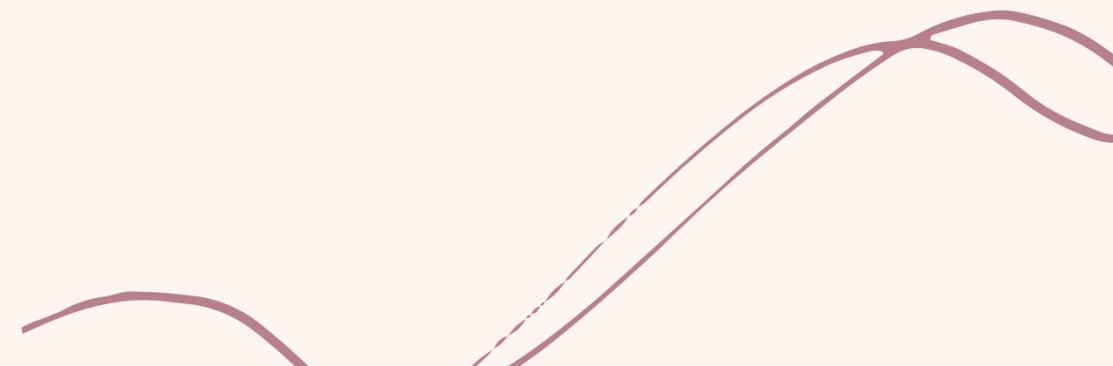




# Understanding Stillbirth and Baby Loss

A Presentation by Caridad Saenz, Birth & Bereavement Doula

# Welcome and Introductions





Caridad Saenz,  
Birth & Bereavement Doula

*What is a  
Bereavement  
Doula?*



- Workshop objectives and expectations



Overall Objective: To bring awareness around stillbirth and baby loss, provide strategies for supporting bereaved parents, foster an environment that encourages open dialogue on this topic, and share resources for long-term healing and support.



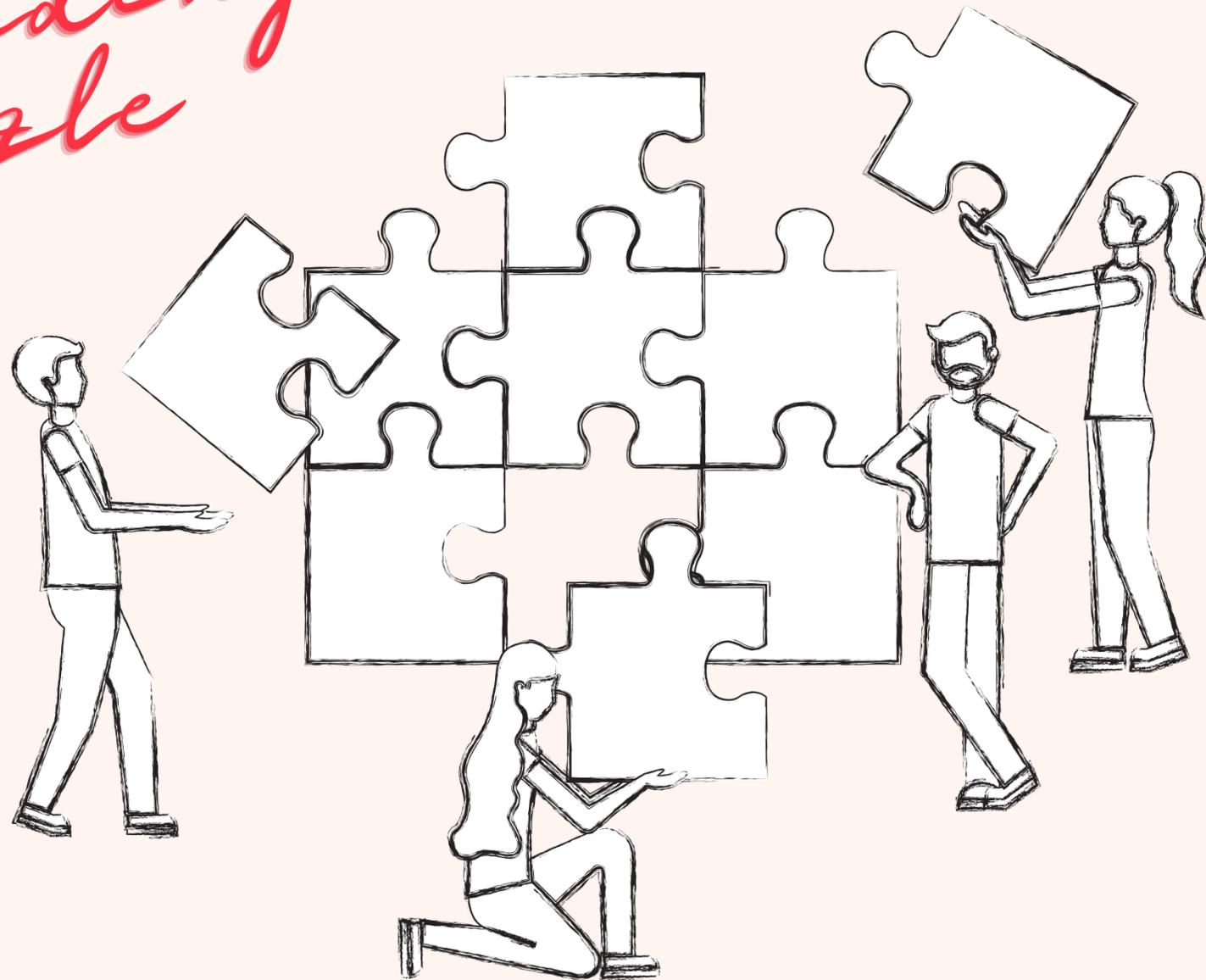
**Breaking the silence around stillbirth and baby loss is important because it can have several benefits:**

