

# Duke University Health System Bereavement



Helping Yourself - After The Loss Of A Baby

Grieving can be an overwhelming experience. It affects every aspect of your life. During your journey towards healing, it is important to take care of yourself - physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

#### How do I take care of myself?

Be gentle with yourself in the coming days, weeks, and months,

- Mourning takes time sometimes longer than you might think.
- Give yourself the needed time. Treat yourself as you would a best friend.

<u>Carry or wear a linking object</u> – something that belonged to your baby (picture, footprints, lock of hair), if this is comforting to you.

#### Take care of yourself physically

- Eat a healthy diet including milk, protein, vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.
- Get needed rest
- Exercise daily physical activity can refresh you and take your mind off your pain for a
  while. The activity may be walking, swimming, working out, or whatever you enjoy
  doing.
- Avoid over-use of alcohol or medication. They tend to numb your emotions and delay your grief work.
- Talk about your thoughts and/or feelings, as you need to. It can be with your partner, family, or friends. Consider talking to someone outside the family counselor, faith leader, social worker, nurse or your doctor.

<u>Write down your thoughts and feelings</u> – some people find this more helpful than talking. Ways of doing this are:

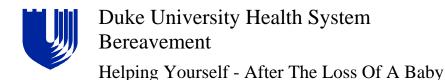
- Keeping a journal or diary.
- Writing letters to your baby, and/or about your thoughts and feelings.
- Writing notes or poems.

<u>Read - books, articles, or poems that comfort you</u>. Reading about how others have dealt with their grief will let you know that you are not alone.

<u>Look to your faith</u> (whatever you perceive that to be) – and maintain your spiritual bonds. Consider the following:

- Religious services and/or ceremonies (memorial service).
- Quiet prayer and meditation.
- Involvement in activities in your place of worship.

<u>Accept comfort and help from others</u> – admit when you are feeling lonely or are in pain. Your family and friends love you and want to help. Share with them what does and does not help.



## How do I take care of myself? (con't)

Give yourself permission to laugh, as well as cry - both are healing.

<u>Consider postponing making major life decisions</u> (for at least a year, if possible) such as moving or selling property and belongings.

#### Should I try to forget or keep my memories alive?

- After your baby dies he/she will <u>always</u> remain a part of your life. Memories are all you have now *treasure* them.
- Share your memories with family and friends who can support you.
- Collect objects that remind you of your baby and that comfort you. Consider keeping these precious things in a memory box.
- Begin rituals to serve as a tribute to your baby's short life, such as:
  - Lighting a candle at mealtime in your baby's memory.
  - Plant something as a living memorial (flowers, bush or tree).

## What can I do if I need help?

Some people find it helpful to talk about feelings and thoughts with someone outside the family. There are people available who understand and care about you.

#### Some suggestions include:

<u>Support groups</u> – A safe place where survivors can share their experiences and support each other.

<u>Religious/Spiritual community</u> - People who can help identify spiritual resources that may be comforting for you.

<u>Bereavement counselors</u> - Specialists, who help people adjust to the death of a loved one, try to find a therapist who has experience working with victims of homicide.

<u>Duke Hospital Bereavement Services</u> –Bereavement Services provides a clearinghouse for information, resources and support about grief, loss, dying and death. (877-460-7969).

Local mental health associations - To get more information and referrals.

## When do I need to call my doctor?

- If you are unable to take care of yourself or your family.
- If you have persistent thoughts of or are planning to hurt yourself.
- If you become very depressed and are unable to do activities of daily living.
- If you are unable to sleep or have questions about sleeping.
- If you think that you need medication.