

Partners' reactions and ways to cope in a new pregnancy after pregnancy loss

Patient information and support tool

Pregnancy after Pregnancy Loss Information Tool - Partners

Partners often play two roles during a pregnancy after pregnancy loss: a parent-to-be with their own reactions and experiences, and a main support for their partner.

You might find that there is a greater focus on the pregnant woman even though it is your baby too. It's easy to feel invisible and like you are 'along for the ride'.

This tool has been written to acknowledge and normalize your feelings and to provide some strategies for coping with your unique position. All quotes are provided from partners.

COMMON REACTIONS EXPERIENCED BY PARTNERS

"If you get the information and you know it's common to have this – it really gives you a lot of comfort. I just think information during all this is key"

During a pregnancy after pregnancy loss you may have particular feelings that are shared with your partner and others that are unique to your experience.

You might:

- Not want to get too excited about the pregnancy for fear of losing again
- Feel worried about the pregnancy and about your partner having another pregnancy loss
- Feel helpless to support your partner and to take away her anxiety
- Feel pressure to support your partner and to reassure her that everything will be OK, even when you are uncertain about the outcome
- Want to protect your partner from how you're feeling because you don't want to bring her down
- Feel uncertain when your partner asks you for answers and whether everything will be OK (e.g., in the case of her bleeding or feeling pain)
- Feel frustrated that you aren't getting as much support as you'd like from the medical system, especially in the early pregnancy
- Want to avoid and ignore your feelings
- Feel like your feelings are overlooked, like you are invisible in the pregnancy process
- Start feeling more optimistic and happy about the pregnancy before your partner does
- Feel guilty that you are coping differently or better than your pregnant partner

"When she worried I worried a bit"

"When I am feeling negative I am not going to be voicing that too much as I don't want to bring you down"

"Very optimistic and glad and happy and still keep a bit to myself, in a cage, I still want to control it right?"

"You are always going to have that in the back of your head. You can never truly feel better until you have a child in your hand."

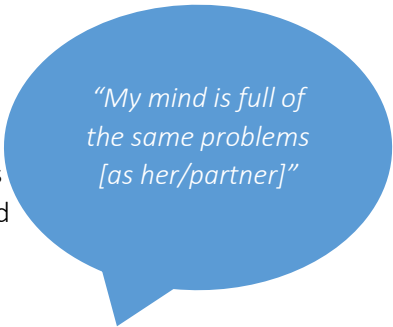
COPING STRATEGIES

Specific coping strategies and tips for coping during pregnancy

Along with the general coping strategies outlined in the document for women, the following strategies could be helpful for partners:

Remind yourself that you are a parent-to-be too, and it's OK and normal if you are worried.

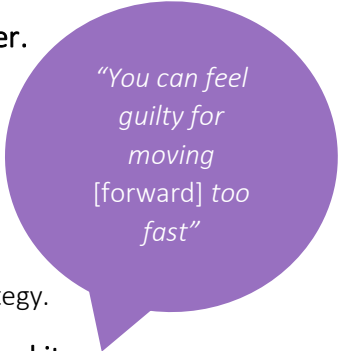
You're allowed to be impacted and worried about the pregnancy and about your partner. Accepting how you feel makes it easier to move through it. Resisting it, or judging yourself doesn't help you or your partner. We often hear partners say something like, "well I am not the one carrying the pregnancy". But remember that you are carrying your partner and that brings its own challenges. One partner told us that partners should start noticing and feeling their own feelings because it can be easy to ignore them and try to avoid them which can catch up with you in the long run.



"My mind is full of the same problems [as her/partner]"

It's also OK if you don't feel as worried about the pregnancy as your partner.

You may start feeling more optimistic about the pregnancy before your partner does – accepting these feelings, and that it's OK to feel differently than your partner is important too. You may also cope with and process things in different ways.



"You can feel guilty for moving [forward] too fast"

Get informed.

Seeking out information is a way to feel more control and a common coping strategy.

Being the strong one: Be OK with asking for support or a time out if you need it.