- 1. Promote healing and provide validation for the grief of parents.**
- 2. Increase awareness and understanding of these tragic events.**
- 3. Improve post-loss care for bereaved parents.**
- 4. Encourage funding for research into causes and prevention of stillbirth and neonatal loss.**
- 5. Lead to policy changes and legislation that provide support for parents.**
- 6. Provide support networks for parents who have suffered similar loss.**



- Icebreaker activity to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere

*Understanding  
the Puzzle*



A stillbirth candle in a dark holder, resting on a white cloth with a gold trim. The candle is lit, and the flame is visible. The background is a soft, light-colored surface.

Understanding Stillbirth  
and Baby Loss

# Understanding Baby Loss

**Baby loss, whether it occurs during pregnancy or after birth, can be a deeply painful experience.**

**Here are some types of baby loss:**

- **miscarriage**
- **ectopic pregnancy**
- **stillbirth**
- **neonatal death**
- **SIDS**
- **termination for medical reasons**

**Seeking professional help and emotional support is important during this challenging time,**



- Discussion on the profound impact of stillbirth and baby loss

**The loss of a baby can have a profound emotional impact on parents, including feelings of :**

- **sorrow**
- **guilt**
- **anger**
- **fear**
- **loneliness**
- **depression**
- **PTSD**
- **jealousy**
- **numbness**



**The emotional impact of baby loss on parents**

**Seeking help and support from professionals or a community of those who have experienced similar loss is important, as the emotional impact can be long-lasting and affect all areas of life.**

- Sharing statistics and facts to raise awareness

## Mortality Rate in the United Arab Emirates

The neonatal mortality rate = **3.6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2020**  
This rate has fallen gradually from 5.7 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001

The infant mortality rate = **5.4 deaths per thousand live births in 2021.**  
This rate has fallen gradually from 59.5 deaths per thousand live births in 1972



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Stillbirth Statistics: According to the World Health Organization, there were an estimated 2.6 million stillbirths globally in 2015, or roughly 7,200 every day. Every year, about 98% of stillbirths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Approximately three-quarters occur during the antepartum period and a quarter occur during delivery.

