

Making Memories...When Your Baby Has Died
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When a pregnancy ends with miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, still-birth or neonatal death, dreams are shattered, hopes are lost and intense emotions are aroused.

Decisions

At this time of loss, there are many decisions to be made. It is important for you to actively participate in the decision-making processes. It is usually not helpful to let someone else make decisions for you.

There are no rules for handling this very difficult situation. Naming, seeing, holding, touching your baby gives you the opportunity to parent this child. It is a bittersweet time because as sad and difficult as it is, the memories you now make will be very important to you and your family as you adjust to this loss. While the process will certainly be painful and difficult, it is also a critical step in the healing process. You can make caring, loving decisions that make special memories to hold in the future.

Creating memories does not necessarily prolong the pain of your loss, it can and may comfort the soul. The purpose of grieving is to find a place in your heart and soul for the memory of this child who has died. This takes time and begins at the time of the loss. Most parents find that pregnancy and baby mementos can become very special. Photographs, birth/death certificates, footprints, lock of hair, ultrasound pictures, hospital bracelet, baby blanket, prenatal records may help to confirm the reality of the brief life and death of this child.

Options

What may be suitable for one family may not suit another. Every family needs to make its own decisions according to personal, religious and cultural values. Options commonly available for babies who die before birth include hospital disposition, burial or cremation. Another decision families need to make is about a funeral or memorial service. This choice acknowledges the reality of what has happened and provides an opportunity to find meaning and solace by sharing grief with others.

Memorialization

Creating memories can help with healing, finding comfort, and can be done at any time. Buying a special candle and lighting it to honor the memory of the baby, purchasing a special piece of jewelry (angel pin) or ornament, planting a rosebush or tree, making an album or memory box, naming a star, releasing balloons, donating to a favorite cause, are various ways for parents and families to acknowledge the brief life of this special child.

Grief response

Grief occurs following perinatal loss because most parents develop an attachment to the baby long before s/he is born. Even with a very early miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy, parents may grieve not only the loss of the pregnancy and the baby, but also

the loss of their hopes, dreams and fantasies concerning that child and the loss of an unlived life. You may experience many different emotions. Feelings aren't right or wrong - they just are. Give yourself permission to grieve by expressing how you feel. This grieving response is normal and healthy and is how one integrates this loss into one's life.