

Grief is such a personal experience and for many couples, after the death of one of their singleton children or one or more of their multiple birth children, it is often difficult for them to understand why they are unable to help each other through this most difficult time.

Parents often express their grief in very different ways. This may cause them to drift apart because each parent feels that the other should show the grief in the same way as they do.

Many women may find the only way they can show their grief is by crying often and, though they can repeatedly talk about their deceased child or children, they may be unable to talk about the pain they are experiencing with themselves.

For many men, the message they have received all their lives is that “men don’t cry”. This can force them to take their grief “behind closed doors”.

Both the mother and the father may also feel the restriction that our society seems to place on us, that it is only appropriate to show our grief or our tears for a short time, so, many bereaved couples grieve in private, not letting the outside world see they are still grieving some time later.

Within the relationship of a couple, one partner often sees the other as the single person who will be there to provide personal comfort and understanding during a time of great pain and sorrow. If you are one of the bereaved parents and you believe your partner does not see that the way you are grieving is right for you, it may

often increase the pain and sorrow that you feel. If you feel your partner is “not there for you”, your grief may turn into feelings of bitterness, anger, rejection and ill will, aimed towards your partner.

Any difficulties that your partnership may have previously experienced before your child or children died may also escalate.

You may find that you differ in your feelings about treatment of other children in the family, as they adjust to life without one or more of their brothers or sisters. Acceptance by adults of how children grieve can also be difficult and can cause problems between you as you try to agree about what action to take. Caring for the surviving children of a multiple birth, and knowing how and when to tell them about the multiple/s that died, will be other issues facing you. One of you may decide it is easier to “switch off” and just let the other look after all these situations.

Some strategies that may help you

- Try to accept that you and your partner may grieve in different ways and at a different rate, and both ways are the ‘right’ way for each of you.
- If you are having a ‘down’ day, understand that your feelings may not coincide with those of your partner. Come to the realisation that each of you will need time alone at some point in your grieving to work through the different stages of grief that you will experience. Try not to be angry if on your

‘down’ day, your partner is having a ‘good’ day.

- Try to keep talking to each other, as difficult as this may be sometimes, especially in the early days. Talk about your surviving children and about how you can help them with their grief. Talk about the belongings of your child/ren that have died, and which ones you both feel should be kept. Particular consideration will need to be given to any special mementos or memories which have been gathered.
- Looking back and reminiscing over the time you spent with your child/ren before and after they died remains long after the initial loss. As the person who has shared most of these experiences with you is your partner, it can be devastating not to be able to reach out to discuss these important decisions. Though it is difficult at first, as times goes on it can often be helpful and enjoyable to remember the “happier times” together, as a family.
- Affection between many couples after the death of a child or children can be difficult to express. It is important to have someone you can physically touch, or who can touch you, and it is important that it can be your partner. It can be extremely difficult to keep the hugging, cuddling and even lovemaking alive in your relationship. Many partners can feel guilty about enjoying this close physical contact after the death of their child.

- Many families have been through similar situations in grieving over their deceased child/ren. Seek their support. Often the support you can receive from other couples who have also had to face this sorrow can help you understand your own grief and that of your partner. Because men and women grieve so differently, some mothers find they can only talk about their grief with another mother, and some fathers with another father. Many people find they form new and often lasting friendships with other bereaved parents.
- The most important thing to remember is that your life will go on, even though one or more of your children has died. It can be very difficult to realise that this relationship of yours involves more than just that child or children. It involves two adults who are trying to rebuild their shattered lives after a tragedy which others cannot even begin to understand, unless they have experienced the death of their own child/ren.
- Do not be surprised if your grieving intensifies many months or years after the death of your child/ren. In the case of surviving multiple birth babies, parents have to juggle the sadness of the child/ren who died with the joys of having the survivor/s, as well as the busy and often tiring new lifestyle this brings. Frequently your grieving is “put on hold” and not dealt with until sometime later.
- Do not be afraid to seek help. This may be in the form of grief counselling, relationship

counselling or a combination of both. You should not see this need for help as a failure on the part of either partner to handle grief.



If you have experienced the miscarriage or death of one or more of your multiples, you may like to have contact with other bereaved multiple birth parents. Enquire about such support through your local group of multiple birth parents, or contact the Australian Multiple Birth Association. Please know that to members of our association, you will always be multiple birth parents. You can visit our website for resources and support services at:

amba.org.au/bereavement.php

or contact our bereavement support at:

bereavement@amba.org.au

24 Hour Support Lines:

Miracle Babies

1300 622 243

SIDS and Kids

1300 308 307



BEREAVEMENT

GRIEVING COUPLES

A leaflet for parents
(written by a bereaved parent)

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