

## About Grief

- Grief over the loss of a baby can be as intense as grief over the death of any other family member.
- Grieving parents may experience a range of emotions, including shock, sadness, anger, fear and guilt, as well as physical symptoms.
- Parents may grieve the loss of their hopes and dreams for their future as they had envisioned it, as well as their identity as a parent.
- Grief is unpredictable and may come in waves.
- Partners often grieve differently and may feel alone and unsupported.
- Parents must feel free to express their love for the baby they have lost and to grieve in their own way.
- Seeing pregnant women and babies, holidays, and significant dates can be painful after the loss of a baby.
- Family and friends often find it hard to talk about the baby, and inappropriate comments may cause further grief.
- Grief is a transformative experience. Life is divided into before and after the loss.
- Grandparents often grieve for their grandchild, and may find it difficult to cope with their own child's pain.

### How Friends and Family Can Help

- Allow parents to share their pain.
- Listen. Don't try to fix or change parents' feelings.
- Express your own sorrow.
- Say the baby's name.
- Be patient—grief may last for years.
- Stay in touch often.

## Contact Us

### HAND OF THE BAY AREA Helping After Neonatal Death

#### CHAPTERS

- NORTH BAY (Marin/Sonoma)
- SAN FRANCISCO
- SAN MATEO
- SANTA CLARA
- SANTA CRUZ

#### CONTACT US

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#### 24-HOUR STARVISTA CRISIS HOTLINE

650.579.0350

Your call will be referred to HAND by StarVista, and a HAND volunteer will return your call within 24 hours.

**HAND** relies solely on donations and volunteers to support its programs. For more information please visit our website at [HANDsupport.org](http://HANDsupport.org).

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*This brochure is also available in Spanish. Please contact us to request brochures or download from our website at [HANDsupport.org](http://HANDsupport.org).*



**HANDsupport.org**

We are a volunteer group of parents who have experienced the loss of a baby before, during or after birth.

We offer empathetic peer support to parents and their adult family and friends during the normal grieving process following:

- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Loss of a pregnancy that was wanted, but interrupted, after prenatal diagnosis or for maternal health
- Premature birth
- SIDS
- Infant death in the first year of life

HAND has been offering peer support to Bay Area families since 1981. HAND is a secular 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and all our services are free.

## How HAND Can Help

We are so sorry you have suffered the loss of your baby. To help you with this heartbreaking loss, **HAND** provides empathetic peer support and information about pregnancy loss and infant death. Bereaved parents often find solace in talking with others who've experienced similar losses and truly understand the complexity and depth of grief that comes with the loss of a child.

### **HAND** offers:

- In-person and virtual grief support group meetings for parents who are grieving a pregnancy or infant loss.
- Specialized virtual support groups:
  - Early Pregnancy Loss
  - Parenting After Loss
  - Subsequent Pregnancy
- One-on-one peer support from a **HAND** volunteer via phone and/or email.
- Information and resources for bereaved parents and professionals.
- Presentations and bereavement care sensitivity training for healthcare providers.
- Annual Service of Remembrance, creative workshops and other events to help parents process grief and cherish their babies.
- Helping Hands quarterly newsletter.
- Limited financial assistance to help eligible families with funeral expenses.
- Volunteer opportunities where parents can honor their losses while helping other bereaved families.

## After Your Loss

### **First Days: What to Expect**

- During the early days of loss, grieving leaves little energy for anything else.
- After delivery you may want to stay in the maternity unit, or if you find it difficult, you may ask to be moved to another area of the hospital.
- Engorgement and breast milk can be a painful physical reminder that you don't have a baby to nurse. Your healthcare providers can help you with this.
- You may be asked to sign a birth and/or death certificate and to make decisions about the handling of your baby's body.
- An autopsy may be helpful to understand the cause of your baby's death.
- You may feel ill and drained after your loss, and hormonal changes might make things harder. Talk to your doctor about any concerning symptoms.
- In addition to grieving, you may be worrying about the future, your chances of conceiving again, and the possibility of another loss, especially if it took a long time to get pregnant due to fertility issues.

### **Early Pregnancy Loss**

- An early loss can be just as painful as a later term loss and deserves acknowledgement and support. If you're grieving an early loss, that grief is valid.
- How you feel depends on your experience, circumstances, and what your pregnancy meant to you.
- There are fewer tangible memories of pregnancy when a loss is early, so some parents create their own mementos (a stuffed animal, a memorial plaque, engraved jewelry).

## After Your Loss

### **Helpful Suggestions**

- Seeing and holding your baby helps to affirm your child's life and gives you lasting memories.
- Naming your baby is a way to honor your baby's uniqueness and can help later when you think and talk about your child. It's never too late to name your baby.
- Photographs of your baby, a lock of hair, footprints, and other items can be treasured mementos.
- Be kind to yourself. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel. There is no correct or incorrect way to grieve.
- Give yourself a break. If possible, put responsibilities and expectations on hold until you have more energy.
- A memorial service, a religious ceremony, or planting a tree or garden can be helpful at any time.
- Stay in touch with those friends and family who understand how to support you in your grief.
- It's okay to avoid people and events, like baby showers and children's birthday parties, until you feel up to it.
- Take good care of yourself with nutrition, rest, time in nature, physical activity, and anything that comforts you, moment to moment.
- Get all the support you need through support groups, online communities, spiritual care and/or grief counseling.
- Tell your story and express your feelings. Allow yourself to cry.
- Try to avoid major decisions and big changes. Grief can be overwhelming and your judgment may be clouded for a while. If you must make decisions right away, seek input from a trusted family member or friend.