



How to Navigate Care Through Pregnancy and Infant Loss

Every person experiences a loss of a child differently. While miscarriage, pregnancy loss, infant loss and child loss have their own distinct “technical” definitions, the one common truth is that loss...is loss. And the only people who truly understand this kind of grief and loss are those who have been through it.

Wherever you are on your healing journey, Poppy Seed Health holds space for you. Your loss is real. Your grief is too. We see you. We honor your loss...and remember your baby too. Knowing that there are no words that can ever change what you’re going through, we aim to support your healing journey with emotional and practical care—because in our society, loss has been invisibilized by silence and stigma.

‘How to Navigate Loss Care Through Pregnancy and Infant Loss’ is a guide created by trained advocates in loss care and by members of the Poppy Seed Health team who have experienced miscarriage and infant loss. It is designed to provide practical tools and language that can aid you in your healing journey and facilitate support by offering ways to hold space for grief, strengthen support systems and provide access to physical and emotional healing techniques.

Statistics like 10 to 20 percent of known pregnancies end in miscarriage will experience a miscarriage will never put adequate meaning to the real human experience of grief and loss. It is a traumatic experience. Suddenly everything is different while the world around you seemingly keeps going. There can be a shift in your identity and as you move through that, here are few affirmations worth remembering (and even repeating) that might resonate with you:

I am not a statistic.

I am a parent.

I am worthy.

My pain is real.

I can heal on your own timeline.

A COMMITMENT TO HEALING THAT YOU CAN SHAPE INTO YOUR OWN

Supportive words, whether from ourselves or from others help the nervous system to feel safe. After experiencing her own early pregnancy loss, our founder Simmone Taitt was inspired to write this commitment to herself. Take from it what feels right to you or write your own.

“I will try to love this mind, this body, this uterus, this loss...even though it's hard to be kind to myself through this. To choose resilience some days and rest the others. To honor my baby, my hopes, my dreams, and the could-have-beens— because as invisible these feelings are to some, my loss is real and invisible no more. I commit to doing what is best for my healing, including asking for care and support, when needed. I am not alone in my mourning and grief. I am loved and my baby is loved too.”

As you move through this guide, we invite you and your grief to come as you are. Remember that you are never being asked to shrink or hide any parts of yourself. There is no expectation that the grief will shrink or disappear, rather the acknowledgment that grief can change over time and that your capacity to hold it can expand and change too.

‘Life grows around grief’ diagram based on Lois Tonkin’s ‘Growing Around Grief’ model.



People tend to believe that grief shrinks over time.



What really happens is that we grow around our grief.

HOW TO CREATE AN AFTERCARE PLAN TO PHYSICALLY HEAL YOUR BODY AFTER LOSS

Take a second to breathe on this one. While discussing body healing after a loss can be hard, your body and you deserve care. At the end of every pregnancy, there is a physical healing period, and this is often overlooked when a pregnancy ends in loss. All bodies that have carried a pregnancy deserve support.

The end of a pregnancy of any length requires physical and emotional healing. An aftercare plan could include:

- **Restrictions on lifting heavy items or overexertion for at least two weeks**
- **Nourishing foods and if possible a plan for others to help prepare them**
- **Warm teas and broths**
- **Offloading of non-essential tasks such as housework to others**
- **Childcare**
- **Resources for older siblings to process as well**
- **Mental health support**
- **A doula**

HOW TO CREATE AN AFTERCARE PLAN TO PHYSICALLY HEAL YOUR BODY AFTER LOSS

Here's a breakdown of what that looks like:

Nutrients

Include blood builders with foods that will increase your red blood count (i.e. replenish after blood loss):

- Dark, leafy greens
- Nettles
- Red meat, especially organ meat, or legumes for folks who do not consume meat
- Dried fruits
- Egg yolks

Hormone support

Post-pregnancy, the body is rebalancing hormones. Elevated levels of progesterone are coming back down, estrogen levels are dropping. The liver and gut are processing these hormones, so drinking lots of warm liquids can help to support this. Foods that help you keep regular are key as hormones are processed through the digestive system.

- Prunes, psyllium seed husk, and chia or flax seeds can help to encourage regular bowel movements
- Probiotic sources such as yogurt, kimchi or sauerkraut
- Lots of water
- Chaste tree tincture helps stabilize progesterone and inhibit prolactin
- Red clover tincture helps modulate estrogen levels which can decrease experiences of hot flashes

Comfort

A loss can make you feel numb or disconnected from your body. It is ok if you are not present to any sensations of tenderness or discomfort, but if you are, then physical comfort is a priority and will enable deeper healing. You may also feel the physical toll of grief and exhaustion.

- Cramp bark tincture for pain relief
- Red raspberry leaf tea helps tone the uterus
- Heat packs
- Warm baths
- CBD
- Ibuprofen
- A glass of red wine, if it makes you comfortable

Immune support

Your body uses a lot of its own resources (e.g. nutrients, blood, hormones) at the end of a pregnancy and the immune system is working hard to keep your body well, so foods that boost the immune system are essential. Look for foods rich in Vitamin C, Vitamin D, zinc, selenium, iron and protein.

- Vitamin C: broccoli, peppers, citrus fruits
- Vitamin D: peas, bananas, nuts
- Zinc: whole grains, poultry, chickpeas
- Selenium: spinach, brazil nuts, fish, turkey
- Iron: see blood builders
- Protein: eggs, beans, yogurt, meat

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE PARTS THAT NO ONE TALKS ABOUT AFTER LOSS

Leaving the hospital after a miscarriage, pregnancy or loss of a child is hard enough. There are things that you have to do that you (and really no one) ever plans for.

