



Helping a Friend Whose Baby has Died Due to Miscarriage, Stillbirth, or Early Infant Death

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The death of a baby does not flow with the natural order of how we perceive life and death. In our society, we expect people to live long and full lives. The reality, however, is that people of all ages can and do die, including unborn or newly born babies. As a support person to a family impacted by such a loss, you serve an important role. Here are some practical suggestions for how you can help:

- ♥ **Don't wait for your friend to ask *you* for help; take the initiative!** Be proactive in your support. Instead of saying, "If you need anything at all, please let me know" consider the difference when you state, "I would love to do _____ for you and your family during this difficult time." Don't wait for the grieving parents to come to you. Chances are, they won't ask. When you take the initiative, however, they will be so very thankful. Here are just a few specific ways that you can offer to help:
 - **Deliver a meal.** In the days and weeks that follow a loss, your friend will be experiencing a time of readjustment, both physically and emotionally. Offer to bring a meal to the family. This will be one less thing that they have to worry about during a difficult time.
 - **Offer to care for any living children.** It may be likely that your friend has other living children in the home. If this is the case, offer to care for the children at a time that would be convenient for the family. Perhaps you could offer to care for them while the parents attend any follow-up doctor visits or just to give them some time away together.
 - **Offer to clean house.** When struck by grief, many everyday activities come to a standstill, including household chores. Offer to help your friend by cleaning house. It will be one less thing for the family to have to worry about.

- ♥ **Speak the baby's name.** If your friend named the baby, don't be afraid to speak his/her name. Speaking the name is a way of honoring that baby's life. If you are unsure about whether the baby was named, simply ask by saying, "Did you choose a name for your baby?" If the answer is "no," that's okay. Do not feel bad for asking. It means the world to grieving parents to know that others genuinely care.

- ♥ **Remember special days.** Facing special days, such as holidays, birthdays, anniversary dates and the like can be difficult for anyone who has had someone special in their life die. For parents who have had a baby die, there are some additional dates to be aware of, including: the due date of the child (in the cases of miscarriage, stillbirth, or premature birth/death), as well as Mother's and Father's Days. Send a card to show you care and be sure to acknowledge the significance that these special days hold.

- ♥ **Ask your friend how he/she is doing.** This may seem like a pretty straightforward suggestion. The truth is, however, we have a difficult time talking with people about death. Do not ignore the topic in the days, weeks, and months after your friend's loss. Rather, ask him/her how he/she is doing and be prepared to probe further with additional questions or conversation. Grieving parents need to know that others truly care about what they are going through.



- ♥ **Give a gift of remembrance or a keepsake.** When someone loved dies, we are left with many memories and a treasure box of artifacts, both of which serve as evidence of life. When a baby dies, however, there may be few memories or tangible mementos. There are numerous gift ideas to give in remembrance or as a keepsake. Some specific examples may include:
 - Have a baby quilt made and personalize it in some unique way
 - Give the family an outdoor perennial planting that will bloom each Spring
 - Customize a piece of jewelry with the baby's name or initials or consider giving a special charm
 - Purchase a meaningful figurine, such as the Willow Tree or Isabelle Bloom collections
 - Be creative and put together a small scrapbook or shadow box that details this journey

- ♥ **Don't forget dad.** In pregnancy and infant loss situations, most of the attention is focused on the mother. However, dads grieve too! Each person is going to experience his/her grief in their own unique way. Dads whose babies die are often expected to "be strong" and to protect the mom. Such expectation places added pressure for grieving dads. Recognize that the dad is grieving too and be sure to acknowledge this fact.

- ♥ **Do not unintentionally discount the death.** Both our actions and our words come into play with this suggestion. We tend to operate under the misconception that bringing up the death will only cause my friend greater pain. As a result, we tend to ignore the topic altogether. While our intentions are to protect our friend, we are unintentionally discounting the baby's life and death. The same can be said in situations when we try to offer up the right words, which then come off as hurtful or minimizing. When in doubt, it may be better to say, "I don't know what to say, but I am here for you." This shows that you care without the risk of saying the wrong thing with the best of intentions.

- ♥ **Offer your friend helpful resources to show you care.** There are a number of books, support groups, online communities, and various other resources aimed at helping families who have experienced the death of a baby. Do the research and let your friend know about the resources available to him/her in your community.

- ♥ **Finally, BE A FRIEND.** This may seem like an obvious statement. Truly, be a friend. Continue to do the things you enjoyed doing together before your friend's baby died. Think also of new activities you can enjoy together that honor your friend's baby, such as a fundraiser for some related and worthy cause. If you enjoy running as a hobby together, consider running a race in honor of the baby who died. If you enjoyed scrapbooking together, create a book in memory of the baby. The possibilities for incorporating ways to memorialize the baby together are endless. The act of doing so, and being the person who initiates it, will show your friend just how much you care.

A personal note of encouragement, as you help your friend...

Dear Friend,

I speak from experience when I say, your friendship matters. Don't let the awkwardness of the situation or your own discomfort keep you from reaching out to a friend whose baby has died. Your friend wants to hear from you. Your friend wants to know that you are there and that you care. The suggestions given above are a collection of selfless acts that a few of my own select friends carried out when my babies died. Their support in my own time of grief was a tremendous comfort to me and I want nothing but the same for your grieving friend.

*Take Good Care,
Teske*

