

## Stillbirth

**“HOW DO I LEAVE HOME TODAY FULL OF YOU AND COME HOME TOMORROW EMPTY?” THESE WORDS ECHO THE HEARTBREAK OF PARENTS WHO, FULL OF HOPE AND EXCITEMENT, ARE SUDDENLY FACED WITH THE DEVASTATING REALITY OF STILLBIRTH. THE ANTICIPATION OF WELCOMING A NEW LIFE TURNS INTO UNIMAGINABLE GRIEF WHEN A BABY DIES JUST BEFORE OR DURING BIRTH.**

Parents often begin bonding with their baby during pregnancy, building emotional connections through the baby's kicks, the sound of the heartbeat, and the dreams, hopes and future plans. When that life is lost, the parents feel like they have lost a part of themselves, their identity.

All members of the family feel the loss when a baby dies, however, this type of grief can feel isolating for the parents. Every individual will experience a unique grieving journey, as everyone processes grief differently. Tension in a couple's relationship can often arise from traditional gender expectations around grief. Fathers are frequently expected to stay strong and suppress their emotions in order to support their partners. Men, in particular, may struggle with feelings of helplessness as they try to comfort their grieving partner while denying their own pain. On the other end, mothers are generally allowed, and even expected to express their feelings more openly. When parents conform to these gender roles, it may create emotional distance, making it difficult for couples to truly grieve together. However, there are couples who through this shared grieving journey, their relationship grows closer as they find comfort in each other.

Toller and Braithwaite (2009) labelled the tension 'Grieving Together – Grieving Apart' to describe parents who need to grieve concurrently on a couple and an individual level. This is because parents need

to grieve with their partner to be able to provide each other with the necessary support while also grieving alone, as every person's grief experience is unique. Thus, negotiation between the couple needs to take place, which includes accepting each other's different needs and ways to grieve. Hence, open, honest communication is imperative at this time, not just about the loss, but about how each person needs to grieve and how they feel they need to support each other.



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After experiencing such a profound loss, parents often struggle with returning to the wider community. Research by Pollock et al. (2020) indicates that many parents withdraw from others, avoiding potentially uncomfortable interactions and lacking the emotional strength to participate in social activities. While Human et al. (2014) noted that some individuals respond with empathy and support, parents grieving a stillbirth frequently encounter societal silence, stigma, and taboos. These challenges can significantly hinder their

ability to grieve openly or to honor and remember their child's life and passing.

Stillbirth is a profoundly personal and life altering experience. Healing takes time, patience, and compassion, not just from the grieving parents, but from those around them. Understanding, seeking support, and acceptance is imperative from the social context, such as family, friends and the work place, as families navigate the complex journey of loss and love.

# Conversation Starters After School

**IN TODAY'S FAST-PACED WORLD, MANY FAMILIES JUGGLE BUSY SCHEDULES. PARENTS OFTEN WORK FULL-TIME, AND CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, WHICH CAN MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR BOTH PARENTS AND CHILDREN TO SLOW DOWN AND CONNECT AT THE END OF THE DAY.**

Checking in with children after school fosters emotional connection, which also supports their development. However, this can be challenging due to stress, expectations, or distractions. That is why it is important to set the right scene: a calm, distraction free moment where the parent's attention is fully on the child. If one asks their child: "Did you have a good day at school?" during a rushed car ride, one will likely get a one-word response. Hence, it is imperative to make space where the child feels seen and heard. Also, such space helps to strengthen the bond between parents and children.

Using open ended questions that invites the child for a more open conversation can be useful. An example of such questions include:

- What was the best part of your day?
- What was the most difficult part of your day?
- What did you do during break time?
- Was there something interesting you learned today?
- Is there anything you would like to talk about?

It is important to let the children lead such conversations as each day is different, and the child's experiences are too. There might be days where they do not feel comfortable to open up about their day. As children grow, it is also important to adjust one's communication style and the type of questions to ask. Older children may respond better to prompts about their goals, dreams, and interests.

Finding a few minutes a day to connect with your child, can leave a lasting impact on the relationship. This shows your child that you are a safe, empathetic listener, a parent who they can trust in moments of joy or hardships. Over time, this will build a strong foundation for open communication.

# POSITIVE PARENTING TIPS

## **Listen Actively and Communicate Openly:**

Give children your full attention when they speak, acknowledging and validating their feelings to foster trust and emotional security.

## **Express Love and Affection:**

Show your love through warm gestures such as hugs, kind words, and praise to help children feel valued and secure.

## **Encourage with Positive Feedback:**

Reinforce positive behaviour through praise and recognition, helping to build your child's confidence and self-worth.

## **Teach Emotional Self-Regulation:**

Model and guide children in understanding and managing their emotions in a healthy and constructive way, including both positive and challenging feelings.

## **Create Meaningful Moments Together:**

Spend dedicated time with your child through shared activities, like reading, walking, or playing which helps deepen the emotional connection.

## **Set Age-Appropriate Expectations:**

Be mindful of your child's developmental level when setting goals, to ensure they are achievable and supportive of their growth.

## **Foster Responsibility and Independence:**

Involve children in age-appropriate responsibilities to nurture their independence, confidence, and problem-solving abilities.

## **Support Learning and Curiosity:**

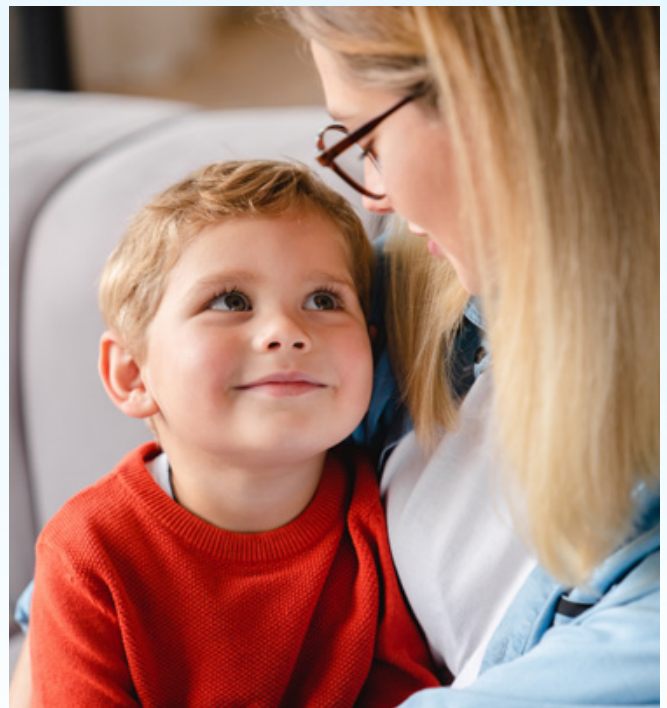
Encourage exploration and celebrate effort and persistence, not just accomplishments, to cultivate a love for learning.

## **Provide Gentle and Consistent Discipline:**

Establish clear, developmentally suitable rules and explain the reasons behind limits or consequences to promote understanding and respect.

## **Lead by Example:**

Demonstrate the behaviours, attitudes, and values you want your child to adopt, recognizing that children often learn by observing the adults around them.



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