Most partners take pride in being the strong one in their relationship and to be the support for their partner. However, it can also be exhausting to be the strong one all the time. Take a time out from being on the "support marathon". Tell your partner what you need. Get your own support if you need it. Talk to your partner about how you're feeling. They may be surprised and grateful that you shared. Some find it easier to find someone to talk to outside of their relationship. The key is to make sure you feel support – from someone.

COPING STRATEGIES

Coping in your relationship

Support each other and seek additional support.

Experiencing a pregnancy loss can be difficult on a relationship. It can be the first time that you have experienced a loss or grieved together. Getting pregnant again can be stressful and put some pressure on the relationship and highlight your differences. It can also strengthen your relationship and your commitment to each other.

There is no set timeline for how to grieve the previous pregnancy loss(es) and or way that you should cope with the current pregnancy.

Partners often grieve and cope differently from each other.

Both partners experience feelings of grief, loss and sadness after a pregnancy loss, but may react, express and cope differently.

Sometimes this can create conflict in your relationship. Women wonder if their partners are as affected as they are, partners feel guilty for 'moving forward' faster than their partners. But it's OK if you don't feel the same grief and if you don't feel sad about the pregnancy loss for the same length of time. Women and men can also express grief differently (e.g., men might feel angry, women feel sad) – it's important to remember that these feelings are grief reactions – in that way you are similar.

It's also OK if your worries and concerns about a new pregnancy are different or if one of you starts feeling more hopeful before the other does. Sometimes it can be helpful to discuss that you are feeling differently – in an accepting and non-judgmental way. For example, saying, "Even though I am starting to feel more hopeful, I understand if you are not." It can also be helpful to find common ground in how you're feeling. For example, most will feel nervous before the first scan in a new pregnancy.

Ultimately if you can accept that you are both in it together but it's OK if you have different reactions or ways of coping, it will help you navigate things more easily.

Take a "time out" from worrying about the pregnancy.

Commit to taking a break from the worries and stress and to being in the moment together and doing something you enjoy.

Plan regular "check-in" times.

It's also important to know that you can have a conversation about how you're feeling even if you feel differently. For example, set a time every day or once or twice a week to debrief. Possible prompts: How I am feeling now is... What I need from you is...

COPING STRATEGIES

Navigating relationships with family, friends and others

Often people have good intentions but don't know what to say (or are clueless). Sometimes people can say things that they think will make you feel better like, "at least you're pregnant now!" but it can feel like your feelings are minimized. It can even feel hurtful.

When deciding how to respond or talk to people about your experience, **consider the importance and closeness of the relationship and tailor your response.**

Consider what do I want to share? What do I need to say to protect myself and/or the relationship? What's most important to me?

Don't be afraid to ask for what you need from the people closest to you or from your manager/colleagues. Be clear and direct.

For example, ask for time off from work or to work from home on the day you have a scan or appointment, ask for assistance with practical items from family/friends, or tell people you'll give them an update when you're ready, or that you want/need them to check in regularly.

Take a time out when you need it.

For example, tell your friends/family/colleagues that you are taking a 'time out' from baby showers and children's birthdays for now.

Be OK with setting a limit or walking away from a conversation.

For example, if someone says to you after a pregnancy loss, "You can just try again" you could say:

- "I know you're trying to help, but it's not as easy as just trying again"
- "What I need from you instead is..."
- "Even though it (pregnancy loss) happens a lot, it isn't easy to just try again"
- "That's true" (and walk away)

Have a secret signal with your partner as an "out" for each other if you find yourselves in a tough conversation.

Educating family and friends

Give them this information tool to read to help them understand your reactions in a new pregnancy.

They can also read resources about supporting a loved one after pregnancy loss (not pregnancy specific).