Neonatal Death Statistic: The global neonatal mortality rate was roughly 18 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017, according to UNICEF, contributing to approximately 47% of all under-5 deaths globally.

- Exploring the emotional and psychological effects on parents and families

Losing a baby due to miscarriage, stillbirth, or newborn death can lead to significant emotional and psychological effects on parents and families.

Some of these effects include:

depression

anxiety

guilt

strain on relationships

social isolation

impact on siblings

spiritual crisis

panic disorders

physical symptoms

identity crisis



- Q&A session to address any initial questions or concerns



Navigating Grief  
and

Supporting Bereaved Parents

- Understanding the grieving process and the unique challenges faced by bereaved parents

**Grief is a personal experience, and everyone grieves differently. It can involve a wide range of emotions and physical symptoms and may not follow predictable stages. There is no set timeline for grief, and it may take longer for some than others. External support can play an essential role, and taking care of physical needs can help with emotional distress. Eventually, most people reach a point of acceptance and growth from facing adversity. It's important to talk about grief, express it, recognize it in others, and ask for help when needed.**

Normalizing grief: Understanding the grieving process



- Active listening and empathy: Techniques and strategies

**Empathy and supportive communication are essential skills for building strong relationships. To cultivate these skills, one can:**

- Practice active listening and strive to comprehend the emotions behind the words.
- Refrain from judging and approach conversations with an open mind.
- Show genuine interest by asking follow-up questions and valuing the person's perspectives.
- Use empathetic language to show understanding and appreciation.
- Validate the person's feelings, even if you don't agree.
- Be patient and allow people the space and time they need to express themselves.
- Practice empathy regularly in everyday interactions.

**Cultivating empathy and supportive communication**

- Providing effective support through validation and non-judgmental communication

Providing support to someone who has experienced baby loss can be challenging. Here are some guidelines to follow:

1. Acknowledge their pain and validate their feelings.
2. Listen actively and avoid interrupting or offering solutions unless asked.
3. Avoid making judgments or assumptions about how they should be feeling or coping.
4. Use empathetic language to show that you are trying to understand what they're going through.
5. Let them know it's okay to cry, grieve, and talk about their baby.
6. Avoid clichés and offer specific words of comfort.
7. Offer practical help with daily tasks.
8. Encourage seeking professional support or counseling.

- Case studies and examples to illustrate different scenarios

#### Case Study 1: Pre-existing Conditions

In a specific case study, a 37-year-old woman who was previously diagnosed with gestational diabetes and hypertension during her pregnancy experienced a stillbirth at 32 weeks gestation. Despite careful prenatal care and monitoring, her stillbirth highlighted the risk and severity of pre-existing health conditions in pregnant women. In the aftermath, grief counseling and emotional support played a significant role in her recovery process.

#### Case Study 2: Lack of Proper Prenatal Care

A young woman in a low-income country had limited access to prenatal care. Without being aware of her fetus's decreasing movements, an unfortunate stillbirth occurred at 38 weeks. The case showcased the necessity of adequate prenatal care and maternal education, particularly in underprivileged regions.

#### Case Study 3: Unexplained Stillbirth

Another case study involved a 30-year-old woman with a previously uneventful pregnancy. At 36 weeks, she suddenly felt reduced fetal movements. Despite immediate medical attention, her baby was declared stillborn. In such cases, unexplained stillbirths can be psychologically devastating due to the lack of closure or understanding as to why it happened. Therefore, bereavement support and professional psychological help are crucial.

