



dad always

SURVIVE

A Guide for the First Stretch After Baby Loss

This guide is designed to help you survive the next moment with as much care and safety as possible. Use it more like a menu than a map: start anywhere, skip what does not fit, and repeat what helps.

Before You Begin

Dear grieving dad,

The right words do not exist to describe how utterly devastating losing your baby is. Your whole world has caved in—along with the future you were already picturing and the plans you were already carrying. And *that* feeling has no name. It's not uncommon to feel like everything is happening so fast and you have no control. If you also feel disoriented, numb, angry, or like you have no idea what to do next, that makes sense. Most dads don't. None of us are thrown into this darkness knowing how to survive it.

Many of us have also felt paralyzed and powerless. And if part of you believes the most important thing right now is to be "*strong*", I want you to know this: strength doesn't have to mean navigating this alone. I want you to still be a pillar for your partner without dismissing that you also deserve your own support. This is why I'm thankful you've found this guide.

This **Dad Always SURVIVE** guide is a simple framework for the first stretch after loss. The most common approach is to use it more like a menu than a map—start anywhere, skip what doesn't fit, and repeat any section as often as you need. The other common approach is to follow it sequentially. There's no "*right*" way. Your only job is to survive the next moment with as much care and safety as possible.

My hope is that it helps you navigate the moments and days ahead. At the end of this guide you'll find additional support options. I suggest turning there only after you've used this guide for at least two weeks.

I wish you weren't living this.

Kelly Jean-Philippe

This guide is not intended to be a substitute for mental health treatment or crisis services. If you feel unsafe or are thinking about harming yourself or others, call **911** immediately, contact your mental health provider, call / text **988**, the **24/7 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (*USA only*), or head to your nearest emergency department. Outside the U.S., contact your local crisis line, emergency services, or nearest emergency department.

SURVIVE

S — Shock

Get through the next hours.

Fewer decisions. One point person. Basics first.

U — Uplift the body

Stabilize the nervous system.

Water, food, sleep attempt, and a few minutes of movement.

R — Regulate

Contain the flood.

Grounding for overwhelm and anger.

V — Verbalize needs

Stay on the same team.

Short check-ins. Simple asks.

I — Interact with boundaries

Handle work and others.

Set boundaries & expectations. Protect your energy.

V — Value your baby

One small act of remembering.

Ideas and letter starters.

E — Expect waves

Plan the next two weeks.

Triggers are normal. Support matters. Repeat what helps.

What you may be feeling right now

- numb
- disoriented
- angry
- detached
- panicky
- like none of this is real

Focus only on the basics

- Drink water.
- Eat something simple.
- Reduce decisions.
- Reduce noise, visitors, and stimulation.
- Choose one point person to update others.

If you are in a medical setting

- Ask for next steps in writing.
- Ask for privacy.
- Take options one at a time.
- Use available support services if needed (*i.e. Spiritual Care/Chaplain, Social Work, Music Therapy, Child Life Specialist*)

You do not have to carry everything at once. You only need to get through this moment with as much care and safety as possible.

Do this

- Identify what *"right now"* feels like.
- Commit to **1** or **2** basics.
- Choose **1** way to improve your setting.

Your body matters right now

- Grief and trauma hit the body hard.
- Even small care counts.
- Good enough is enough.

Start here

- Drink a full glass of water.
- Try to eat protein or something easy to tolerate.
- Do not go too long without food.
- Take a short walk, stretch, or do a few slow movements.

If sleep is rough

- Dim lights before bed.
- Avoid doom-scrolling.
- If you cannot sleep, get up briefly and do something quiet.
- In medical setting, ask for only essential visitors after a certain time

Get urgent support if (*non-negotiable*)

- **panic attacks are intense**
 - **you cannot eat for days**
 - **you are relying on alcohol or substances to cope**
 - **you feel unsafe**
 - **you have thoughts of harming yourself or others**
-

In a medical setting alert medical team or Social Worker. Outside medical setting in the U.S., call or text **988** if you feel unsafe. Call **911** for immediate danger. Outside the U.S., contact your local crisis line, emergency services, or nearest emergency department.

Do this

- Set an alarm to eat something **every 3-4 hours** at least 3x per day
- **Set a time** at which you'll put away your phone for the rest of the night

When overwhelm hits, come back to your body first

Try this 90-second reset

- Press both feet into the floor.
- Breathe - inhale 4, exhale 6-8.
- Name 5 things you see.
- Say out loud - *"I can do hard things."*

When you are overwhelmed

- Splash cold water on your face.
- Step outside for 60 seconds.
- Change clothes.
- Eat something warm.
- Take a short walk (*no phone*)

When anger spikes

- Pause before speaking.
 - Do a few wall push-ups or slow squats.
 - Take 20 minutes of space.
 - Come back when you can stay present.
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Regulating is not weakness. It is how you keep yourself from drowning in the moment.

