

The Life that Could Have Been

Walking Through Miscarriage

■ by Karen Krygsheld, MSW, LCSW



***The Lord is close to the broken hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.***

Psalm 34:18

The double pink lines! A positive pregnancy test! Perhaps you've been waiting for this moment or perhaps you're completely surprised. Maybe excitement grows, maybe apprehension. But then it happens...miscarriage.

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What next? Tears. Anger. Disbelief. Each person reacts differently to a miscarriage and the individual situation impacts that. If the pregnancy had been announced, people may say hurtful things, although they intended to be helpful. If the pregnancy had not been announced, the pain may be very silent and lonely. Following a miscarriage it is typical to cycle through different grief processes: denial, sadness or depression, anger, bargaining, and acceptance. These grief processes are not a checklist to be completed. Each day may contain a bit of each, or some weeks may feel swallowed by one feeling more than another. Allow yourself to feel each stage. As days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months, moms should begin to feel more days of "acceptance"-- the days where you feel like yourself and are able to function as you used to be able.

Anticipate Shadow Grief

Even after feeling more yourself again, times of shadow grief will creep up. Shadow grief is the unexpected things that remind you what you have lost. For example: your due date, a family wedding where the baby would have met family, the first Christmas without the baby, the time a friend announces her pregnancy, or the anniversary of your loss. When you're able to anticipate these, ask for support from friends and family. Plan out how you would like to spend the day on your due date or the anniversary of the loss. Others are more than happy to help you in these times—you need not be alone!

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Article taken from the May | Jun 2018 issue of *PRESSING ON*, a Publication of Chicago Christian Counseling Center
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Help from Friends and Family

As friends and family, we can take an active role, not just remain side line well-wishers. Grief is a time when mom may not feel like getting up and doing what she used to do. Here are some ideas to help:

- Offer to bring a meal.
- Help with the older kids.
- Provide practical support at home (cleaning, adjusting things in nursery if requested, etc).
- Ask how she's doing and what she needs from you. Does she want to talk about the baby and her feelings, or a different topic, or remain silent altogether?
- Be bold in mentioning the baby. Talking about the baby will not bring more pain than ignoring what happened.
- Remember your job is not to cheer up mom, simply be present.
- Offer your silence. Grief may be silent, but it does not need to be lonely.
- Remember and mention the shadow grief days (due date, date of loss, holidays).

What About Dad?

Let's not leave dads behind! A dad's grief may be neglected, as family and friends know better how to support mom than dad. Although many dads experience pregnancy in a different manner than moms, who almost immediately feel the symptoms of the life growing inside her, dads still experience grief. Go ahead and give dad permission to express what he has lost. Let him know that you are thinking of him just as much as mom. Perhaps simply acknowledging he may be feeling pain will be enough to allow him to acknowledge it himself.

No Need to Grieve Alone

Pregnancy and infant loss is a difficult road, but it does not need to be lonely. As parents we can reach out to others, and as friends and family we can use these practical strategies to support the family. Psalm 34:18 tells us that "The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." We—the friends and family—are the instruments he uses to do this as He is the "God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1: 3b-4). ■



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