#### Case Study 4: Genetic Abnormalities

A 25-year-old first-time mother had a regular anomaly scan at 20 weeks, revealing severe fetal abnormalities. After further testing, a significant chromosomal defect was diagnosed. The mother and her partner made a decision to end the pregnancy medically for the welfare of the baby. While the grief for the loss was profound, the condition ensured a strong likelihood of stillbirth or neonatal death. In such cases, supportive counseling and shared decision-making are vital.

All these case studies underscore the importance of regular prenatal care, early detection of potential issues, emotional and mental health support, and proper care for expectant mothers.

*Case Studies*

- Small group discussions and role-playing activities to practice communication skills

This activity involves participants getting into small groups of three, with one person playing 'the speaker', one 'the listener', and one 'the observer'. The 'speaker' reads a scenario of baby loss as if they have personally experienced it, while the 'listener' provides empathetic and supportive responses. After 5 minutes, the 'observer' provides feedback on the interaction, and the group discusses feedback and feelings about the role-play. Participants then switch roles and repeat the process. The activity aims to develop skills in discussing baby loss and create a comfortable environment for understanding these experiences.



*Break*



*Creating Safe Spaces*

- The importance of breaking the silence surrounding stillbirth and baby loss

**Breaking the silence surrounding stillbirth and baby loss creates a culture where bereaved parents feel understood, supported, and less alone. They can then navigate their grief in a healthier way and work toward healing. It can also lead to societal and systemic changes that can reduce the incidence of these tragedies.**

1. **Create a Safe and Comfortable Environment:** Begin by ensuring that the space in which the conversation happens is safe and non-judgmental. This includes the physical, emotional, and social setting. Encourage everyone to express their feelings honestly and assure them that their emotions are valid.
2. **Empathy:** Practice active listening and validate feelings and experiences of your audience. Understand that dealing with a loss may spark a variety of emotions which can change and be unpredictable.
3. **Language:** Use clear, empathetic, and respectful language. Avoid using medical jargon or euphemisms. Also, be sure to use the baby's name, if it was given, to honor the child's memory.
4. **Honesty:** Be honest but sensitive about the realities of baby loss. Avoid making false promises or giving false hope. It's important not to shy away from talking about the emotional and physical aspects of loss.

**5. Tailor Your Approach:** Remember that everyone is different. Their cultural, religious, personal beliefs and their past experiences will shape how they navigate through their grief. Be sensitive to these differences and respect them.

**6. Open Up the Dialogue:** Encourage questions and discussion. Provide the audience with the opportunity to share their stories, thoughts, and feelings. This will not only make them feel heard but also help them in the healing process.

**7. Provide Resources:** Offer resources for grief counseling, support groups, online forums, and books that could help them navigate their journey through grief.

**8. Follow-up:** After conversations or workshops, follow-up with attendees. This shows that you genuinely care for their wellbeing and are willing to support them even after the conversation is over.

- Fostering an environment of open and honest conversations

**Empathy and supportive communication are essential skills for building strong relationships. To cultivate these skills, one can:**

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**Cultivating empathy and supportive communication**

- Providing resources and information about support groups, online communities, and counselling services

Counseling and access to resources are essential for those grieving baby loss because they provide:

1. Emotional healing by providing a safe and supportive environment for expressing and processing emotions.
2. A reduced sense of isolation by connecting individuals with a community that understands their feelings.
3. Effective coping mechanisms, such as navigating daily life and memorializing the baby.
4. Treatment for complex grief and PTSD, if needed.
5. Management of physical symptoms caused by emotional turmoil.
6. Support for future pregnancies by managing fears and anxiety.

- Interactive activity to brainstorm ideas for creating safe spaces in different settings (workplaces, schools, communities)

# Title: Safe Spaces Brainstorming Carousel

(A GROUP ACTIVITY)



# Long-Term Support and Healing



- Recognizing the ongoing need for support beyond the immediate grieving process

Long-term support is essential for individuals dealing with grief after baby loss because:

- the emotional impact is ongoing
- anniversaries and milestones can reinvigorate feelings of loss
- grief can mutate over time
- long-term support can lead to post-traumatic growth
- support is needed for future pregnancies
- extended support can help manage ongoing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or PTSD.

