

Grieving a stillbirth or neonatal death

~English~

(Copy of pamphlet from nurses at QMH)

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not glow in the harbour.

This document is meant to be a resource for mothers of
baby loss in Hong Kong but does not necessarily
represent the feelings and beliefs of glow in the harbour.

Grieving a stillbirth or neonatal death

Grief at the death of an infant is accompanied by seemingly unbearable disappointment. At times, you may feel as if you are going through stormy waves all alone. When your baby dies, your dreams and plans, your works as a parent to care and protect, are left unfulfilled. Having no memory other than those of being pregnant and quickening in the womb, your grief is difficult to work through.

Relatives and friends may perceive the child as non-person and instead of being supportive may encourage you to distract yourself, forget and get on with life.

Take time to grieve, to think about your baby and your feelings. Do not always try to avoid this by being too busy. Be patient with yourself.

Advice to Mother

It is most important to keep communication lines open between you and your family members or professionals as they are able to help you. Do not be afraid to talk about your baby, your feelings, your hopes, and your worries. The questions about cause of death, future pregnancies, and genetic factors need to be verbalized and responded to.

Grief is such an intense experience that you may feel like you're going crazy. The fruitless searching for your infant, the pain at seeing other parents with babies, that ache of empty arms and loneliness of crying—all these are normal reactions amongst many others with similar experiences. They will subside and pass in time. Do not block your tears, anger, desperation, misgivings, and feelings of having failed your baby and one another. Caring for what you feel is the most comforting and healing.

You may worry that the loss was a punishment... Certainly God does not take children as retribution for wrongdoing. If this issue is troubling you, speak to your minister or a counsellor about it.

We encourage you to do something to memorialize the child such as name your child, write a letter/poem, take a photograph—these will give substance to the reality and are aids to mourning. You may also arrange a funeral, a memorial service such as offering a prayer for your child, a planting of a tree in his/her memory, and/or making a donation in his/her name.

Postnatal Care for Mother

Time taken to recover from the grief is individual and different. You should ensure adequate rest and a well-

balanced diet so as to enhance your recovery. It usually takes about 6 weeks for your physical body to return to pre-pregnant stage.

Personal hygiene is also important. If you have perineal wound, you should clean it with shower after urination and defecation. Daily shower and frequently changing the maternity pad can ensure good hygiene.

Breast engorgement usually occurs in 3-5 days. A supportive bra may help. Stimulation and massage should be avoided because more milk will be produced. You can take pain killer if you have pain or have fever. Discomfort will subside after 2-3 days.

Postnatal follow up appointment will be arranged for you. Please attend the follow up to have a checkup and discussion with your doctor.

Advice to Father

You might be one of the fathers who find it hard to relate to a stillborn or neonatally-lost baby. If you were not able to bond with your developing infant during the pregnancy there might now be a gulf of misunderstandings between you and your wife.

Perhaps you have loved your baby from the start and are now grieving deeply as a couple. You do not know what to do with your pain or you think that if you hide your feelings, you will be a better support to the mother. But this leads the mother to think that the father does not care and she feels more lonely in her grief.

This is a time when you both need to be able to draw close, offer support, and give one another permission to have his/her own responses to the loss. Perhaps practically you do not know what is best: should the prepared nursery items be cleared away to avoid pain or left in place for your wife to do with as she wishes? Generally, the wisest course to follow is to ask her what she would prefer. Ideally, mutual agreement should be reached about what, and how, to tell others and children.

Mourning is a process and healing takes time. You may, at times, feel desperate or impatient to recover. Try to have patience whilst taking care of yourself and of each other. Coping with all of this is by no means easy, but it is possible to emerge from the experience and find life meaningful together once more.