

DO'S AND DON'TS

WHEN SUPPORTING BEREAVED FAMILIES

THE DEATH OF A BABY IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER.

Though we mean well, sometimes our attempts to comfort a loved one in his or her time of loss causes more heartache. Saying nothing at all can be equally as hurtful. The following tips are meant to help your words be truly supportive and to alleviate some of the anxiety around "saying the wrong thing" as you care for your friend or family member who has endured the death of their baby.

HELPFUL LANGUAGE

- I love you
- I am so sorry
- I am at a loss for words
- I would do anything to take this pain away
- If you would like to talk about how you are feeling, I'm here to listen.

PLEASE DO NOT

- Offer cliches
- Judge or offer advice
- Compare losses

HURTFUL LANGUAGE

- At least...
- Everything happens for a reason
- Time heals all wounds
- It's going to be okay
- God has a plan
- You are young, you can have more children
- At least you can get pregnant
- Be thankful you have other children
- Let go, move on

BASIC FACTS ABOUT PREGNANCY & INFANT LOSS

- 1 in 4 mothers report experiencing perinatal loss—however, the number may be as high as 50%
- Approximately 24,000 babies annually will be stillborn (>20 weeks gestation). An additional 23,000 infants will die within the first 28 days of life
- Perinatal loss occurs 10 times more often than deaths related to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

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MORE SUGGESTIONS

- Arrange for meal delivery, meal gift cards, or grocery gift cards (2-4 weeks after the baby's death is helpful)
- Refer to them as parents—as they are, even if they do not have a living child—and acknowledge them on Mother's and Father's Days.
- Make sure to remember, ask about, and care for the father, as he is also grieving.
- Ask them to tell you about their baby: what was their baby's name, how did their baby die, what do they remember about their baby?
- Ask to see a photograph of their baby; tell them he/she is beautiful.
- Be present—listen, and sit with them.
- Ask what would feel healing or helpful.
- If they have living children, offer to take the children for outings and let the parents have time to grieve alone or together.
- Don't say "I'm here for you" or "reach out if you need anything." They do need support. Text them and tell them you're thinking of them.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND

Birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries—such as those of the baby's death or due date—are especially difficult. Let the parents know that you are thinking of them and their baby on these special days with a card, small gift, candles, or a contribution to a meaningful charity. Please be open and accepting of however they choose to celebrate these holidays, even if they decide not to participate.

The grieving process is never over and parents are always grateful for your kindness. Months after the baby has passed away, it can be helpful to continue to send "thinking of you" cards or thoughtful gifts.

Don't be offended if the bereaved parents do not respond.