Methods of providing ongoing support include regular check-ins with a counselor or psychotherapist, participation in bereavement support groups, commemorating the baby's memory on significant dates, and providing access to ongoing mental health resources.

- Exploring counselling services and the benefits of professional guidance

Professional guidance and counselling services can be crucial for parents and families experiencing grief after the loss of a baby. Seeking professional help can provide:

1. Validation of feelings
2. Grief management
3. Individualized support
4. Mental health support
5. Help for siblings
6. Family therapy
7. Support in subsequent pregnancies

Finding a trusted and comfortable mental health professional is important in navigating the healing process.

- Introducing support groups and their role in providing a sense of community and connection

Support groups provide a sense of connection and community for individuals with diverse needs. They offer peer support, community building, information sharing, emotional outlet, motivation, encouragement, and advocacy. The advent of technology has expanded support groups to online platforms, but their foundational aspects remain the same.

- Remembrance rituals as a way to honour and remember lost babies

## Remembrance Rituals

1. Plant a memory garden with flowers or a tree symbolic to the baby's memory.
2. Hold a memorial service or gathering to share memories and offer mutual support.
3. Create a memory box with mementos such as ultrasound pictures, hospital bracelets, or baby's clothing articles.
4. Conduct a balloon or lantern release, with each carrying a special message for the baby.
5. Create or purchase keepsake jewelry inscribed with the baby's initials or birthdate.
6. Turn to art; create or purchase artwork symbolic of the baby.
7. Make charitable donations in the baby's name or support relevant organizations.
8. Observe the baby's birthdate with special activities or actions that honor their memory.
9. Have custom-made memorials like plaques, statues, or benches prepared in memory of the child.
10. Choose a special tattoo honoring the baby, such as a name, symbol, or date.

- Practicing self-care techniques and coping mechanisms for bereaved parents

Self-care techniques and coping mechanisms are essential for anyone dealing with grief, including bereaved parents. Here are several suggestions:

1. Structured Routine
2. Physical Activity
3. Healthy Eating
4. Expressive Writing/Journaling
5. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques
6. Support Groups
7. Remembering and Memorialising
8. Therapy and Counseling



It's essential to encourage supporters to suggest these techniques gently, but understand that each person's healing process may take time. Seeking professional help is also beneficial.

- Sharing resources and recommendations for further support and healing

Below are some helpful resources that support families dealing with stillbirth and neonatal loss:

#### U.A.E. Resources

<https://carryloss.com/>

<https://stillamum.com/>

<https://www.tfmrmamas.com/>

[www.lovetroughlosssupport.com/](http://www.lovetroughlosssupport.com/)

<https://www.lalalangtrywhite.com/services/lovetroughloss>

#### U.K. Resources

- Sands (Stillbirth and neonatal death charity): Offers a range of support including a national helpline and support groups.
- Child Bereavement UK: Supports families when a baby or child dies and offers training to professionals.

#### U.S. Resources

- The STAR Legacy Foundation: Conducts research, provides education, and supports families dealing with stillbirth.
- National Share: A community for those who are touched by the tragic death of a baby through early pregnancy loss, stillbirth, or in the first few months of life.
- The Compassionate Friends: Offers support and resources for parents, siblings, and grandparents grieving the death of a child.

#### Global Resources

- ISA (The International Stillbirth Alliance): Promotes and enhances stillbirth-related activities on a global scale and conducts research and education.

Conclusion and Wrap-up



- Recap of key points and takeaways from the workshop



- Open forum for questions and final thoughts

Added resources, handouts, and contact information for  
further support

- Participant Journal
- Baby Loss Flyer for Grieving Parents
- Resources List to Support Groups

- Expressing gratitude and closing remarks

# Understanding Stillbirth and Baby Loss

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Thank you 

Lunch and Network