

## Suggestions for Supporting Parents

-Karen and Don Richer and Marcia McGinnis



- Offer a hug.
- Tears are normal. They release pain. Don't be afraid to cry with family.
- Offer, don't force, to provide meals or to baby-sit other children.
- Offer to listen and to sit with them. Ask if they would like to talk about their loss. If they do not, they will let you know.
- Let the parents set the pace.
- Don't tell them about other or worse situations. They are hurting about their own situation.
- Don't expect them to relate to common events-pregnancies, new babies, reunions, parties. They must protect themselves from further pain. In the future, these events will be happy ones again.
- They may say or do things that they wouldn't normally say or do. This is normal. They often feel guilty about these responses. Be patient.
- They will have good and bad days.
- Their baby's due date, anniversary of birth and death dates, holidays, Mother's and Father's Day are very difficult. Call or send a note.
- The fourth-sixth months after a loss are difficult. Denial is gone. The reality of their loss is clear.
- When they tell you how they feel- listen. Refrain from making judgements and setting timetables.
- If their baby has a name, please use it.
- A future pregnancy is not a replacement or "the" healing factor after a loss. Please don't focus on this possible event. Subsequent pregnancies are usually very stressful. Choices for the future have to be carefully reached. Please be patient.



The bereaved parent will appreciate your efforts to understand their grief. Just knowing you care is very important. It is okay to let them know that you are sad and grieving, too.

### **Be Truthful in Grief**

Just be my friend  
Just hold my hand  
And tell me the Truth  
Tell me that you are sorry  
Tell me that you can't fix it  
Tell me I did nothing to deserve  
the death of my babies.

...Tell me that you love me and  
You believe in hope for the future  
Because I'm too weak  
to believe that right now.

-Sharon Cryor, 10/96 SA



“Thank you, SA, for helping my daughter, Ondrea, after she miscarried her first daughter, Dakota. You were the sounding board she needed when I was probably at my most inadequate. Tess 1992

### **SHARE Atlanta offers:**

- **Parent Packet: Support Group info.** with resource materials and booklist. For parents after returning home. (Online or call.)
- Website with forums, stories, medical & grief links & information, candlelighting page
- Online Newsletter and Updates
- Memorial & Candlelighting Programs
- **Angel Garden & Memorial Brick Pathway** in Arlington Memorial Park, Sandy Springs, GA
- **“Outreach for Healing” Programs** (March of Dimes, 4Bs -Blankets, Buntings, Bonnets & Booties, Festival of Trees, etc.)
- In-service Programs
- Subsequent Pregnancy Support

### **SHARE Atlanta is:**

- a grief mutual-support group for families who have experienced ectopic, miscarriage, stillbirth and newborn loss.
- a non-profit organization since 1984.
- staffed and led by parent volunteers.
- funded completely by tax deductible donations.
- non-denominational with no fees.

## **SHARE Atlanta, Inc.**

Pregnancy and Newborn Loss Grief Support  
Since 1984

### **“Be Truthful in Grief”**

..Just be my friend  
Just hold my hand  
Tell me that you are sorry..

A guide for the family and friends  
of those who have experienced  
pregnancy or newborn loss.



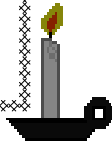
Neither the length of a pregnancy nor  
the length of a life determine a  
child's significance to the bereaved parents.  
Every child is loved and wanted.

Support ~ Information ~ Messages  
(770) 928-9603  
[www.shareatlanta.org](http://www.shareatlanta.org)

“I am a *cousin* who is hurting. I didn't understand. I thought baby Leslie's death was one of a kind. The stories and information on your website have helped me understand feelings and reactions after this type of loss. Thank you.” Reinette, KY 1996

My co-workers said, "I'm sorry..."  
I could hear their concern.  
One gave me a hug.  
I felt the concern.

A few friends said, "If you need to talk..  
I'll listen."  
That spoke their concern.  
Danis Cole, SHARE Atlanta 1990



### A Note to Family and Friends

We understand that the grief after your friend or family member's baby dies is difficult to understand and support. The parents appreciate those who have aided them during the first days after their loss. Many hope the parents will grieve for a few weeks and move on with their lives. To heal, parents must have space and time to move through their grief. This brochure discusses the grieving process after a pregnancy or newborn loss as well as ways to support the family as they begin to heal.



