

10 considerations when supporting a bereaved couple

The reasons we avoid talking to parents about the loss of their baby is because we are fearful of saying the wrong thing and nervous of what we may hear. It is therefore helpful to be prepared. Here are some important considerations when talking to bereaved parents:

1. Ask the baby's name and use it when talking about him/her – don't just say it once but use it regularly and remember to use it in the future – it is so important for parents to know their baby hasn't been forgotten.
2. Refer to the couple as parents – remember they may have experienced the birth of their baby, and they have most likely seen and held their baby. Remember he/she is real!
3. Consider all the things you might ask a couple following the birth of a living child and then adapt this to respect the loss of the baby – for example: It may be appropriate to ask about the birth – take the lead from the parents – if you show you are interested, they may want to tell you.
4. Show you are interested in how they are feeling and offer a listening ear, but don't try to fix or rationalise what's happened.
5. Avoid making comments that try to be optimistic – for example 'You can try again' or 'at least you know you can carry a pregnancy' – comments like these can make bereaved parents quite angry and/or upset as they seem dismissive of the child they've lost.
6. Some couples are really grateful for offers of help with simple tasks such as cooking and shopping. But don't be offended if the couple don't want to see anyone or speak to anyone or find social situations difficult. They will be dealing with their grief in their own way.
7. It is usually difficult for bereaved parents to be around pregnant women or other people's babies and they may not want to see friends who have babies around the same age. Respect this, and think of ways they can still feel included in friendship groups.
8. Don't forget Dads. Often the attention is all on the Mums, but Dads are grieving too - often in a very different way.
9. Ask if there is a charity they'd like you to donate to in their baby's memory or perhaps you fundraise for by doing a run, walk, or skydive for example.
10. Try to remember significant dates e.g. the date the baby was due if the baby was miscarried or premature, or the anniversary of the baby's birth – these days will be painful reminders for bereaved parents for many years to come, as will other significant days such as Mothers Day, Fathers Day and Christmas.