

# Men and baby loss

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It can be an incredible shock to suddenly lose your baby, and can be a devastating experience for a family, the impact of which is felt forever.

## Types of baby loss

<i>Ectopic pregnancy</i>	An 'out-of-place' pregnancy in which the fertilised egg implants outside the uterus, typically on the fallopian tube. It is not possible to move such a pregnancy into the uterus. Around one in eighty pregnancies are affected.
<i>Miscarriage</i>	The spontaneous loss of a pregnancy before 20 weeks, typically without a treatable cause. A miscarriage can occur because the fetus isn't developing as expected, or due to genetic abnormalities in the developing baby. Nothing can be done to prevent it if there are problems with the pregnancy. Around one in four pregnancies end in miscarriage.
<i>Stillbirth</i>	When a baby dies before or during labour after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy. A stillbirth can occur because there's a problem with the placenta or an infection, but in about half of stillbirths there's no known cause.
<i>Neonatal loss</i>	Losing your baby in the first 28 days after birth. There may be a clear reason, such as a genetic problem, premature birth, or problems during labour, but sometimes there's no clear cause.

## How you might feel

Grief is overwhelming feelings of loss and sorrow – it is a deeply personal experience individual to each person. When a baby dies, much of the focus of support may be on the mother – but fathers and partners also have a relationship with the baby and so will also be grieving, not just for

the baby themselves but for the whole life you imagined with them. You may not feel the physical changes of pregnancy or miscarriage, but the emotional loss can be just as significant.

You will likely be focused on supporting your partner / mother of your baby, but in order to do so effectively you need to look after yourself. You don't have to be strong all the time – recognising that you need help and reaching out will enable you to better cope with life and be more supportive of your partner in the long term.

Loss of any kind prompts many emotions, including: anger, confusion, shock, isolation, guilt, anxiety, intense pain, powerlessness. All of these responses are completely normal, and remember that everyone responds to grief in different ways, there is no wrong or right way. The length and strength of your grief may surprise you. Be kind to yourself.

It's important to acknowledge what has happened, recognise your feelings, and reach out for support before getting to crisis point.

## How to cope

There is no one, correct way to cope with grief. Accept that what helps initially may change over time. With support, you can adjust to a new way of living that includes your grief, and honours the connection you have with the baby you lost.

### *Looking after your physical wellbeing*

Eating a healthy, varied diet and drinking plenty of liquids will give you the necessary energy and strength to cope with your grief. Try to minimise your caffeine and alcohol consumption, and avoid recreational drugs – although these may help suppress difficult feelings, this can become a problem in the long run (both for your health and for processing your grief).

Eating socially provides an excellent opportunity to see friends or family, and can serve as a way of celebrating your baby.

Regular exercise can help to improve your appetite and sleep, reduce stress, boost energy levels, as well as helping you feel better about yourself generally.

Exercising socially provides an excellent opportunity to see friends (or make new ones) and family, reducing feelings of loneliness. Try to get outdoors and in the fresh air if possible.

Having some routine in your day can help you with clarity and focus, and may provide a small sense of relief from the pain of grief as you adjust to a new way of life.

### *Looking after your mental wellbeing*

Sharing your feelings with someone, whether that be your partner, a friend or family member; or someone external and anonymous such as a helpline volunteer, can help you to process your grief, which can be very isolating. You could also join a local support group. This also allows you the space to connect with people who care about you and can support you, or at least can sympathise with your experience. If you're not used to talking about your feelings, it may feel difficult at first.

What if you don't want to talk to someone? That's okay too - silent or independent coping doesn't necessarily mean you are not processing your grief so long as you are making use of creative outlets to express yourself, share, and connect in other ways.

You may find it easier to express your feelings privately, for example through keeping a journal, which also provides a helpful record for you to look back at your process of grieving. You might find it helpful to read about others' experiences, or read books and support literature. To understand the different ways someone can cope with grief without talking, read this [blog](#).

Remember that there is no set time scale for feeling better – feelings can come and go and you might still have bad days after you thought you had recovered.

### *Building memories*

Memory boxes can help keep important mementos together (such as images from scans, and journal entries about your experience if you suffered a miscarriage; as well as photos of your baby, foot or handprints, a written description of what your baby looked like, or a lock of hair if you

suffered a baby loss). These can capture a memory of their life, however short, and can give you a focus for your grief.

### *Connecting with other bereaved parents*

Retreats offer a safe space for parents to get to know others who can empathise and share their experiences. Here you can say things you perhaps have never shared, and to feel the grief, pain, and injustice of your loss as you move towards healing.

Teddy's Wish funds [annual healing retreats](#) for parents who have lost a baby to SIDS, stillbirth, or neonatal death

### Your couple relationship

Losing a baby can place an enormous strain on your relationship, especially if you and your partner have different ways of coping with grief or difficulty sharing your feelings, which can lead to misunderstandings and tension. Perhaps one of you wants to sit with the grief a little longer while the other only wants to look forward. You may feel differently about the prospect of trying for another baby.

It's important to reach out to, and keep talking with, your partner. Be open about your own needs and feelings, and respect theirs, remembering that everyone's grieving journey looks different. These differences don't mean that one of you feels the loss more intensely than the other.

For more support, see Tommy's [page](#) on supporting each other as a couple.

### Supporting bereaved siblings

If you already have a child, you may feel unsure about how to explain the death of their sibling, and how much information to share with them (particularly if they are very young).