Do this

- Memorize the **90-second reset**.
- "When I'm feeling overwhelmed I'll _____."
- "When I'm angry I'll _____."

You do not need a perfect conversation

Try a 3-minute check-in

- *"The hardest part of today was ..."*
- *"One thing I need right now is ..."*
- *"One small win today was ..."*

When you need closeness

- *"I am not okay right now. Can you stay close?"*
- *"Can I get a long hug? - Don't let go first."*
- *"Can you sit with me for a minute?"*

When you need space

- *"I am overwhelmed. I need 20 minutes, then I will come back."*
- *"I need quiet so I do not snap."*
- *"Can we pause this and come back later?"*

When you need normalcy

- *"Can we take a break from the heavy stuff for a little while?"*
- *"Can we do something simple together?"*
- *"I need 15 minutes to play a game on my phone."*

Needing comfort, space, or distraction does not mean you care less. It means you are trying to survive this wisely.

Do this

- **Initiate the 3-minute check-in** the same time in the morning and in the afternoon / evening

You get to choose how much you share

Keep it simple

- *"I experienced a loss in my family."*
- *"I am returning to work, but I am still grieving."*
- *"I am not ready to discuss details."*

If you need flexibility

- *"For the next few weeks, I need to focus on core priorities."*
- *"My concentration may be off at times."*
- *"I may need some flexibility as I transition back."*

If someone presses for details

- *"I appreciate your concern, but I am keeping details private."*
 - *"I am not up for questions."*
 - *"I am not looking for advice right now. What's most helpful is practical support."*
-

You do not owe people your story to deserve support. Privacy is allowed. Boundaries are allowed.
Simplicity is allowed.

Do this

- Modify these scripts to your voice or use "as is".
- Explore leave benefits (*if applicable*) with your HR representative.
- **Practice 90-second reset.**

You do not need to do something big

Ideas

- Carry a small token.
- Wear jewelry with your baby's name.
- Frame an ultrasound or memory item.
- Write a letter.
- Choose a song, walk, or route in their honor.
- Plant something.
- Create a private ritual.

Letter starters

- *"I wish things were different ..."*
 - *"My dearest [baby's name], this is daddy."*
 - *"I will always love you."*
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Remembering your baby is not about doing it **BIG** or perfectly.

It is about making space for the love you have to give.

Grief comes in waves

Build your support crew

- **1 Practical person** – food, errands, logistics.
- **1 Emotional person** – can sit with pain without fixing it.
- **1 Logistics person** – updates, work coordination, planning.

Plan for likely triggers

- due dates and anniversaries
- returning to work
- pregnancy announcements / kid parties
- holidays and Father's Day
- social media and baby aisles

Create a hard day kit

- easy food
- electrolytes
- grounding steps
- comfort item
- list of who to text
- sleep supports

One message you can send

“Things are heavy after our loss and I could use some support. Can you help with check-ins, meals, or logistics for the next couple weeks?”

Get urgent support if panic attacks, flashbacks, nightmares, rage spikes, shutdown, substance use, or unsafe thoughts are becoming part of most days.

Do this

- My 1 Practical person is: _____.
- My 1 Emotional person is: _____.
- My 1 Logistics person is: _____.

Closing Note

There is no “*perfect*” way to survive baby loss. There is only the next moment, the next hour, the next decision for how to stay grounded and present as best you can. Come back to these pages whenever you need them. Repeat the parts that help. Leave the rest alone for when they might be necessary.

What you might notice after two weeks

- Sleep or appetite shifts
- Triggers may feel more unpredictable
- Changes in how you relate to work, people, and “*normal life*”
- You and your partner grieving differently—and the gap feels wider

I’ve reserved a limited 30-minute virtual **SURVIVE Recap** for dads who’ve used this guide—especially after the two-week mark. **This is not a test or a therapy session.** It’s a free private conversation where we:

- reflect on what actually helped (*and what didn’t*)
- name what you’re carrying now that the first shock has faded
- identify current triggers and pressure points
- build a simple support plan for the next few weeks
- identify a few clear “*next steps*” that fit your life and your grief

Go to [Dad Always](#) to request a conversation. If you’re not ready, that’s okay too. Your only job is to survive right now with as much care and safety as possible.



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