandchild(ren), and remember that they also feel sad for not being able to protect you and your partner from such terrible pain.
- If you have older children, consider having them involved in the service too. Write a note, draw a picture or place a stuffed toy in the casket. Having them as part of the service helps them understand and ask questions as they may need.

There are many supportive books available on grief and mourning. They can be found in your local Library and perhaps the library of your local twin and triplet support group. There is no charge to join the Loss Support Network. You do not need to be a member of MBC.

Please don't be alone in your grief. There are many caring people available to support you.

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Support Contacts

Multiple Births Canada

Loss Support Network

Email: loss@multiplebirthscanada.org

Toll Free in Canada: 1-866-228-8824

Lynda P. Haddon

www.jumelle.ca

Centre for Loss in Multiple Birth (CLIMB)

www.climb-support.org

Email: climb@pobox.alaska.net

The Compassionate Friends of Canada, Inc.: check their website for a group near you www.tcfcanada.net

Bereaved Families of Ontario

www.bereavedfamilies.net

Multiple Births Canada's Loss Literature

Written and Developed by Lynda P. Haddon, Multiple Birth Educator, 2000

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