

Pregnancy Loss Initiative: Support for Individuals and Families

Pregnancy Loss is Very Common

An estimated 10-20% of pregnancies end in miscarriage, which is defined as a pregnancy ending before the 20th week ¹. Approximately 80% of all pregnancy losses occur in the first trimester ². Stillbirth is defined as the loss of a baby after 20 weeks of pregnancy ³. Approximately 1 in 175 pregnancies end in stillbirth, affecting 21,000 pregnancies annually ⁴.

A variety of factors can lead to pregnancy loss, including but not limited to certain medical conditions, infections, exposure to chemicals, substance use, and being 35 years or older. While pregnancy loss affects many families, factors such as race, ethnicity, income, housing insecurity, and food insecurity can contribute to poor health outcomes including pregnancy outcomes ¹. Stillbirth rates are twice as high among non-Hispanic Black individuals when compared to non-Hispanic White individuals ⁴.

Families Need Support

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) recognizes the profound impact pregnancy loss has on one's mental health, interpersonal relationships, one's ability to become pregnant, and one's ability to parent. Many times, the cause of the pregnancy loss is never identified. Individuals may blame themselves, live in guilt about losing the pregnancy, and fear losing a future pregnancy. While pregnancy loss is common, resources for families are limited.

Each person's grief journey is unique, personal, and based on many factors. The best way to communicate

with your friends, family, and coworkers when you are grieving is to be honest and specific about what you need. There are no right or wrong ways to feel.

Here are some ways to better acknowledge and communicate with people experiencing grief.



DO SAY:

"I am sorry."

"I'm here to listen if you want to talk."

Share happy memories (as appropriate).

"I know this must be a very difficult time for you. Is there anything you need that I can help with?"

Share your feelings of pain and loss for the deceased. It will let them know you share their grief.

Silence can be ok.

AVOID CLICHES SUCH AS:

"At least you're young. You can try again."

"At least you have other children."

"I know how you feel".

"I'm glad she's no longer suffering" - Let them say it first.

"Everything happens for a reason." ⁵



Our Impact

VDH supports individuals and families who have experienced pregnancy loss through the Pregnancy Loss Initiative. This program includes but is not limited to the following: miscarriage (including molar and ectopic pregnancy), termination/abortion for medical reasons, stillbirth and neonatal death, sudden unexpected death of an infant, and pregnancy/parenting after loss. This program is funded by state matching funds for VDH's federal Title V Maternal and Child Block Grant.

VDH partners with community-based organizations and hospital systems to offer grief and material support to families and increase awareness.



From October 2024 to September 2025, VDH's partners:

- Offered 61 grief groups for individuals who have experienced a pregnancy loss, with an average of 13 people attending each group.
- Distributed material support (including mementos and "angel boxes") to 232 families.
- Hosted 21 community events, including community sewing circles to make burial gowns for grieving families as well as community conversations/informational events.



Reach out to the dedicated team at the Virginia Department of Health and our Pregnancy Loss partners for any information you may need.



<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/family-planning/pregnancy-loss-services-initiative/>



¹ March of Dimes. (2023). "Miscarriage." <https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/miscarriage-loss-grief/miscarriage>

² American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (2018). "Early Pregnancy Loss." Practice Bulletin 200. <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-bulletin/articles/2018/11/early-pregnancy-loss>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). "About Stillbirth." <https://www.cdc.gov/stillbirth/about/index.html>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). "Data and Statistics on Stillbirth." <https://www.cdc.gov/stillbirth/data-research/index.html>

⁵ Full Circle Grief Center. (2024). "Bereavement Resource Manual." <https://fullcirclegc.org/bereavement-resource-manual/>