

CARE GUIDE: INFERTILITY AND MISCARRIAGE

Grief over infertility and miscarriage is a pain people often carry silently that can affect them more than others realize. Infertility is defined as actively longing and trying for a biological child without success, and miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy at any point after conception. The struggle with infertility may or may not include miscarriage. Grief is not a linear process, and when connected to infertility, it can come in waves based on a woman's menstrual cycle. Every month brings fresh loss and reminders of what they do not have but deeply desire. Even if a couple has a child, infertility can still cause grief. Often, the longer the couple waits to conceive, the deeper the sorrow gets as they grieve unmet expectations and a loss of a future or identity they desire. God has not abandoned or forgotten your friends. He is with them and loves them, even in the depths of their sorrow (Psalm 116:1-5; Lamentations 3:32). Ask the Lord to help you know what your friend needs most and how he wants you to respond (Proverbs 3:5-6).

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- ***"Infertility is just a woman's issue."*** It takes two to create a baby. The struggle may affect the woman, the man, or both. Men and women can each experience shame if something within their biology contributes to the couple's infertility. Both may grieve the struggle they are experiencing as they long for a child.
- ***"If someone is struggling, he or she doesn't have enough faith."*** Feelings are a God-given gift that helps us experience all aspects of life. A world with infertility and miscarriage is not what God originally created, so it is appropriate to feel sorrow. There are no guarantees God will grant the request the way we want, but our honesty can deepen our intimacy with him. (1 Samuel 1:1-2:10; John 11:33-36)
- ***"Miscarriage isn't as hard as losing a child after birth."*** Any miscarriage is the loss of life, and everyone experiences loss differently. Whether that child only lived a few weeks in the womb or years after birth, death is still death, and it is right to grieve. (Psalm 139:13-16)
- ***"A child will make everything better."*** Adoption is a beautiful thing, but it will not take away the reality of infertility. Also, there are varying opinions around IVF, surrogacy, or other medically assisted pregnancies that are not easily answered and may add to the heartache. (Proverbs 15:22; Colossians 2:2-4)

HOW TO HELP

Be present to listen and pray. Most people don't want to talk about sad things, so they avoid hard topics. This causes those grieving to feel alone and isolated. They need you to be willing to step into their sorrow and sit with them as they talk or cry. You cannot change their situation or say magic words that will take away their sadness. Instead, validate their feelings and seek to understand. Pray the big prayers that your friends might not be able to pray for themselves. (Job 42:4)



Be sensitive when you announce or celebrate events. Share news of pregnancies with them ahead of time in private so they are not forced to process publicly in the moment. Consider having the husband of the pregnant couple text the other husband so he can discern when to best tell his wife. Invite the couple to visit the hospital to meet the new baby on their own. Women may also choose not to attend baby showers for a season due to the unpredictability of grief. (Romans 12:15; Colossians 3:12-13)

Follow up on news or updates they share. Visits to the doctor can be uncomfortable or confusing, so they may need extra encouragement afterwards. They may or may not want to share details, especially not right away, so refrain from pushing to satisfy your personal curiosity. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Remember important dates. If your friend lost a child due to miscarriage, mark the due date and miscarriage dates on your calendar. Reach out to them and acknowledge these anniversaries or other important dates like Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.

Be a safe place to share. Ask the couple how often they want to talk about infertility and what questions they want asked. Give them space to explain how they feel and the decisions they are facing. These struggles can place additional strain on a marriage and lead to division. You may do research together on topics if that would support the couple. Do not force personal opinions on them. Everyone's situation is unique, and bodies respond differently to medical procedures.

Avoid toxic positivity. Refrain from sharing a miracle story about someone who experienced infertility and later had children. It is good to be hopeful and pray for a pregnancy, but excessive optimism can also be hurtful. There is no guarantee God will give us what we want, no matter how good it is. We can be hopeful and open-handed while grieving and waiting. We have a God who walks with us through it all and loves us more than we can ever understand. (Proverbs 25:20)

DO SAY

"I am so sorry. That is so hard."
"How are you feeling today?"
"Do you want to share more? It's ok if not."
"I am praying for you. Is there anything specific I can pray for you this week?"
"I would like to bring you dinner. Would next Tuesday or Wednesday work?"

DON'T SAY

"At least..." or "Have you tried..."
"My friend did... and now has kids."
"Well, you weren't pregnant very long."
"You are young and still have time."
"Now you know you can get pregnant."
"Have you thought about adoption?"
"When you stop worrying, it'll happen."

KEY SCRIPTURE

Ask the Lord to help you discern when and how to share Scripture. Many people in difficult seasons are wrestling with God, so offer verses with compassion, patience, and humility. Psalm 13, 62, 139; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Isaiah 26:3-4; Lamentations 3; Luke 1; John 11:33-36; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Ephesians 3:20-21; Hebrews 10:23-25

NEXT STEPS OR WATERMARK MINISTRIES: Shiloh (groups for men and women)