### The Grieving Process for Parents...

This process is most intense during the first six months to a year after their baby has died. Processing grief and making difficult choices in order to heal is an overwhelming, all-consuming job. Parents are grieving- the loss of their dreams of having this baby, the death of their child, and their dreams of their future with this baby. Many fear whether they will ever be able to have a baby or if they will survive the many intense emotions that they are now experiencing. This is part of the grief associated with a pregnancy or newborn loss.

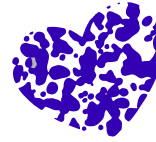


### Grief and Close Relationships...

When you try to include them in daily activities you may find them unreceptive or indecisive. This is normal. Parents have little emotional or physical reserve to engage in the activities that they once shared with loved ones and friends. These common activities seem out of place with their daily life as they struggle to understand their loss and learn how to cope.

Their reactions can be confusing and difficult for both the parents and those who love them. With healing, they will gradually embrace the familiar as well as new options that are important to them, their family and friends. Please be patient during this process.

I never imagined...  
How quickly life can change.  
How suddenly dreams can shatter...  
Elaine Yeager, SHARE Atlanta 1988



### Pregnancy & Newborn Loss ~ A Unique Loss

These issues are all "relationship oriented." Many cause conflicting feelings that complicate the grieving process for everyone touched by the loss.

- Death is rarely expected at birth or during pregnancy.
- The baby is not known by friends and family.
- Society does not understand the lasting impact of this type of loss. Parents are encouraged to "move on" before resolution has happened.
- Parents are often denied permission to grieve or to validate that they knew and loved their baby.
- There are few mementos and bittersweet memories. Often there is no funeral for closure.
- There is a loss of control, sadness, fear, and guilt. If these responses are denied by the parents and others, more losses (self-worth, hope, health...) happen.
- **Grief influences every relationship a parent has.**  
Marcia McGinnis SHARE Atlanta 7/97



### Help yourself so you can help them...

- **Give yourself "permission to grieve":** Your grief is normal. There will be sadness about the parents' pain, and confusion about how to best support their grief.
- **Learn about the Grief Process after this type of loss:** Bookstores, the library, the internet, our website, and our group provide many resources.
- **Allow everyone time to heal:** There is not one answer. It takes work and patience to heal after a tragic and unexpected death. Everyone's efforts are important.
- **Keep communication open—you do not have to know all the answers:** The parents must take care of themselves. Sometimes their grief is too intense to share. Confusion and indecisiveness are part of grief. Be patient. Listen. Let the parents be your guide.

**Support Groups:** Groups provide outlets for emotions that stress even the best of relationships. They help parents learn how to cope thus reducing the pressure on everyone. Join them if they invite you, but only if you feel comfortable to do so.

*Be honest and gentle in how much you feel you can do with and for the bereaved parent.*



### SA's Message to Bereaved Parents

- **Permission to Grieve:** As parents, love and grieve for your baby regardless of the baby's gestation. This was your baby-your dream.
- **Why Grieve?** We grieve because we loved. Normal grief can last from 6 months to 2 years. Intensity varies over this timeframe.
- **Intense feelings and reactions:** Panic, sadness, anger, loss of control, and fear are normal. "Yo-yo" pattern or the rise and fall of feelings happens.
- **Is this a punishment?** This is not a punishment for something in your past. Guilt is a normal part of grief. Forgiving is important.
- **Normal reactions & needs:** Crying, retelling the story, isolation for a period, heightened/decreased need for exercise-work-sleep, need for support.
- **Mothers and Fathers grieve differently:** Mother and child bonding begins in early pregnancy. Usually, fathers move on earlier than mothers who continue to seek resolution. Support each other.
- **Others:** As you can, share with others your feelings and coping ideas. They may not react in the way you wish, but try to keep communication open. You must still do what is right for you.
- **Support Groups:** You can safely share feelings and learn ways to heal. Feelings are validated by others who "have been there." Many attend steadily for 6 months to a year and revisit as needed. Later, volunteering provides a healing outreach.
- **Grieving leads to gradual healing:** By taking the responsibility to learn coping ideas such as creating mementos, attending memorial services and groups...

...Healing Happens.

