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6) You can't believe how sad you feel or how many tears you can cry. Don't try to ignore your feelings. You will be sad, but don't allow your sadness to control you. Others have survived their grief and in time, you will too. Happiness doesn't always come easily so nudge yourself to find it. Laughter and joy doesn't dishonor your loss. Finding joys in one of your choices; focus on joys that help you to heal.

7) You have the right to remember your baby—Your memories are an important part of you life. Healing doesn't mean forgetting or making the memories insignificant. Healing means refocusing. If it is possible, you may see, touch, name, and photograph the baby. You may wish to save a lock of hair, take a footprint, or have a memorial service. You may want to request an autopsy and see the report. Later it may be comforting to do something tangible like planting a tree, selecting a special piece of jewelry with the birthstone, or donating to charity. On the anniversary you may want to share a special time with your partner.

You Can Survive Pregnancy Loss

Most people have not learned coping skills for grief and loss. Pregnancy loss may be your first personal encounter with death. Surviving a loss is hard work; grief exhausts your endurance. Healing does happen in time. Focus on getting through the grieving rather than on the suffering. Respect your needs, limits, and imperfections. Be receptive to the caring and support of others and be patient with their shortcomings.

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While you are learning a lot about death, you are also learning a lot about life. There are joys after—and during—sorrows. Your reading of this information means you are on a path which will lead you through the struggle to survival. You can survive your pregnancy loss.

Miscarriage: Grief and Healing was adapted from materials prepared by Jody Earle, Luba Djurdjinovic and the Educational Materials Advisory Committee of the *Ferre Institute*.

The *Ferre Institute* is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the health of individuals and families by providing information and education on genetics, infertility, environmental exposures, and family healthy history.

Learn more about our programs
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infertilityeducation.org

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MISCARRIAGE

Grief and Healing



Being expectant usually means you are eager. Now you have suffered a loss, and you no longer feel eager. You are feeling more sadness than you thought possible. Although each person's grief experience is different, in all grief experiences there is a sameness. All losses represent unfinished plans, broken dreams, and a severing from the future you anticipated. You have heard about pregnancy losses, but until now you never really listened. Personal loss and death may be new territories for you and you're not certain that you know how to survive.

The Grief Process

With any loss, there is a process which consists of three basic steps.

- 1) Shock/Denial—"Oh, no! Not me!"
"Oh, those can't be blood spots. I've been taking extra good care of myself."
- 2) Anger/Guilt/Depression— "Why me? If only I'd..." "I want a baby so much. Everyone else doesn't even care and they have perfect pregnancies." "I've felt sadder this week than ever in my life."
- 3) Acceptance—"Yes, me. It's part of my life and I have to deal with it. Many people lose pregnancies and somehow pull themselves together. Maybe one of them can give me information about a counselor or group to help me."

Each step takes longer to go through than the previous one. There are many setbacks; some are anticipated and others

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are unexpected. Setbacks may involve baby showers, birth experience stories, new babies, OB/GYN office visits, nursing mothers, thoughtless comments, holidays, and family reunions. These can gnaw at you and wear you down, or you can accept them as unavoidable temporary annoyances. Working through the grief process is a part of your healing. It will not erase the loss. You will not forget nor will you be the same as you were before. You will eventually find a comfortable place to tuck the memory of your loss.

Your Healing Rights

Fortunately, all of us have a natural desire to heal and to feel better. This is a time to respect your needs and instincts, and to be gentle to yourself. Remember that you have some specific healing rights.

- 1) **You have the right to be informed** — Knowing the facts helps protect you from being misled. You have the right to know what happened, be aware of implications for the future, see your medical records, expect expertise, take notes, and ask questions.
- 2) **You have the right to make decisions**—It is your body, your baby, your partner-ship, and your future. It is up to you to choose whether or not you should be on a maternity ward, whether you want a private room, whether you would like visitors, and whether you would like an exception to rules so your partner can stay with you after visiting hours. In addition, you have choices to make about what you'll do with your maternity clothes and your baby items. Don't allow others to be "helpful" and

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- make quick choices for you; instead, use others as sounding boards to help you decide which options are best for you.
- 3) **You have the right to protect yourself**— There is no reward in punishing yourself. For now, avoid those situations that you know will be difficult. Don't wonder if you'll make it through the week. Instead, aim to make it through the next hour and then the next hour.
 - 4) **You have the right to take time**— Respect your need for time; hurting and healing take time. The amount of time needed varies with each person. No one can do your healing for you. Unfortunately our society resists anything which happens slowly. Grieving and healing are hard work and can't be rushed.
 - 5) **You have the right to receive support**—Be receptive to those who wish to help even though this may not be easy for you. Find appropriate support . Remember that those who care the most about you may not be the best choices for support. You shouldn't have to justify to anyone why you feel the way you do. If you feel out of control and can't seem to pull yourself together, consider seeking help from a counselor, therapist, or your support group so that you can be guided through your grieving.

You have the right to be sad and to be joyful— After your loss you have many uncomfortable feelings such as weariness, numbness, disappointment, inability to concentrate, betrayal, loneliness, helplessness, anger, guilt, and emptiness.

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