

Father's Grief

When you found out you were having a baby, your life changed forever.

Little did you know how much your life would truly change. Experiencing the death of a baby through pregnancy loss or in the first few months of life is devastating, and the feelings you experience may be intense. You will have to recover physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The following information has been gathered by bereaved parents, friends, and professionals, as a source for answers to some of your questions as a father, and also to help you realize the normalcy of all the emotions and fears you may experience during your grief journey.

HOW CAN I EXPECT TO FEEL?

The death of a baby can be difficult and overwhelming for both parents. You may have been raised to be strong, in control, and able to handle anything. Unfortunately when a tragic event happens, these qualities are hard to hold up, and sometimes these characteristics can greatly hinder your grieving. It is normal to feel angry, vulnerable, out of control, guilty, frustrated, and even depressed. But sometimes when men have these feelings, it becomes difficult to express them because you have been taught that crying and showing emotion could be a sign of weakness. You may feel embarrassed to cry in front of others, or even alone. Men are not always conditioned to express their feelings, or to cry about something sad. It is important to give yourself permission to grieve the way you need to grieve. There is no right or wrong way to do it. As much as some people would like one, there is not a step-by-step process for grieving. However, there are some common feelings you may experience. You might go through a range of emotions at different times, or reexperience an emotion you have already felt. You may be feeling...

Shock or Confusion

Finding out your baby has died can leave you numb. Your thinking may not be clear. You may be asking, "How can this happen?" or "Why did this have to happen to my baby?"

Loss of Control

Your loss of control may encompass many aspects of your life. You may feel overwhelmed by all the emotions that you are experiencing. You may have found a new awareness of your own mortality, as well as for the people you hold dearest to you. You did not get to control what happened to your baby, and you may feel a sense of helplessness because you could not be the protector you wanted to be.

Anger

Anger is an emotion that is very common with men during grief. Your emotions of sadness, guilt, or disappointment may be directed in the form of anger. You may struggle with your faith, healthcare providers, and even family. The death of a child is tragic and completely unfair. Feeling angry about it is normal. It is important to realize that finding healthy ways to direct anger is vital to getting through your grief.

Frustration or Failure

You may feel frustrated at the loss of control that has been created by this situation. Many men like to fix problems, and sadly you cannot fix this. You may feel you have failed as the provider and/or protector of your child and partner. This culmination of emotions may make you feel quite vulnerable.

Sadness

You may have prepared financially, physically, and emotionally to spend the rest of your life with this baby. It is only logical that you would be completely saddened by this loss. You may even experience physical symptoms such as mood swings, fatigue, insomnia, inability to concentrate, or irritability. Your energy levels can be erratic, as well as your appetite.

Father's Grief

Because grief can have physical consequences it is important to take care of yourself both physically and emotionally. Grief is a journey that does not end when you leave the hospital. You may be feeling a deep, piercing set of emotions initially. This does not last forever; your pain and heartache will lessen in time.

HOW IS MY GRIEF DIFFERENT FROM MY PARTNER'S?

Everyone grieves differently. You and your partner may have similar feelings, yet you may feel miles apart. You may even have difficulty understanding how your partner is grieving even though you both lost this baby. Women tend to be more open with showing emotions and crying. You may feel awkward with how others express sadness, while still figuring out how to express your own. You may put your feelings aside to support your partner or to take care of other circumstances, but remember your grief and emotions are still there. It is okay to take a break from being the strong one to grieve.

Grief may be debilitating and tiring for you or your partner. Men are more susceptible to take the emotion that they are feeling because of their grief and turn it into another concern. You may feel like withdrawing from normal or routine activities. Some people bottle up their motions and stifle them in hopes they will just go away, while others substitute anger to cover up their sadness or hurt.

You may feel like working long hours, and possibly not coming home to avoid the memories or sharing with your partner. Trying to escape or avoid grief will only prolong the release of the emotions that you carry with you. It is important to give yourself permission to not only feel, but to share your pain and disappointment.

Your partner may question you during your grieving process. This is normal. People want to know that they are all right and that you are too.

Your partner may not understand that you prefer to grieve or cry alone, especially if you have not told them. You may be perceived as cold and irritable, or even depressed. Your partner may wonder why you do not feel the same emotions at the same times they do. Everyone grieves at their own pace and in their own ways. You may need to clean up the garage, while your partner works on their scrapbook. You may need to take long walks alone, and your partner may need to be held and hear that you are sad too. Finding ways to express your sorrow alone is important to your grieving. Finding ways to express to your partner how you grieve or what you need to get through this is just as valuable.

HOW DO I COPE WITH OTHERS AND GOING BACK TO WORK?

Even for someone who has experienced the loss of a baby, your experience is different and unique. Many times people just do not know what to say. They may say things that they feel are comforting, but make you angry. Most people are not trying to be insensitive to you; they just do not truly understand the impact the death of your baby had on you. Some people don't understand that you lost a part of you, including the future you were planning together.

The best way to communicate with your friends, family, and/or coworkers when you are grieving is to be honest and specific in what you need. If you are not a verbal person, write a note telling them how you feel, what you have been through, or how you need to be supported. Sometimes people can be astonished by the depth of your feelings.

Depending on the relationships you have built at work, going back might be difficult. You may have not been given much time off from work for this loss and you may feel torn about returning. You may not feel the support you need, or you may find yourself always being asked about how your partner is, but not how you are doing. Realize that you need support too. Grief might make your normal days work unbearable. You may feel sudden urges of sadness or the need to cry. You may experience difficulty concentrating or confusion at work. It is crucial to be open with your employer or coworkers about your needs. You may need to delegate or share responsibilities to alleviate feeling overwhelmed. If you are in an authoritative position, you may have a difficult time understanding how your grief is going to

Father's Grief

be accepted in the workplace. Do your best to find appropriate ways to communicate your needs as a grieving parent and coworker. As you continue grieving and remembering your baby, days will begin to fall into a new normal pattern.

WHERE CAN I FIND SUPPORT?

Do you need support? This question would be easier to answer if you were a quarterback or a point guard, or maybe even if you were planning a weekend fishing trip. In these circumstances you would not hesitate to tell people what you need in order to have the tools to be safe and succeed in what you were doing. In our daily lives at home, at work, and recreationally, we constantly need support. Sometimes it's help from a team, coworker, or your partner. The death of a baby is a terrible experience and finding support can greatly contribute to healthy grieving.

Many people find it helpful to confide in a good friend or family member. Sometimes we do not receive support from the people we most expect it from. Try to be open to receiving support from an unlikely source. You may find that there are people at your work or church that can share a similar experience. Another source of help can be found on the internet. There are on-line organizations designed to help grieving parents and families. You may find helpful information or even other parents you can correspond with. For many parents, a support group is a great resource for connecting to other parents that have lost a baby. Grief can be a lonely experience. Support groups provide a common ground on which you can share your story. Talking to other grieving fathers can provide a sense of relief, a feeling that you really are all right, and that you can work through your feelings. Support groups also provide a safe place to share feelings. It is not always easy sharing intimate emotions with people unless they can understand where you are coming from. Groups are not just a safe place to talk, but also a place where you have permission to break down or cry when you need to, and at the same time you have men and women surrounding you with support and compassion. Support groups, internet connections, and friends and family can be a significant source of support, but if you feel your sadness significantly interrupts your ability to function daily, it is important to contact your doctor or see a professional counselor. Remember, grief is a journey filled with ups and downs. You will experience many emotions and milestones as you grieve your baby. Grief is not a weakness; it's a part of life that we don't get to control. You are not alone in this journey, and there are resources and people available to support you.