The Miscarriage Association: <https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/supporting-someone-through-pregnancy-loss>

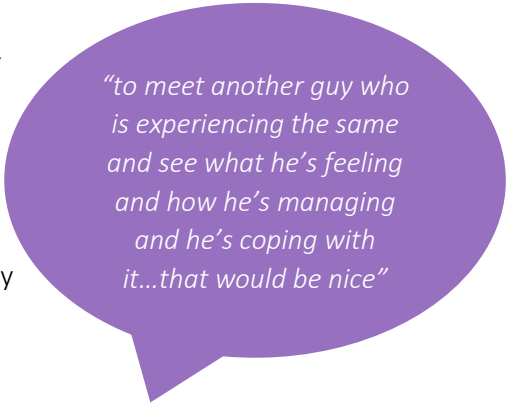
RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Seek additional support – from those who have gone through similar experiences and those who haven't

Feeling supported is linked with better coping for those with pregnancy loss. Given that partners are women's primary support during a new pregnancy, it's important you have support too.

Support can come from a variety of sources: a trusted friend or family member, a professional like a psychologist or psychotherapist or others who have gone through similar experiences.

Support can be in a variety of methods. Some find it helpful to talk about how they are feeling with a friend or family member, whereas others want to hang out with friends/family and take part in an activity where they *don't* have to think or talk about it but feel supported by spending time with people they know care about them.



"to meet another guy who is experiencing the same and see what he's feeling and how he's managing and he's coping with it...that would be nice"

Other possible actions:

- Consider a friend, family member or trusted person in your life with whom you could share how you're feeling or spend some quality time together.
- Ask your doctor for a referral to a psychologist or search out a psychologist in your area – partners need support too.
- Search for books, videos on YouTube or social media platforms for personal stories and people sharing their experiences of pregnancy after pregnancy loss. You may need to search and exclude some to find one that speaks to you. One book that might be of interest:

Gammeltoft, L. & Nørgaard, M. (2021). Tabet. Heartbooks. [in Danish, series of essays from experts and patients]

- **Attend a network/support meeting with other partners.** Check out the following Danish websites and organizations that include support networks for those with a history of pregnancy loss. Both these organizations offer specific resources and support groups for partners.

Patientforeningen Fertilitet og Tab- <https://fertilitetogtab.dk/> [in Danish - national patient organization for infertility and pregnancy loss including network groups for men and women, free resources and seminars.]

Landsforeningen Forældre og Sorg: <https://foraeldreogsorg.dk/> [in Danish -free telephone counselling, support groups, workshops for men and women who have lost a child including through pregnancy loss.]

- Check out online resources and organizations that offer a combination of information and support. The Miscarriage Association of UK has developed an excellent section on partners that includes links to information, videos, podcasts, leaflets, personal stories, images and support resources. Note that this resource is primarily focused on pregnancy loss rather than pregnancy after pregnancy loss.

The Miscarriage Association: <http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/>

Specific to partners --<https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/partners/>

Illustrations of partners' experiences of loss: <https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/your-feelings/partners/cartoons-partners-experiences-pregnancy-loss/>

Notes:

This information tool was developed based on a research study following 15 couples during a new pregnancy after one or two pregnancy losses conducted at Hvidovre Hospital, Denmark (Koert et al., 2023) and a review of previous research on this topic. A focus group of 3 couples with pregnancy loss(es) and a stakeholder group of gynecologists, nurse, midwife, psychologist and public health researchers provided input into different stages of the development of the tool. Thank you to all, and especially the couples, for their important contributions. All quotes are from the participants in the research study (Koert et al., 2023).

Coping strategies section: this section was developed based on the findings from the study of pregnant couples (Koert et al., 2023), a review of existing research, and consultation with focus groups and stakeholder group. We intend to develop this section further and to provide more evidence for the effectiveness of specific coping strategies such as mindfulness in reducing distress in couples during pregnancy after pregnancy loss through future studies. For now, these are suggestions of strategies that may help.

Koert, E., Hartwig, T.S., Hviid Malling G.M., Schmidt, L., Nielsen H.S. 'You're never pregnant in the same way again': prior early pregnancy loss influences need for health care and support in subsequent pregnancy. *Human Reproduction Open*. 2023; 2023(3):hoad032. doi: 10.1093/hropen/hoad032. Open access link: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hropen/hoad032>



COPL – Copenhagen Pregnancy Loss cohort



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