

miscarriage

HOW TO SUPPORT PARENTS
WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD



The LORD is close to the brokenhearted,
saves those whose spirit is crushed. (Ps 34:19)



Adapted from - *Grieving Together: A Couple's Journey through Miscarriage*

By Laura & Franco Fanucci

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HOW TO SUPPORT PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD

If you know someone who has experienced a miscarriage, you know how difficult it can be to respond in a way that feels genuine and loving. It might even seem easier to ignore the situation. This little guide offers practical and spiritual guidance to help you help your friend or family member who has experienced this tragic loss.

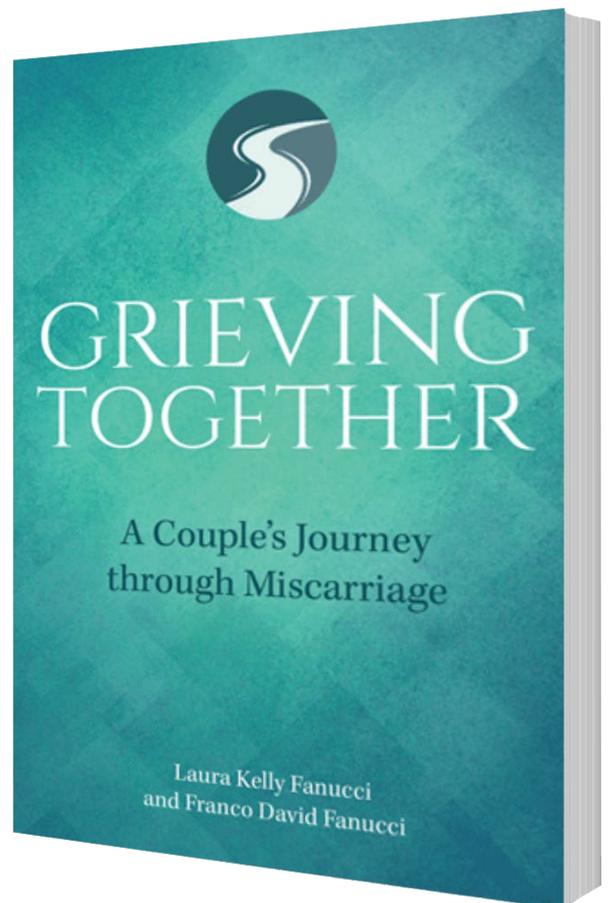


“one of the most difficult realities of being open to life is that it then makes you open to loss.”

“**Grieving Together** is for couples who have opened themselves up to the gift of children and have experienced the deepest loss and grief the human heart can understand. As I read I was moved to tears, not only remembering our own child in eternity, but with gratitude for the healing that this book will help bring to countless grieving parents. **Grieving Together** is a wealth of practical information and emotional and spiritual support in a time often marked by confusion, fear, and pain.”

- MARY HASELTINE

Birth and Bereavement Doula, Childbirth Educator, and Author of *Made for This: The Catholic Mom's Guide to Birth*



common pitfalls & how to avoid them



In an effort to offer consolation, we might be tempted to turn to clichés. Clichés usually contain a kernel of truth, but their flaws and limitations can add to the pain of those they hope to comfort. The suggestions below offer new perspective on these clichés and how you might respond instead.

SAYINGS ABOUT GOD



You might be tempted to say - It's God's will. God has a plan. Everything happens for a reason.

What you probably mean - Variations on this theological theme rank among the most common responses to miscarriage. People want to set the present suffering within a wider view of the goodness of God's will and the beauty of God's plan for humanity. They also hope to encourage those grieving with the comfort of God's love. But reminding someone who is in pain that "God is good, all the time!" can feel like slapping a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Parents who are grieving often feel that their pain is dismissed when someone seems to suggest that God wanted or willed the loss of their baby.

What you should remember - God does not desire the death of a child. But within God's loving purposes — for humanity as a whole and for each human life — God can always bring about good from and through suffering. Ultimately God's plan involves the destruction of death and grief at the end of time (as seen in Isaiah 65:19–20 and Revelation 21:4).

You might be tempted to say - God needed another angel. Now your baby is in a better place.

What you probably mean - When a baby dies, people want to assure grieving parents that their precious child is special in God's eyes, too. The idea that babies would become angels springs from people's desire to envision babies as happy in heaven, but as also watching over their parents' lives in a unique way. Yet even the goodness of heaven cannot always ease the natural longing of parents for their child to be here and in their arms.

What you should remember - People do not turn into angels. As the Catholic Church teaches, angels were created all at once at the dawn of time. But instead of becoming angels, humans can become powerful intercessors in eternity, praying for the needs of those still on earth. The Catholic belief in the Communion of Saints provides deep comfort that we can remain forever connected to those who have died.

You might be tempted to say - Let go and let God. God doesn't give you more than you can handle.

What you probably mean - Christians often want to encourage one another that God loves and cares for them, and that they can survive difficulties because God will give them strength to endure. While these expressions of concern are based in the truth of God's compassion, such sayings reduce the mystery of God's action in our lives to "cute" clichés more suited to daily irritations or frustrations than the overwhelming depth of grief.

