



Supporting loved ones after a miscarriage

Support in heartbreak

Many of us know someone who has lost a child due to miscarriage but it can be challenging or uncomfortable to know what to say and how best to support them if you haven't experienced baby loss yourself. We have compiled a list of suggestions based on the experiences of Fruitful Hollow staff members who have suffered miscarriages themselves.

Things you can say (and things better left unsaid)

★ **Instead of asking "How far along were you?" ask "Is there anything about your pregnancy or your loss that you would like to share?"**

Those who have lost a little one to miscarriage may be reluctant to answer the question "How far along were you?" out of concern that an early miscarriage will be brushed off as not deserving of grief or mourning. For others, there is no simple answer: it might be unclear at what point the baby died, there may have been a lot of testing and waiting for more news, or the miscarriage may have been drawn out. They may not feel comfortable sharing all the details in order to answer that question. No matter how many weeks or months along a pregnancy is, it is a heartbreaking loss for the parents and a trauma that they have experienced. The dignity of all life must be upheld, regardless of how many weeks along the pregnancy had progressed. Asking instead "Is there anything about your pregnancy or your loss that you would like to share?" gives the grieving parent the opportunity to share the challenging nuances of their loss that might not neatly fit the category of "How many weeks along were you?"

★ **If you're not sure what to say, ask "How are you feeling today?"**

Grief and loss can be a complex journey with good days, bad days and excruciating moments. The general question of "How are you doing?" can elicit the general default answer of "fine", while "How are you feeling today?" gives your loved one the opportunity to share more specific details of how they have been doing physically, emotionally or spiritually that day or that week. This question also gives the person the flexibility to share how little or how much they are comfortable sharing.

★ **Mention "If you chose to name the baby, I'd love to pray for them by name."**

Many couples who have lost a baby to miscarriage choose to name their child. Offering to know and pray for their baby by name may give your loved one comfort

that their loss is remembered by you as a baby with a name, and not just as a “pregnancy lost at x number of weeks”.

★ **Ask “Do you feel like you’ve had the space you need to grieve at this time?”**

Work and home responsibilities, along with potentially caring for other children, can make it hard to have the time and space to properly grieve and recover. If they say no, you can follow up with “Would you like to brainstorm possible solutions for that?” If they are open to suggestions, possibilities include encouraging them to take more bereavement/compassionate leave from work (if available), offering to watch their other children for a couple of hours to give them uninterrupted time for grieving and recovering, or even making time for a coffee and chat if they’d like to have more time to share about their loss and how they are doing.

★ **Skip the platitudes**

Platitudes never help someone who is grieving. Even when well-intended, they often feel hurtful and insensitive and end up invalidating the grief of your loved one. Here are some examples of platitudes that can feel quite hurtful and why.

“Now you know you can get pregnant! This is good news.”

“Don’t worry! You will get pregnant again and forget about this.”

The parents are grieving the loss of a SPECIFIC child, and that child can never be returned to them. These phrases invalidate the grief and loss the couple is going through. In addition, no couple is ever guaranteed to get pregnant again or to carry a pregnancy to full term. No miscarriage is ever good news. Parents remember their children lost to miscarriage many years later, and still grieve their loss.

“It was only a chemical pregnancy.”

“It’s probably a good thing that the baby passed, it may have had complications.”

These phrases miss the mark as they discount the value of the life that was lost. As Catholics, we believe that life starts at conception. An early miscarriage (sometimes known as a chemical pregnancy) or a miscarriage due to health complications is still the loss of someone dearly loved and hoped for by your loved one, a person for whom they had envisioned an entire future, even if they had only known about the pregnancy for a very short time. All life, no matter how many days or weeks old, no matter what health complications were involved, is deserving of dignity and respect.

“Next time, you should try to rest more.”

“My friend had a successful pregnancy straight after a miscarriage by doing ____.”

Unless your loved one has explicitly asked for advice, do not offer suggestions as to what they should have done differently or what worked for others. This implies they were partly to blame, which can really intensify the heaviness of their grief.

If you’re not sure what to say, try one of these simple phrases instead:

“I am so sorry this happened to you. That’s so heartbreaking.”

“I am so very sorry to hear about your loss. I am here for you. Would you like to chat about it at all?”

“I am so terribly sorry to hear this. I know how much this baby was hoped for and loved. This must be such a painful time for you.”

Things you can do

★ Offer specific items of help, and make sure to follow through

Vague offers of support (ie: "Let me know if you need anything") create more mental work for your loved one, as they have to figure out what they need, what kind of help you might be willing to give, and then have to have the emotional energy to follow through and ask for it. Take on that mental load yourself by offering specific ways you would be able to support them. Some suggestions include:

"Can I take you out for coffee to give you some time to chat?"

"Could I drop off a coffee or a meal for you sometime this week?"

"Would you like me to watch your toddler for a few hours so you can have some time to yourself?"

"I'm heading out to pick up some groceries for myself. Can I do a grocery run for you at the same time? I'm happy to drop off some general food and toiletry items you might need."

If you do make an offer to meet up for a chat, send a meal or anything else, only offer if you fully intend to follow through. Your loved one will be less likely to turn to you for support in the future if you make an offer and then don't follow through.

★ Have a mass said in honor/memory of the baby they lost

Feel free to ask your loved one if they named the child, and then you can use the baby's name in the mass intention.

★ Light a candle and pray at church

Take a photo and send it to your loved one to let them know you are praying for and thinking of them. If you've prayed for them at a shrine or holy place, you might send them a postcard to say that their little one was remembered.

★ Remember the anniversary

Write the baby's name down in your calendar and reach out on the anniversary each year to let your friend know they are never forgotten. You can reach out to your friend on the anniversary of the loss or the anniversary of what would have been the baby's due date/birthday. Both are difficult days for parents.

★ Have a prayer card made for them

This card can be similar to the ones made for funerals.

★ Check on your loved one and just make sure they are taking care of themselves

Grief is not linear: they may be doing well for a while and then a hard day or distressing memory may trigger another wave of grief. Sometimes your loved one might feel it's no longer socially acceptable to mention their grief, but by checking in with them, you can give them a place to share their feelings.

★ Gift them a simple journal or devotional and a candle so they can pour out their pain onto paper and process through prayer.