



Surviving the Death of a Baby  
GRIEF RESOURCES FOR FATHERS  
FROM FIRST CANDLE, INC.



Somewhere there is a field

of lovely **Forget** Me Nots,

Delicate blooms for lives lost too soon,

Echoing *Forget Me Not*.

**first**  
**candle**

Saving babies. Supporting families.

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## **When your baby dies, hopes and dreams are lost and lives are forever changed.**

This is likely one of the most difficult times in your life, but you may feel you have to be strong for your partner and your family. There are decisions to be made and you may feel a need to be in control. Friends and family may feel more comfortable asking how your partner is than asking how you are.

Our society tends to put men in a supporting role when it comes to the death of a baby, but you are grieving too. You loved this baby and had planned for a lifetime of memories with him or her.

How you cope with your grief will be important as you try to heal and move forward. In talking with those who have been there, we encourage you to acknowledge your pain and not try to hide or run away from it. In the long run, it will be well worth the investment not only in yourself, but in your ability to be there for your partner and any other children who may be grieving in their own way.

No two people grieve alike. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Take time to find out what works for you.

**We hope this brochure will help you understand your grief and guide you as you and your family begin your grief journey.**

## Your grief...

There is no aspect of your life that won't be affected by your baby's death. Grieving is a way to put your world back together and heal the wounds left by the death. Your instinct will likely be to keep your emotions intact, to be strong and carry on. But unresolved grief can cause serious emotional and physical problems.

**Healing comes from expressing emotions, talking and leaning on others for help...things that may not come naturally for you.**

Following are suggestions from other bereaved fathers that you may find helpful:

- **Experience your grief.** Find a quiet place each day where you can be alone with your thoughts and your pain. This will help you sort out the "what ifs" and "whys" echoing in your head. Consider writing down your thoughts, feelings and memories and read them often.
- **Cry.** Crying is a normal and necessary response to grief, even for men. Crying can make you feel better by relieving tension from within your body. If you are not comfortable crying in front of others, find a place where you can be alone and release your emotions.
- **Accept that this is not something you can "make better:'** Everyone's grief and healing will take time. Be patient with yourself and those around you.



- **Talk about your feelings.** Reach out to family members or trusted friends and let them know you just need someone to listen. This includes your partner. Also let those around you know that it's okay to talk about the baby. He or she is a part of your family and always will be.
- **Express your anger in positive ways.** For men, anger is probably the most common emotional reaction to the death of a baby. Ignoring or denying anger does not make it go away. There are many ways to express anger that are not harmful to yourself or others. Exercise or other physical activities are good choices.
- **Ask for help.** This could be the hardest thing for a man to do. It may be easier if you talk with other grieving fathers. Parent support meetings and online chat rooms can help you connect with other fathers and see how they are coping. Try attending at least one meeting together with your partner or connecting with fathers online. It may be very comforting for you.
- **Try not to over-involve yourself in sports, hobbies, work or social activities.** This will only bury your feelings. Give yourself space to work on your grief. There will be plenty of time for these activities when you are in a better place and on the road to healing.
- **Avoid the use of alcohol, drugs or sex outside your relationship to help numb the pain.** The high is temporary; reality will step back in very quickly.

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When you learn that your baby has died, many decisions will need to be made.

Many men feel the need to make decisions themselves to protect their partner. Because some decisions can have life-long effects, it is important to discuss everything openly with your partner and make these decisions together.



## Your relationship...

Many people think that the death of a baby will bring parents closer together. This is not always true. The death of a baby can place tremendous stress on your relationship. But with genuine care, concern and respect for each other's feelings and grief reactions, you can come through this experience with renewed strength and hope for the future. Things to keep in mind:

- **Both of you are in pain.** Both of you are in need of support. Making sure that both of your needs are met will take time, energy, patience and understanding.
- **At times you may not have the energy to take care of anyone but yourself.** During these times, let your partner know how you're feeling and what you need. Ask for help or a listening ear from outside the relationship if need be.
- **Accept that your grief and your partner's grief will not be the same.** Never assume that because your partner hasn't cried, or hasn't mentioned the baby in a while, that your partner is okay. Ask how your partner is doing, ask frequently and listen.
- **Keep the romance in your relationship.** Plan a date night each week, even if you don't necessarily feel like it. Set aside time each day to just touch and share closeness; talk about the early days of your relationship and the feelings you had for each other. Sexual intimacy will come with time; don't force it.
- **Consider counseling.** Be willing to do whatever you need to do to ensure that your relationship survives this unexpected, tragic experience. You've lost your baby, don't risk losing each other.

## Your job...

Our society allows much too little time for grieving and usually less for men than women. You may be expected to go back to work less than a week after your baby dies. Or, you may feel you have to go back quickly for financial or job security reasons. See what your options are; take as much time as you can. At first you may find yourself unable to concentrate and unmotivated. These are normal feelings that will fade with time. If possible, work your way back to full days gradually, a few hours at a time. Other ideas:

- **Talk with a trusted manager before returning to work.** Talk with him or her about how you're doing and what your needs are. Discuss how you would like the subject handled with other employees. One father sent a letter to everyone in his office, sharing with them what had happened and his desire to share his daughter with them, even though she had died. He let them know that it was okay to talk with him about it - in fact he welcomed it.
- **When you do go back to work, make sure you have a plan for communicating with your partner daily.** If your partner is staying at home alone or with other children, help make arrangements for friends or family to check in or help with the housework or the children.
- **Try to avoid long hours, especially in the early weeks.**



## Your future...

Remember, we never get over the death of our babies. We can, however, learn to live with the loss. There will be a tomorrow and one day it won't hurt as much. Here are some things to consider as you look toward the future:

Although your baby has died, you still have a need to give and do for him or her. Talk with your partner about ways to keep your baby's memory alive in your family. Some ideas include making a donation to a charity on birthdays or holidays, planting a tree or garden in your baby's memory and butterfly releases.

Don't let feelings of happiness or even joy make you feel guilty; you are not betraying the memory of your child.

Understand that there may be times when memories of your baby's life and death surprise you. They may bring a smile; they may bring a tear. Accept them for what they are - memories of your child who has touched your life and made you the person you are today.



## You are not alone...

We are so sorry for your loss. Please know that you are not alone on this journey. There are a wide range of resources that can help you through this difficult time. First Candle, Inc. is here to help, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Please let us know what we can do.

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