

HANDLING HURTFUL COMMENTS

WHEN YOUR BABY HAS DIED DUE TO
MISCARRIAGE, STILLBIRTH, OR EARLY INFANT DEATH

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IN THE AFTERMATH OF PREGNANCY OR INFANT LOSS, YOU MAY EXPERIENCE UNWELCOME AND HURTFUL COMMENTS FROM THOSE AROUND YOU. IT CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT TO MAKE SENSE OF SUCH REMARKS. HERE ARE SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF THE WELL-MEANING, YET HURTFUL COMMENTS THAT YOU MAY ENCOUNTER:

BEWARE OF THE “AT LEAST...” COMMENTS.

At least you were only ____ weeks along.

At least you have your other children.

At least you can get pregnant.

At least you didn't have to give birth (miscarriage).

THE PROBLEM WITH “AT LEAST...” COMMENTS IS THAT THE VERY NATURE OF THE WORDS MINIMIZES THE VERY PROFOUND LOSS YOU ARE EXPERIENCING. “AT LEAST” TENDS TO MINIMIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUR BABY’S LIFE AND MAY LEAVE YOU FEELING AS THOUGH YOUR LOSS IS NOT IMPORTANT. THE REALITY IS THAT YOUR BABY’S LIFE IS SIGNIFICANT AND WHAT YOU ARE FEELING IS VALID AND IMPORTANT. KNOW THAT THE PERSON WHO OFFERS THE “AT LEAST” COMMENT IS MOST LIKELY TRYING TO HELP YOU FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE SITUATION AS A WHOLE. THEIR INTENTIONS ARE WELL-MEANING, BUT THE MESSAGE CAN BE HURTFUL. BE PREPARED FOR THESE COMMENTS AND STAND FIRM IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR CHILD’S LIFE, NO MATTER HOW BRIEF, MATTERS.

You can always try again.

FOR SOME, THE VERY THOUGHT OF “TRYING AGAIN” MAY BE ABSOLUTELY DREADFUL. FOR OTHERS, IT MAY BRING A SENSE OF PEACE. WHICHEVER THE CASE, THE FACT REMAINS THAT A NEW PREGNANCY CANNOT REPLACE THE LIFE OF YOUR BABY WHO DIED. AS A COUPLE, YOU MUST DECIDE TOGETHER IF AND WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO “TRY AGAIN.” ALSO, BE MINDFUL OF YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER’S GUIDANCE IN THIS MATTER.

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How many children do you plan on having?

THIS QUESTION MAY ARISE, PARTICULARLY IF YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED MULTIPLE LOSSES. IT CAN BE A HURTFUL QUESTION TO FIELD, ESPECIALLY IF YOU FEEL A STRONG DESIRE FOR MORE CHILDREN. KNOW THAT THE PERSON ASKING THE QUESTION IS LIKELY MOST CONCERNED ABOUT YOU AND YOUR WELL-BEING, NOT NECESSARILY THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN YOU PLAN TO HAVE.

This is just 'nature's way'. Something must have been wrong with the baby.

COMMENTS LIKE THIS CAN BE ESPECIALLY HURTFUL BECAUSE IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE THAT ANYTHING WAS "WRONG" WITH YOUR BABY. SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW THE CAUSE OF YOUR BABY'S DEATH WHILE OTHERS OF YOU WILL NEVER KNOW. WHAT IS KNOWN, HOWEVER, IS THAT YOUR BABY WAS PRECIOUS AND LOVED, DESPITE ANY KNOWN OR UNKNOWN DEVELOPMENTAL IMPERFECTIONS.

Your baby is in a better place.

THIS STATEMENT MAY BE A MATTER OF TRUTH FOR YOU, DEPENDING ON YOUR INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS. IT CAN ALSO BE HURTFUL TO HEAR, THOUGH, BECAUSE AS A PARENT IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE YOUR CHILD COULD BE ANYWHERE "BETTER" THAN WITH YOU.

IN COPING WITH HURTFUL COMMENTS, STRIVE TO LOOK BEYOND THE ACTUAL WORDS THAT ARE SPOKEN AND TRY TO EXAMINE THE INTENT OF THE PERSON MAKING THE COMMENT. WHEN YOU RECEIVE AN INSENSITIVE COMMENT YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU REFRAME AND COPE WITH THE COMMENT IN A POSITIVE WAY.

Who is this person who made this comment?

What is my relationships with this person?

What do I value in my relationship with this person?

What was the comment and how did I perceive it?

What do I believe are the true motives or intentions of this person?

WHEN YOU RESPOND TO HURTFUL COMMENTS, TRY TO DO SO AFTER EXAMINING THE INTENTIONS BEHIND THE WORDS BEING STATED. BE OPEN AND HONEST ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS AND KNOW THAT YOU HAVE PERMISSION TO GRIEVE.