What you should remember - Turning to ancient truth from Scripture may be more comforting than these popular sayings. "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted" (Ps 34:18) and "Jesus wept" (Jn 11:35) remind us that God grieves with the grieving and comforts those who mourn.

SAYINGS ABOUT MISCARRIAGE



You might be tempted to say - At least you can get pregnant. At least it was early. At least you're young. At least you have other kids. At least you didn't know the baby.

What you probably mean - "At least" statements often spring from a positive belief in the importance of gratitude, but these sayings minimize the person's suffering, silencing them from voicing their pain or making them feel like they shouldn't be grieving.

What you should remember - Research on miscarriage and emotional health has shown that the length of the pregnancy does not determine the extent of the parents' grief. Even the earliest loss can be experienced as devastating, because the parents have already begun to love this baby and imagine an entire life with their child. While gratitude can help in healing, letting the grieving couple find their own reasons to be grateful is usually more helpful than providing them.

You might be tempted to say - Something was wrong with the baby; it's for the best. This is nature's way.

What you probably mean - It is generally unhelpful to theorize about the cause of a miscarriage, but people resort to such explanations because they hope to free the couple from guilt — for example, saying, "It wasn't your fault." These instincts often spring from a place of love, wanting to protect the couple from pain by putting distance between them and the miscarriage. But rare is the parent who could see the death of their child as "for the best" when this loss is likely experienced as one of the worst griefs imaginable.

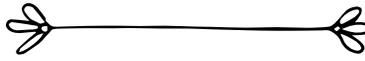
What you should remember - The majority of miscarriages are caused by underlying chromosomal issues and have nothing to do with the mother's behavior. But this truth does not lessen the couple's sadness over their loss. They love their baby and will never forget their child.

You might be tempted to say - You can try again. You'll have another.

What you probably mean - There is hope beyond this present suffering. Miscarriage does not have to define a couple forever or prevent them from parenting a living child someday. But well-meaning comforters can be too quick to push couples to conceive again. Taking time to mourn means that they may not be ready to think about another child yet. You can encourage the couple to focus on healing, and then look ahead to what may come next.

What you should remember - The grieving couple will forever be the parent of this particular child, a unique soul. Future children cannot replace this baby. There are no guarantees in any pregnancy. Rather than trying to predict the future, you and the couple can choose to pray for hope and trust in God's mercy and loving plan.

SAYINGS ABOUT GRIEF



You might be tempted to say - I know exactly how you feel.

What you probably mean - Because you don't want the couple to feel alone in grief, you might try to offer solidarity in their suffering. This attempt to connect might feel comforting if your experience is actually similar to theirs — that is, you lost a baby — or upsetting if your loss doesn't seem to compare at all — your dog died. But such sayings usually spring from a desire to empathize and draw the couple out of the darkness of feeling alone in grief.

What you should remember - We are not alone in grief. Even if you do not understand exactly how the grieving couple feels, many other parents have suffered the heartache of losing a baby. Encouraging the couple to seek out and connect with those who do share their grief can be a huge source of comfort.

You might be tempted to say - I can't believe this is happening to you. I can't imagine.

What you probably mean - Sometimes people are so overwhelmed by another's pain that they try to distance themselves from it (the opposite of "I know exactly how you feel"). You may feel you are honoring their suffering by placing it on a pedestal or not trying to compare it to anything you have experienced. But grieving parents often say these expressions make them feel alienated — that their life is unimaginable to others.

What you should remember - You do have the power to imagine. The root of compassion is found in our ability to imagine. Once we start to picture what it might be like to stand in another's shoes, we can start to "suffer with" them (the meaning of the word "compassion") and let our hearts be moved with love for them.

You might be tempted to say - Be strong. Time heals all wounds.

What you probably mean - Clichés of certainty abound in the face of struggle: "Every cloud has a silver lining"; "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." We want to encourage one another in our suffering, which is a beautiful — and deeply Christian — instinct. But we cannot coax or coach one another through pain as easily as we would desire. Perhaps you do see qualities in the grieving couple which they cannot see clearly right now: their strength, their faith, or their ability to overcome adversity. Maybe you have found healing in the passage of time for your own deep hurts. But encouragement about the distant future is not always helpful when the couple is suffering in the present.

What you should remember - No prescribed time frame will fix the sorrow present, and no chosen mindset can overcome suffering. But the passage of time does change grief, as does growth in strength. Yet we should not view the couple as weak or slow if they find that grief remains. God is at work in our weakness (see 2 Cor 12:9), and it is God — not time or attitude — that binds up our wounds (Ps 147:3).

positive actions you can take today



There are many positive ways to help and support parents in their grief after loss. By our words, actions, and prayers, we can help create a more compassionate atmosphere around grief in our families, parishes, and communities.

Often the best things to say are the simplest: “I’m so sorry”; “I love you”; “I’m here for you”; “You and your baby will not be forgotten.” These four expressions of support are outlined in the four steps below: Acknowledge their pain. Listen with love. Support in practical ways. Remember them.

ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR PAIN



Especially in a culture that does not speak about miscarriage, grieving parents need their loss to be validated. Don't be afraid to speak of the baby they lost. You aren't reminding them of their child (since they could never have forgotten); you are reminding them that their child is remembered.

Send a card - A sympathy card can mean even more than a phone call, email, or text, since it gives something to hold and keep.

Offer a donation - A memorial gift to a charity related to the baby's loss or a favorite organization is a wonderful way to honor a baby's memory.

Give a gift - Create a care package for the parents — for example, a candle, prayer card, favorite tea or coffee, prayer shawl, journal, or book. Remember the baby with a plant or tree, memorial garden stone, jewelry with the baby's birthstone, picture frame, or a gift personalized with the child's name or initial. Having a Mass offered for the child or enrolling their name in the prayers of a religious community are two other comforting Catholic traditions.

LISTEN WITH LOVE



Scripture counsels us to “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). What grieving parents want more than anything is to have their baby back. Since that is impossible, what you can give them is time and space to grieve. Your support and prayers are the most important ways to help a grieving parent. You do not have to do anything elaborate — simply be present in their pain and let them know they are not alone.

Follow their lead - Some people may be open about their loss; others may not want to talk about it. Take your cue from them, and ask what they need.

Listen more than you talk - Offer love instead of advice. Try not to fix what can't be fixed. Listen to their story, even if they need to tell it many times.

Avoid clichés - No tidy explanation or trite saying can make sense of what happened. For example, switch “I can't imagine” to “I can only imagine” to extend your empathy. Instead of worrying what to say, just try: “I love you. I'm here for you.”

SUPPORT IN PRACTICAL WAYS



Instead of asking how you can help, make a concrete offer. “What can I do?” is often too difficult for the bereaved to answer during the fog of grief. In the immediate aftermath of miscarriage, grieving parents need help with life’s most basic needs. Offer to buy groceries, help clean the house, mow the lawn, or shovel the driveway. Keep showing up over time.

Food - If you’re local, bring a meal or help set up a meal train for others who want to help. If you’re long-distance, you can send a gift card for a restaurant, pizza, or groceries, or call a local restaurant to have dinner delivered.

Expenses - Medical bills for any kind of loss — even an early miscarriage — pile up quickly, and burial expenses can be overwhelming. Even a small financial gift can help a couple burdened by unexpected expenses.

Child care - If the parents have other children, offer to watch the kids for a few hours during the day (so they can rest) or in the evening (so they can get out of the house).

REMEMBER THEM



Reassure the grieving that you will be with them for the long haul. Call in a week; check in after a month. Be sensitive to how the parents may react to pregnancy news, baby showers, and birth announcements. Don’t assume that the couple is “done” grieving after a certain amount of time or after they go on to conceive again.

Remember their child - Set a reminder in your calendar for the day that they lost their baby, and reach out to them on the anniversary. Include their baby when you count children or grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

Remember the holidays - Send a note to the parents on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day — difficult days after the loss of a child. Light a candle at your holiday table to include loved ones who have died. Mention the baby’s name in prayer before a special meal. Honor their child with a Christmas ornament or other keepsake.

Remember the father - Don’t assume that dad is not grieving as much as mom. Studies show that men are equally affected by miscarriage and that their grief is often unresolved because it goes unacknowledged and unsupported by friends, family, and society.

prayer for unexpected moments of grief



*They woke him and said to him,
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”
He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!”
(Mk 4: 38-39)*

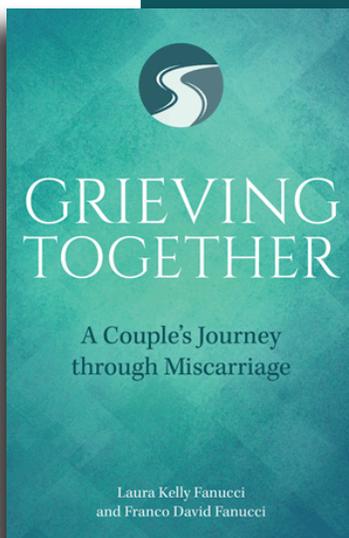
Jesus, your word quieted the chaos and stilled the storm.
When the night was dark and the waves were high,
You saved your friends from fear.
You rescued them from death.

Calm the grief that rises up within me,
The sorrow that steals my breath and aches my heart.
Let it remind me of my great love for my child,
But let it not send me sinking into despair.

Keep my eyes upon your light.
Deepen my faith,
Draw my heart close to yours.
Grant, I pray, your mercy and rest.

You are the way that leads me home,
The peace my soul seeks,
And the promise of the heavenly shore
Where your beloved saints, great and small,
Will together behold the beauty of your face.

In faith I pray.
Amen.



Grieving Together is the book the Fanuccis had wished for after their miscarriage. Practical resources include Scripture, prayers, and official Catholic rites. It also speaks to the unique concerns of fathers, and includes many real-life stories from couples in many different circumstances.

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