Remember that even without using words, you are communicating with your child through your body language and behaviour – so it is best to inform them as soon as possible. Just like adults, children will all have

their own ways of understanding and processing grief. It is important that they know they can speak with you, and that you are available to listen.

For more on this, see the Lullaby Trust's page on bereaved siblings [here](#).

For help supporting grieving children following baby loss, see this Winston's Wish [page](#) and this Child Bereavement UK [page](#). For tips on talking to children about baby loss, see this Tommy's [page](#).

For an overview of children's understanding of death at different ages, watch this [short video](#) by Child Bereavement UK. They also have some helpful ideas for [activities for grieving children](#).

For children who are slightly older, they may find the [Sibling Support](#) website helpful.

## LGBTQ+ parents

For some LGBTQ+ parents, there are other losses associated with pregnancy such as a failed IVF cycle. The anticipation of a pregnancy, despite it not occurring, can be enough to experience it as a pregnancy loss.

There may be additional complexities which can impact on your grieving journey:

- Cultural silence surrounding pregnancy loss may be more acute, with your grief made worse by a lack of recognition of the significance of the loss
- Difficulties of conceiving raise the stakes of the pregnancy, and can create multiple losses if the pregnancy is lost
- If people around you have been negative about your gender identity or sexuality, you may have kept quiet about the pregnancy, leaving you with a lack of support
- If you're going through surrogacy, you may feel a sense of responsibility and care for your surrogate
- If you're a trans birthing father, you may also be dealing with a complicated emotional experience of having to reset your body to do something considered female

Most NHS bereavement support is focused on the birthing mother, which may not apply to you or your partner. Perhaps you haven't felt recognised

or included as a parent by health professionals, who may not understand. This can make it hard for LGBTQ+ parents to receive the necessary care, or to have a chance to hear similar stories and feel less alone.

Some blog posts you may find some comfort in:

A [blog post](#) by a widowed and bereaved seahorse dad

A [blog post](#) about a dad's experience of pregnancy loss with a surrogate

A [blog post](#) by a trans dad and gestational parent

For birth and parenting support services for LGBTQ+ people in the UK, see [The Queer Parenting Partnership](#).

## What happens next?

As a newly bereaved parent you will face many difficult conversations and the need to make decisions at a time when you may not feel able to engage, due to overwhelming feelings of anger, confusion, or sorrow, amongst others.

If you need help in deciding whether to have a post mortem for your baby, watch this [short film](#) by Held in our Hearts, created from the experiences of other bereaved parents.

For legal help following baby loss, see this [page](#) from the Compassionate Friends:

- Support with the child death review process
- Coping with legal proceedings
- Coping with inquests
- Help making a complaint to or about the NHS

For an explanation of the practical steps taken following the sudden and unexpected death of an infant (a child under one year of age), see this [information](#) from the Lullaby Trust.

## Returning to work

If you are eligible for paternity leave and/or pay, you can still take it if your baby was [stillborn](#) from 24 weeks of pregnancy, or was born alive at any point during the pregnancy.

If you lose your baby prior to 24 weeks of pregnancy, you can request a [baby loss certificate](#) from the Government recognising your grief (free, optional). You could speak to your employer about the possibility of taking bereavement leave.

For help on returning to work after your baby loss, see this [page](#) by Child Bereavement UK. You can also watch this [short video](#) on talking about miscarriage in the workplace by Miscarriage Association UK. Tommy's has a blog on [returning to work as a grieving father](#).

## Resources

### *Helplines*

[The Lullaby Trust bereavement support helpline](#) (free): listening service

[The Compassionate Friends helpline](#) (free): run by bereaved parents

[Teddy's Wish counselling support service](#) (free of charge to parents who have lost a baby to stillbirth, neonatal death, or SIDS)

[Sands helpline](#) (free): for anyone affected by the death of a baby.

### *Videos*

[Al's story](#) (Tommy's)

[Are men forgotten in miscarriage?](#) (BBC Two)

[Dads grieve too](#) (Held in our Hearts)

[In this with you: Paul's story](#) (Tommy's) [neonatal loss]

Miscarriage Association UK has a collection of personal stories in video format covering various topics, including:

- [Second trimester miscarriage](#)
- [Pregnancy after miscarriage](#)
- [Coping with recurrent miscarriage](#)

### *Podcasts*

[A father's grief](#) (Time to Talk) [terminating a pregnancy for medical reasons]

[Dad still standing](#) [two dads discussing baby loss]

## *Blogs and articles*

[Here's why you shouldn't forget that dads have miscarriages too](#) (DadsNet): a collection of personal comments from dads who have experienced miscarriages, and how they felt others treated them

[How a man handles a miscarriage](#) (art of manliness): personal reflection of a journey of multiple miscarriages

[The heartache of losing a baby: a dad's story](#) (Bright Horizons)

['I was grieving but couldn't admit it': why men cope so badly with miscarriage](#) (The Guardian, including quotes from FI).

[A father's story](#) (Miscarriage Association UK): recurrent miscarriage followed by successful pregnancy

Find more stories about men's experiences of pregnancy loss from Miscarriage Association [here](#)

## *Signposting*

For a more comprehensive list of organisations providing resources relating to pregnancy loss and pregnancy-related problems (not all father-focused), see [here](#) (compiled by Miscarriage Association UK).

Sands have also compiled a list of organisations providing support, organised thematically, which you can access [here](#).

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust has a page for partners [here](#).

The Lullaby Trust has a [leaflet](#) of tips for coping the trauma of a sudden bereavement.