

MISCARRIAGE

A miscarriage is a special type of loss, perhaps not well understood by those who haven't experienced it. How do you lovingly and sensitively respond to someone who has just shared with you this private loss? Miscarriages and stillbirths are a difficult hurt, and, as with any grief, knowing what to say or what not to say is important to someone dealing with it.

Statistics about miscarriages

Every year in the United States alone, 600,000 women experience pregnancy loss through miscarriage and 26,000 through stillbirth (after the 20th week of pregnancy).¹ It is an occurrence which happens much more frequently than often realized. Many miscarriages occur before women even know they are pregnant, and most occur during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. After having a miscarriage, it is common for women to wonder if they will be able to get pregnant and carry a baby to term. Approximately 85% of women who have had a miscarriage will go on to have a successful pregnancy. For those who have had two or three miscarriages, 75% will eventually go on to carry a baby to term.²

One of the most common questions people have about miscarriage is, "Why?" Sometimes this causes women to question and blame themselves. Many times the reason will simply never be known personally or medically. Other times, by working with healthcare providers, the reason may be identified. Regardless of the cause, having a miscarriage is often an emotionally painful experience.

Emotions after a miscarriage

Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Most often, our society does not publicly recognize the emotions women go through after a miscarriage because there is usually no funeral or public notification. The excitement of being pregnant comes to a crashing halt. If you have a miscarriage, you may go through a wide range of emotions at different times or re-experience emotions you have already felt. There is no right or wrong way to move through your emotions, and each individual's grieving is different. You and your husband may grieve differently, and your friends and neighbors may grieve yet another way. Grief may include feelings of shock, confusion, low self-esteem, loss of control, denial, disappointment, jealousy, anger, guilt, self-blame, frustration, relief, sadness and depression. It is unlikely that you will experience these in any particular order. Learning to live with your loss takes patience and time. Right after the loss, the emotional pain may be very sharp, and as months pass, emotions may rise and fall like waves. Remind yourself that the varying emotions you are feeling will lessen with time, and healing does come. It is important to know that whatever you are feeling is normal and okay.

Things to avoid saying³

In her book on miscarriage, Elise Erikson Barrett shares a number of things to avoid saying to someone who has had a miscarriage.

1. Any sentence that starts with "at least." For example, "At least you are young; you can have another child." Comments like this can invalidate an individual's loss.

2. Overly simplistic spiritual advice. Until individuals have time to process the loss and experience God's hand through their loss, spiritual platitudes fall on "raw" ears. As it says in *Proverbs 25:20*, "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart."
3. Any sentence that tries to come up with a reason for the loss or a way to prevent future loss, such as, "It probably happened because . . ." or, "You should . . ." These comments make an individual feel as though miscarriage is her fault.
4. Giving advice or "quick-fix" solutions, like, "You should try to adopt." It is not the time to make suggestions. An individual's hurting heart may interpret this as though you have no compassion.

Things to say and do

Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Individuals who have experienced a miscarriage need empathy and support. Saying something like, "I am so very sorry for your loss," or, "You have my sympathy," is appropriate. She may want a hug. She may want you to say, "Would you care to share it with me?" And then be ready to listen. Offer some specific ways to provide care, such as bringing a meal or babysitting. Keep communication open through calling, sending a card, or emailing regularly. Remind her of comforting Bible verses, songs, or poems. Ask how you can pray for her. Then pray. Not only will God hear and respond, but you may be given further guidance as to what to do.

Response to others

Depending on the circumstances of your pregnancy loss, you and your husband may be the only ones who know about the loss, or it may be very public. How do you deal with the reaction of others? It is difficult for someone who has never lost a baby to comprehend what you are going through. Often, people do not know what to say to you. Some people will avoid the topic because they don't want to upset you. Other times, in their attempts to make you feel better, they may say things that upset you or make you angry. Most people do not purposely try to be insensitive; they simply do not understand the impact the miscarriage had on you.

The best way to deal with other people when you are grieving is to be honest. You might say, "I'm not sure if that's how I view things, but I appreciate your thoughts." Some women have found it helpful to write notes to their family and friends telling them exactly what is needed from them. For example, sometimes you may need more interaction with others while other times you may want to be alone and not talk to others. People may not understand the depth of your hurt and feelings.

Taking care of your body after a miscarriage

If you have had a miscarriage, you will also need to take care of your body. Your physician will help you determine if there are additional procedures needed to help your body adjust. It is very important to eat a balanced diet, exercise (even if it is just a short walk), drink plenty of water, and maintain a regular rest routine. Besides your emotional reactions, you will also be dealing with hormonal responses as your body readjusts. Depending on how far you were along when the miscarriage occurred, your body will go through some, and possibly all, of the hormonal changes that are normally experienced with a full-term delivery. At times, you may experience mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate and/or irritability. Your energy levels and appetite may be erratic. By taking care of your health, you will physically feel better over time.

Specific tools for grieving

Specific things to help you as you go through your grief journey are:

1. Write your thoughts in a journal. You might list specific Bible verses and songs that helped you through that hour or day.

2. You may want to create special reminders of your baby: write a letter to him; make a memory box and include anything that reminds you of your baby; plant a tree, bush or special garden; make donations to your favorite charity in your baby's name.
3. Find and keep in regular contact with a support group of solid women in your church.

Leaning on God after a loss

2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

Isaiah 53:3 says Jesus was "acquainted with grief." This truth can give us comfort and courage to share our feelings with Him. Sometimes after a loss, a person may feel as though God has deserted them or is distant. Despite this, do your best to stick to a routine of reading the Bible and praying. It may feel like you are going through the motions for awhile. You will realize later that God was always with you and at those deepest, darkest times, He was carrying you. Allow the Word to renew you.

Proverbs 3:5 states, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." God will bring Scripture to you with a new depth of meaning. He will be with you as you go through your grief journey. You will eventually come out of the valley. By His grace you will become a more mature Christian walking more closely in Christ's footsteps as you discover a "new normal." God will help you through the darkness. Keep holding His hand.

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1. <http://www.americanpregnancy.org/main/statistics.html>
 2. <http://www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyloss/mcgettingpregnantagain.html>
 3. Elise Erikson Barrett, *What Was Lost: A Christian Journey Through Miscarriage* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

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ACCFS has numerous resources to assist someone who is going through a wide range of hurts and emotions, from the pain of loss to worry and loneliness to anger and stress. Each resource, either created by or reviewed and recommended by ACCFS staff, is meant to assist in identifying the challenges of these powerful emotions and in bringing our actions into obedience to God's Word. For more information and resources, please visit our website at www.accounseling.org/emotions.