

THE LOSS OF YOUR GRANDCHILD



Stillbirth & neonatal death charity

SHROPSHIRE

Supporting anyone
affected by the death of a
baby

Helpline No: 07772 217439

www.shropshiresands.co.uk

Charity Registration No: 299679

INTRODUCTION

When a grandchild dies, you have to cope with a double load - your own grief for the baby, and the suffering of your own child.

One grandmother wrote -

“For me the suffering was doubly dreadful for, not only did I lose my precious grandchild, but I had to stand by and see my daughter completely heart-broken and be unable perhaps for the first time since I gave birth to her, to help her in any way”.

YOUR GRANDCHILD

It is always sad when someone dies, but the death of a baby is especially tragic, as it comes when a new life was expected.

A grandparent-to-be usually looks forward to a special relationship with the grandchild, but if the baby dies, that relationship is lost. “She was my first grandchild” said one woman “and I longed to hold her before her parents even met”.

The death of a grandchild may revive memories of other losses in your life, but at the same time, your grief may be overlooked as the focus is mainly on the baby's parents.

YOUR CHILD

As a parent, you feel pain when your child suffers, you may feel helpless because you cannot protect your child from sorrow. You may perhaps feel shut out if your child turns to someone else in grief.

OTHER FEELINGS

You may experience many emotions, which may seem ‘wrong’ but are, in fact, completely normal.

Anger - which may be directed at health professionals, at the ‘other side’ of the family, at God or even at the baby for causing such distress.

Guilt - may arise because you fear the baby may have inherited a problem from you, or because you had ‘bad thoughts’ about the pregnancy, or because you feel your reactions and feelings are inappropriate.

Conflict - your religious beliefs, perhaps may differ from your child's, so you see these events in a different way. You may have been taught to ‘keep a stiff upper lip’ or ‘not to talk about these things’ and find it hard to accept or understand the way miscarriages, stillbirths and neonatal deaths are treated nowadays.

THINGS TO DO AT THE TIME OF THE MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH OR DEATH.

- * If you live near enough, go to the hospital and see the baby's parents.
- * If it is possible for you to see the baby, do so. This will be helpful to you in mourning your grandchild, and also to your own child who will value shared memories

- * There may be ceremonies - baptism or blessing, funeral or memorial service - and it may be helpful to attend.
- * If you feel you can, offer to help with practical details which often fall to the father - go with him to register the birth and death, or stillbirth, help to arrange the funeral. Don't be too hurt if the offer is rejected.
- * Your child has probably been given leaflets which you can read. They may help your grief and also give you an idea of how the baby's parents feel, and how you can help.

AFTERWARDS

- * Continue to visit, phone or write, and provide love and support.
- * It will help your child's grief, and your own, if you can talk about the baby by his or her name.
- * In many cases, parents have a photo of the baby - don't feel it is macabre if this is displayed.
Perhaps in time you might like a copy.
- * If you are emotionally close to your child, you can provide a great comfort, but you can also cause great pain. Be careful about using 'comforting' phrases which may come easily to your lips. Don't say "you can have another baby" or "at least you have the other children", as this can be very hurtful.

The baby that dies was wanted for him or herself. The other children will not be a replacement.

- * Don't feel you have to be 'strong'. If you want to cry, do so. Children are usually helped by knowing that their parents care.

One young mother said

"When my child was stillborn, it was my mother's first grandchild... I never realized that his death would affect her so much. She had looked forward to him, and now she missed him too. I was glad she showed her emotion, a doing that showed she cared and that she had loved him too".

LONG TERM

- * It will take your child a long time to recover from the death of the baby - probably longer than you expect. It will commonly take several months to a year.

As well as sorrow, the parents may feel guilt, and the mother especially, may feel jealous of women with babies. Don't condemn these feelings, they are part of the grieving.

- * The father will also grieve, but may hide his feelings more.
- * Even when the first grief has passed, the sadness will last for years, with anniversaries and special occasions being particularly hard.
- * Future pregnancies will be very anxious times, and a new baby may be greeted with very mixed emotions.

We would like to thank the many bereaved parents and grandparents who helped to write this leaflet.