Holding your baby

In the case of a stillbirth or infant death, you should always be given the option to hold your baby. Hospitals sometimes have special cots designed for this to be as prolonged as possible. Take pictures even if you may not want to look at them immediately, dress them, kiss them, speak to them and say their name. You are a parent and this is your time with your baby.

Obtaining a death certificate and rituals

You are not required to move quickly through these days. There are things that you now have to deal with that are reminders of your loss, such as obtaining a death certificate and planning a funeral. These are acts of care on your part as a parent, and as any new parent, you deserve support in them. Your state government website will have a section where you can obtain the death certificate, free of charge.

It is possible to go through a loss and turn away from the grief, it is sometimes too scary or feels too big to walk towards and feel. Rituals can help to integrate the loss—and although grief may not shrink our capacity to hold—it expands. A ritual can be a funeral, end-of-life celebration or a moment throughout the day where you breathe and feel the love for the person or spirit that you carried.

Momentos

Preserving physical reminders of your baby can be healing in the moment or later on in your healing journey.

Some ideas include:

- Resin jewelry made from ashes, hair, milk, placenta
- Photographs of your baby or your pregnancy
- Blankets, clothes or toys that your baby touched
- **Molly Bears** weighted bears designed to be the weight of your baby

How to talk about the loss with your other living children

You may be in a position where you need to talk about loss or fertility challenges with your other children. How to approach this is dependent on their age and comprehension level. A good rule is to tell them in the clearest way possible what has/is happening and create a dedicated space for them to ask questions. Processing as a family by doing a ceremony or your own special rituals for grieving is bonding and allows your loss to be out in the open. You may also want to ask other adults in your children's lives to follow your lead when talking about the experience. If it feels comfortable, acknowledge and talk about the sibling, some children like to write letters or talk to them too.

How to receive care as a partner of loss

If you are the partner of someone who has experienced a loss, you have also experienced a loss and so has your family.

You deserve support for your own loss experience. If you can hand off tasks to others and get mental health support you will be better able to care for yourself and your partner through this.

You may:

- Process the loss differently to your partner
- Have a 'delayed' response to your own grief
- Feel afraid, guilty, anxious or numb
- Feel angry, jealousy or resentment
- Have physical symptoms of grief even if you feel you are 'coping'. These can include an upset stomach, exhaustion, body aches and lowered immune system.

If you are experiencing any of these or feel that you are not able to perform day-to-day functions it is imperative that you access mental health support. You are not alone and your experience matters. Remember that the Poppy Seed Health Pregnancy Loss and Grief Hotline is for partners as well, it is 24/7 and it is free.

How to navigate family planning after loss

Depending on your circumstances, including infertility challenges and alternative planning routes, there is no definitive answer to "trying again."

Here are some markers to look for:

- When you feel physically recovered and emotionally supported
- When you have stopped bleeding to decrease risk of infection
- When your cycle has returned and is somewhat predictable
- Remember you can always pause if you need more time

HOW TO CONTINUOUSLY CARE FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Trauma is real and healing is not linear, and there is no shame in medication, therapy, leaning on friends and family. This is when we pull in all the help we can, because you deserve radical care.

Here's what has worked for other people who have experienced loss:

- Talk with a trained advocate in loss care with Poppy Seed Health's free 24/7 Pregnancy Loss and Grief Hotline.
- Join support groups online or IRL. Talking to others who have gone through loss can hold a space for your grief where others cannot. That is okay.
- Loss over time doesn't erase the emotional and mental impact, feelings of loss can be felt days or years after the event.
- If you think a psychiatric medication such as an antidepressant could help, ask your doctor.
- Explore and define your boundaries. People do not have the right to trauma dump on you as a way to connect. Trauma dumping is non consensually sharing traumatic and potentially triggering stories with a person, often without considering their experience or picking up on cues to stop.
- You are not obligated to take on the task of educating people about pregnancy and infant loss. Here is the 'The Other Side: [How To Care For Someone Who Has Experienced Pregnancy and Infant Loss](#)' guide you can send to friends and family and the '[Navigating Pregnancy and Infant Loss In The Workplace](#)' guide for your employer. They can do the rest.
- You are allowed to make jokes and use humor to lift yourself up. You are still you.
- Find sparks of joy and expression. Journaling, crafts, dance, galore.

LACTATION AFTER LOSS

Lactation begins between 16-20 weeks of pregnancy. If you are lactating after loss, there are a couple of routes: 1. Stop lactation or 2. Pump and donate.

Stop lactation:

Colostrum (the first phase of lactation) will transition to milk on its own even without stimulation. To stop lactating, express as little milk as possible. Drinking sage tea can help too. As milk comes in, the chest can feel heavier and more sensitive. Non restrictive clothing, warm showers/baths, massage on other areas of the body and lots of fluids can help you feel more comfortable.. Green cabbage leaves can be used topically, worn inside a loose bralette, to provide some relief for heavy or engorged chest tissue.

Pump and donate:

Parents who pump and donate have found that paying it forward—or nourishing other babies—has helped in their healing process. It is ultimately up to you and what is right for you. Things to keep in mind: parent groups can often donate storage and pump supplies if you don't have them. A lactating person needs rest, nourishment and support—you can stop whenever you want. A note, some anti-depressants are not compatible with chestfeeding.