FATHERS GRIEVE, TOO

PREGNANCY AND INFANT LOSS IMPACTS FATHERS AND PARTNERS IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

If a pregnancy did not end in the birth of a live infant or if a newborn passed in infancy, partners need to process their experience and be supported to grieve in their own unique way after the loss of a child.

SIGNS OF GRIEF AND TRAUMA IN MEN FOLLOWING PREGNANCY OR INFANT LOSS

- Flat affect/lack of emotion
- Irritability
- Anger
- Lashing out
- Hyperfocus on work as distraction
- Self-blame
- Lack of focus and motivation
- Isolation
- Impulsiveness and taking risks, like reckless driving or extra-marital affairs
- Substance abuse
- Suicidal thoughts

BASIC FACTS ABOUT PATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

- Postpartum depression affects 10-25% of dads, regardless if there is a live baby.
- 24-50% of male partners of women with postpartum depression report depression themselves.
- Up to 18% of male partners report postpartum anxiety.
- Prior history of depression/anxiety puts fathers at a higher risk of developing postpartum depression/anxiety.
- After birth loss or trauma, men have the same risk of developing PTSD as their partners.

PARTNERS OFTEN EXPERIENCE DELAYED GRIEF…WHY?

- Focus is usually on the mother
- Fathers tend to assume a supportive role and neglect their own grief
- Societal pressure to act strong
- Limited outlets for expression of partner's grief
- Lack of recognition of partner's grief
- Stigma, which may prevent parents from talking about their own feelings of grief and loss

WHAT CAN BE HELPFUL WHEN YOU'VE EXPERIENCED A LOSS?

- Individual counseling - create space to process your own emotions
- Couples counseling - can improve communication and help you better understand your partner's journey
- Connecting with your partner (mutual massage, 2-minute hug, couples yoga)
- Seeking social support (pre-existing social networks or faith communities)
- Attending a bereavement support group
- Spending time outdoors
- Exercising regularly
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating nutritious foods
- Setting time limits and boundaries for work