



When a Baby Dies

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When a Baby Dies

- “The child will always be there. Real love doesn’t die.”
- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross 1976



When a Baby Dies

- Grief is intense, lonely and personal.
- The death of a child is unexpected and destroys dreams and hopes and the future
- There is no word in English for what you are when you have lost a child.



When a Baby Dies

- Pain may be eased if they have insight into what has helped others.
- Peer contacts, support groups, websites, chat rooms, professional grief support





When a Baby Dies

- **Shock, denial numbness**
- Help soften the impact of the death
- The parent is “Strong” and “holding up well”, or “insensitive”, “unfeeling”
- Denial can last minutes, days or weeks

When a Baby Dies

- **Reality: intense suffering and pain**
- Crying, weeping, incessant talking
- Relatives and friends and professionals may be uncomfortable with the intensity of the grief.



When a Baby Dies

- Resolving grief is not the same as “getting over it”.



When a Baby Dies

- **Guilt**

- “if only I had: quit smoking, not gone back to work, not used that babysitter, not gone on vacation”



When a Baby Dies

- Anger
- Anger at themselves, their spouse, the physician, the hospital, God





When a Baby Dies

- Fear
- Over-protectiveness, can't sleep, can't concentrate, can't make decisions
- Physical symptoms: chest and stomach pain
- “Going crazy”

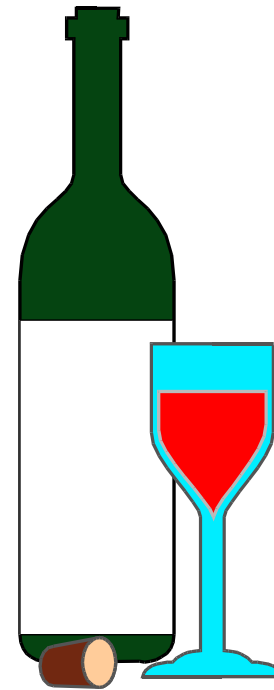
When a Baby Dies

- **Depression**
- Unhappy, sad, worthless, failure, lethargic
- Life has no meaning
- Aching arms, hearing baby cry



When a Baby Dies

- Complications:
 - Consuming guilt and anger
 - Alcohol, drugs, gambling
 - Immobilizing depression
 - Can't sleep or eat





When a Baby Dies

- **Resolution**
- Life has meaning again
- Pain lessens but is not forgotten
- Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries can trigger periods of pain
- Slow process, no set time frame



When a Baby Dies

- **Help families cope**
- Explore coping mechanisms they used in the past
- Identify support systems
- Explore potential solutions and strategies
- Evaluate other stresses
- Refer to appropriate agencies



When a Baby Dies

- First Encounters Matter
 - You can't take the pain away but please do not add to their pain.
 - Families will remember forever if you were caring
 - Introduce yourself: Who you are, what you know, and that you care



When a Baby Dies

- **Decrease confusion**
- Validate their understanding by asking them what happened
- Avoid jargon
- Give clear information
- Provide immediate care, privacy, allow parents to see and hold child



When a Baby Dies

- BE with their grief
 - Let go of “doing”
 - Hear their story
 - There are no pat answers
 - Learn to sit with families and understand “helplessness”



When a Baby Dies

- **Mementos**: pictures, footprints, locks of hair
- Clergy or social worker
- Be considerate when discussing autopsy and funeral plans
- Offer complete information
- Provide information about support groups



When a Baby Dies

- Listen for signs of healing or for signs of complications
- Normalize grief
- Ask families how they said good-bye
- Be ready to hear of other losses
- Grief is like an open wound
- Understand difference between support and counseling



When a Baby Dies

- Care for Yourself
- Know your limits. Know how much you can give
- Refill yourself. Debrief
- “Be” with their pain but don’t take on their pain.
- Know you made a difference in their lives

When a Baby Dies

- **Cultural and religious rituals.**
- If unaware of cultural, religious beliefs, ask the parents





When a Baby Dies

- **Resources**
- March of Dimes Bereavement Kit
- SIDS Mid-Atlantic
- Aplacetoremember.com
- Centering.org
- FIMR