

How to Support Those Struggling with Fertility & Miscarriage

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Many struggle with knowing what to say to those who have experienced difficulty with fertility and those who have experienced pregnancy loss. A quote from Janet Jaffe, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at the Center for Reproductive Psychology in San Diego and co-author of "Reproductive Trauma: Psychotherapy with Infertility and Pregnancy Loss Clients"; states, "miscarriage is a traumatic loss, not only of the pregnancy, but of a individuals' sense of self and her hopes and dreams of the future. She has lost her 'reproductive story,' and it needs to be grieved." Research conducted by Cohain, Buxbaum, and Mankuta (2017) indicates that between 10% and 20% of people with a medically confirmed pregnancy will end in miscarriage. Eighty percent of these will occur during the first trimester, meaning that the majority of miscarriages occur within the first 12 weeks of gestation. Although the likelihood of spontaneous pregnancy loss is shown to decrease after 20 weeks, those who have experienced such a loss can continue to be haunted by worries and fears.

The following may provide you with some helpful tips for friends, family, and loved ones who may have experienced their own loss.

Dos:

- Be mindful of an individual's experiences, acknowledging and trying to be conscientious of their hardship. For example, not discussing another friend's baby shower in front of them. Additionally, sometimes just being there with them in silence can help make them feel seen.
- Validate feelings of grief after the loss of a pregnancy. For example, "I am so sorry for your loss. I want you to know I am here for you, whatever you need. Now, a week from now, or a month, or a year, I'm a phone call away".
- Ask how you can help and offer your support. Some examples of practical forms of support include dropping off a meal, offering to take care of any pets, offering to run errands. Even a simple act of kindness, such as delivering flowers or asking them if they'd like a distraction, can be meaningful. It is important not to make assumptions about their needs.

Don'ts:

- Do not attempt to "lighten" the situation by making jokes. For example, "You can have one of my kids."
- Do not assume one's religion or spiritual background if inappropriate for the person experiencing this hardship. For example, "It will happen in God's timing."
- Do not give unsolicited advice such as offering a magical supplement or herbal remedy that you heard worked for another person. Everybody is different and it is better to listen than try to problem-solve, even if you mean well.

- Don't say things like "You can always try again," "I guess it wasn't meant to be," or "You have plenty of time; there's no rush." Even if you mean well, those comments actually minimize and dismiss the valid feelings they are having.
- Do not focus on your experiences with current or previous pregnancy issues with someone who is struggling with infertility. It could come across as a bit insensitive because those struggling with fertility might willingly go through any pregnancy difficulties if it meant they could have a healthy baby.
- Do not rush people to "get over" their loss and move on; everyone has their own timelines.
- Do not pressure the individual to inform you of their fertility journey or their pregnancy status. They will inform you when they feel comfortable in doing so.
- Do not expect excitement if pregnant after a pregnancy loss. This may be a very scary and anxiety-inducing time. Encourage them to celebrate, if or when they are ready.

If you feel you or someone you know would benefit from talking with a professional and would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please try our [Psychologist Locator](#).

References:

<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/experts-and-stories/the-latest/coping-with-infertility-and-miscarriages>

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