Miscarriage: Coping with the Pain of Loss

Losing a pregnancy to miscarriage can be an intensely painful experience. While trying to cope with the loss, emotions can range from sadness, anger, anxiety, resentment, guilt, and shame to feelings of worthlessness, personal failure, and emptiness. Along with the actual loss of the pregnancy, secondary losses suffered may include the loss of hopes and dreams of the family you planned to build, the loss of the experience of pregnancy, and the loss of the roles you envisioned as mothers and fathers. Ideas of femininity and identity can also be profoundly challenged. Isolation and loneliness are often felt as others don't know what to say to you or how to help. Support from a partner might feel absent as each partner and gender reacts to and grieves differently when faced with loss. The experience of miscarriage can feel very overwhelming which adds to your difficulty in coping.

Following are some tips for coping with miscarriage and loss:

Recognize that You are Mourning. You have just suffered a loss which has significant meaning to you and affects your life. You must, therefore, progress through the bereavement process. Allow yourself to process the emotions and thoughts you are experiencing. Know that there is no set time frame for grieving. People progress through the mourning process at different paces. Take the time that you need in order to mourn your loss.

Realize Your Thoughts and Emotions are Normal. Recognize that your feelings are a normal part of the bereavement process. Miscarriage holds unique meanings of loss for each individual and whether your loss signified the death of an unborn baby, hopes and dreams, or all of those things; you deserve time to grieve. When we grieve, we experience intense and difficult emotions that don't just disappear in a short time.

Avoid Minimizing Your Loss. Unfortunately, losses that occur through miscarriage aren't readily recognized in society as we have no rituals to acknowledge this type of loss. For this reason, others may not know just what to say to you even though they mean well. Realize that you did suffer a significant loss in light of the reactions you experience from others.

Avoid Self-Blame. It is easy, after suffering a miscarriage, to want to blame someone or something for the loss of your pregnancy. Often, women direct anger and blame at themselves. They may feel as if they "should not" have delayed pregnancy or performed that physical activity while pregnant. Realize that your miscarriage was not caused by something that you did. Many times we just have no good answers as to why miscarriage occurs; but know that it was not your fault.

Quick Tips:

- Take the time you need to progress through the bereavement stages at your own pace
- Your feelings are normal, and you deserve time to grieve
- Realize that you experienced a significant loss, even if others don't know what to say
- Don't blame yourself for your loss

Kimberly J. Luybli, M.Ed.
Counseling & Psychotherapy
65 East Elizabeth Avenue
Suite 412
Bethlehem, PA 18018
610-866-2777
For more information, visit **kluybli.com**

Quick Tips:

- Rely on your partner to actively listen to you, and tell him or her what you need from them
- Each person reacts to grief differently
- Creating a ritual to memorialize your baby will help you through the mourning process
- Social support is very important in coping with a loss
- Counselors who specialize in pregnancy loss are available to help

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Talk Openly and Honestly about Your Feelings with Your Partner. Since so many of your friends and family struggle to understand the difficulty in the loss you've suffered, it is important to rely on your partner to actively listen to you. Tell him or her what it is that you need from them. Perhaps you just need someone to be present without saying a word as you describe what you are feeling. Your partner will feel less helpless if he or she knows exactly what they can do for you. Also, ask your partner how you can help him or her as well.

Recognize that Each Person's Grief Reactions are Unique. Even though, as a couple, you both suffered a loss and there are many grief reactions that will be similar between you, there are also unique ways in which each individual grieves. Where different genders are concerned, men may express emotions differently than women. Know that your partner's feelings are not a sign that he or she is uncaring. Often, a partner feels powerless and his or her need to act strong and supportive can be misinterpreted.

Create a Ritual. You have every right to create a memorial to acknowledge your loss. This will help you through the mourning process. Perhaps writing a message to your unborn baby on a balloon and releasing it into the sky will be therapeutic for you. You can also light a candle every week, month, or year in honor of your unborn child. Planting a tree in memory of your unborn baby or creating another personal memorial will also help you to honor your loss.

Join a Support Group. Social support has been shown to be very important in coping with loss. There are support groups available for individuals or couples that have suffered miscarriages. Within this setting, all members have gone through similar experiences and you may feel good in knowing that you are not alone. Members are able to support each other in ways that others, who have not experienced miscarriages, may not be able to do.

Seek Individual Counseling. If you find that you are unable to cope with your loss, know that counselors are available to help. There are counselors who specialize in bereavement and/or pregnancy loss who can help you to make sense out of your experience. Even though depressive symptoms are normal in the grief process, if you experience symptoms of depression that you just can't shake, it is a good idea to contact a counselor for help.