

I Care

What Do I Do If Someone Shares His/Her Story with Me?

Because reproductive loss is rarely talked about, it's normal for those being confided in to feel confused about what to do or say. You may worry about "saying the right thing." However, just by communicating with someone sensitively and compassionately, you can be a source of healing and understanding. Here are some things to keep in mind if a man, woman, family member, or friend approaches you about their own or a loved one's loss.

Acknowledge the Loss and Emotions

When someone shares an experience with you, acknowledge the loss with a simple statement of support and empathy, such as, "I am so sorry for your loss. Thank you for sharing with me. I know it must have been difficult." Resist the inclination to deny or minimize a person's experiences, or, on the other hand, generalize or enlarge the experience in ways the person did not express. If this person shares certain thoughts or emotions that he or she has experienced, then gently acknowledge that those thoughts and emotions can be a normal part of grieving a loss like this. Let him or her know that you recognize that his or her losses and emotions are real.

Listen

Ask questions to clarify, if needed, but resist the inclination to "fix" it. And never minimize a person's experience. Healing is a process, and there is a broad range of emotions that people experience at various points in that process. If some feelings seem inappropriate to you, just listen with the realization that this person may feel differently tomorrow. Leave the door open for him or her to talk with you in the future as he or she works through this experience.

Keep It Confidential

Keep in mind that reproductive loss impacts many people and that some losses—such as abortion—are often kept secret. Therefore, it's important to protect the confidentiality of all who are touched by the loss.

Be Honest

If you cannot provide the support that your friend or family member needs, or if a person's grief is more complicated than you can address, say so. Then help the person find support groups or a professional counselor and offer to watch his or her children or offer to provide transportation while he or she goes to get the help he or she needs.

Don't Try to Force Healing

Each person's timeline for healing is unique and varied. Healing is unpredictable—it shouldn't be forced or interrupted. Be available when your friend or family member is ready to begin or to continue healing.

Offer Support Resources

Resources and toolkits can be found via reproductivegrief.org. If your friend or family member is struggling with unhealthy or risky behaviors, you may wish to help them contact a crisis hotline.