

Miscarriage Grief Is Real

When you lose a living person, most people accept that your grief will not follow a prescribed timeline. Not so, I discovered, when you have an early pregnancy loss. When I lost a pregnancy at "only" 8 1/2 weeks, some felt my grief was disproportionate to my loss, and they expected me to "get over it" and "move on."

Some people don't experience significant grief over an early loss, and some people have never lost a pregnancy, so I can see how they might not understand how I felt. But even for those who think a miscarriage would not be a big deal for them, it is still possible to respect that it is a big deal for others.

And it's important to understand that. Because when you lose a pregnancy and then don't receive the sympathy and support you need, the intense emotions you feel can become even scarier.

I did some research on 'normal' grief after a miscarriage to help everyone understand what it can feel like. What is universally accepted is that the intensity of grief is not tied to the length of the pregnancy, but to many other factors, including how long it took to get pregnant, how much the baby was longed for, the context of a woman's "reproductive story," and how much support the couple received after the loss.

Here are 8 important things to understand about pregnancy loss:

Miscarriage grief is not related to how long you were pregnant.

"Another common misunderstanding about miscarriage is that a woman will experience less grief if she loses the baby early in her pregnancy. But most researchers have not been able to find an association between the length of gestation and intensity of grief, anxiety or depression... A woman who has lost her child at 11 weeks may be as distraught as a woman who has lost her child at 20 weeks..." The assumption that women emotionally attach in proportion to the length of the pregnancy is not always true. Eighty percent of pregnancy losses are first trimester miscarriages. Women often don't tell others about their pregnancy during the first trimester and may try to "keep from getting too excited" due to fears about a loss

Miscarriage grief is related to how long you have been trying to get pregnant.

"When you have a miscarriage, not only do you lose your pregnancy and baby, you also lose your hopes and dreams of the future. Your body isn't working the way you always expected it would; you lose control of feeling healthy and 'normal.' And it feels so unfair that everyone else can have babies – you want to shout, 'what's wrong with me?' No matter how far along you were, when a pregnancy fails, you lose a part of your reproductive story. You have experienced a reproductive trauma."

Miscarriage grief is related to your bond with your baby.

"Our loss can be minimized and invalidated by others, which leads us to question our feelings of grief. However, unrecognized or not, it is the strength of the bond with our baby not the length of the pregnancy that determines the depth of our grief. This mothering bond can have begun to form as early as us playing with our dolls as little girls, so our grief is a normal reaction to a broken bond."

Miscarriage grief is not acknowledged.

"A miscarriage is a psychologically challenging event. Unlike the loss of other family members, the grieving individual has had few direct life experiences or actual times with the deceased to review, remember, and cherish. There is no publicly acknowledged person to bury or established rituals to structure mourning and gain support, and, often, relatively few opportunities are present to express thoughts and feelings about the loss due to the secrecy that often accompanies the early stages of pregnancy. When others do know about the loss, they often fail to appreciate its impact or minimize it, making comments such as, 'It was not meant to be' or 'It is for the best.'"

Miscarriage grief is very real.

"The grief you're feeling is real – no matter how early in pregnancy you experienced the loss of a baby, you'll feel that loss deeply. Even if you never saw your baby, you knew that he or she was growing inside of you, and you formed a bond; however abstract the attachment, you felt it. The baby was responsible for your emotions during pregnancy. From the moment you found out you were pregnant, you imagined yourself a

Miscarriage grief is hard on Mother's Day and other holidays.

"You are not the only one. Somewhere over a silly Mother's Day breakfast, there is a woman faking a smile who feels just like you do. Somewhere in a very silent house with no one to call, there is a woman who is tending the ache of her loss, just like you. Somewhere standing in a shower there is a woman who is feeling it all and letting the tears come, just like you."

Miscarriage grief is felt by partners too.

"Partners suffer as well. No one especially ever talks about how partners experience loss. Partners of women who've miscarried often feel the loss in different ways and can experience a wide range of emotions and different feelings, including resentment that they were not connected to the baby in ways that the mother was and frustration that there isn't a way to fix the situation. Partners may feel helpless and may not feel like there is space to talk about their feelings."

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Give yourself time to grieve