



A Nurses Guide - How to Help Parents through Pregnancy and Infant Loss

“When a baby dies before birth, the mother's expectations of joy and excitement about her baby are brutally replaced by grief and loss. Nursing care after a stillbirth may well influence how the mother will cope and recover psychologically from this abrupt event or whether the stillbirth will cause prolonged mental anguish. In general, previous research has suggested that seeing the stillborn baby has a beneficial effect on the mother. Whether holding the baby will improve the mother's well-being after a stillbirth is unclear.”

“The authors speculate that holding the stillborn baby might enhance the mother's attachment to her baby; holding makes the baby real and facilitates a healthy mourning process.” (1)

- Place the mother and family in their own private room away from other L&D rooms (the sound of crying babies is absolutely excruciatingly painful)
- Remind the mother this is STILL the birth of their baby. Help them hold that sacred beautiful place for their child.
- Please take extra care of the mother as she is still going through labor and delivery on top of dealing with the loss of her child.
- Don't forget to check in with the father, also with the family.
- Explain to the parents what their child may look like. (Explain also to friends and family)
- Call Now I Lay me Down To Sleep (if they are not available take lots of pictures for the parents, every little detail)
- Encourage them to hold their child and spend as much time with their child as they need.
- Use the items in the Queen B Comfort Bag.
- Use a cuddlecot (If your hospital does not have one, considering advocating for your hospital to get one).
- Provide a hat, blanket, and outfit for the baby (these items are priceless, tangible items are so meaningful).
- Allow the parents to bath the baby
- Allow and offer parents to dress the baby in the cloths they brought for their baby
- Make prints of the baby's hands and feet and take molds of the baby's hands and feet.
- Help the parent cut and safe a lock of their baby's hair.
- Encourage them to experience the grief process as it takes its natural course and teach them what they may come to feel as they go through this life-long journey as a bereaved parent.
- Offer the option of pumping and donating their breast milk. (this was an incredibly healing experience for me)
- Call in appropriate and/or requested spiritual guidance / leaders and Social Services to get involved early on. (Offer to help arrange to have their baby blessed, baptized, or another religious ritual)
- Help provide information on burial / cremation. A list of local resources (funeral homes and cemeteries in the area that may provide such services free of charge in situations like this).
- Provide resources for ongoing support and counseling after they leave your care.

“Bereaved parents never forget the understanding, respect, and genuine warmth they received from caregivers, which can become as lasting and important as any other memories of their lost pregnancy or their baby's brief life.” (2)

References

1. Radestad, I., Surkan, P., Steineck, G., Dickman, P., Cnattingius, S., & Onelov, E. (2009, October 6). Long-term Outcomes for Mothers Who Have or Have Not Held Their Stillborn Baby. Retrieved March 19, 2015.
2. Leon IG. Perinatal loss: A critique of current hospital practices. Clin Pediatr. 1992;31:366-74. [\[PubMed\]](#)