

Dear Friend,

Someone very special to you has just experienced the death of a precious baby. This is an extremely difficult situation because most people never expect a baby to die and after the initial grief, they do not know how to interact with the grieving parent. As a parent whose baby recently died, I would like to mention some things that might make the situation easier for you and the grieving parent:

1. Realize that saying “I’m sorry” at any time after a baby has died is never inappropriate or too late.
2. Understand that the amount of time a baby lives does not determine its value or the impact that the baby has on the parents’ lives. To ignore what has happened in hope that the grief will pass is to diminish the worth of a baby that was loved even before its birth.
3. Realize that just as no one can replace a mother who dies, a new baby cannot replace a child who has died. All children are individuals, conceived separately, born separately, and loved separately. It is no different with a child that dies before, during, or shortly after birth. A parent cannot and should not be expected to “save” the love they have for their dead child to give to their next child. The ability to create another baby is not a way to resurrect a dead child, therefore it should not be thought of as a complete comfort. Not only is it unfair to the dead child, but it makes the next child a substitute.
4. If you are uncomfortable about discussing the death of the baby with the parents because you think they won’t want to talk about it, don’t shy away. Simply say something like “I just want you to know that I want to listen if you need to talk.” If they don’t want to talk at that time don’t assume that they never want to talk. Call frequently to ask how the parent is adjusting. If you live close to the parents, take the initiative to get together for lunch or some sporting activity (offer frequently, but don’t force it). Let the parents set the pace but show them constantly that you are open and interested. It may be horrifying for you to hear some details about the death, but it is much worse for the parents to experience the trauma and then have to keep it to themselves because they know it will be hard on you. When they tell you how they feel, refrain from making judgements and setting time tables.
5. Realize that a baby is still the product of the parents’ love and the joy of their lives. There is joy and pain. The joy doesn’t end when the baby dies and the pain doesn’t end as soon as the funeral is over and the cards are sent – accept both. Don’t try to take the pain away. Parents need to feel it, hard as it is to see their pain, they need to grieve.
6. If the child has a name, use it. Try to remember the parents with a note or a phone call on their first Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, as well as the baby’s predicted due date and the first year anniversary of the child’s birth and death (even the first monthly anniversaries).

Finally, if I can convey one thing to you in hopes it will make a difference, it is this: Please make an effort not to underestimate the depth of the pain, the length of the grief, and most importantly, the difference your support and involvement can make during this painful adjustment. There may not be any other time when you are needed more than now. If you distance yourself because you are uncomfortable until you think a reasonable amount of time has passed, you may find a different kind of distance and hurt between yourself and the grieving parent. If you share the experience, everyone will come out of it stronger.

Praying that God will guide and strengthen you.

Signed, A Mother