

A Compilation for Birth Workers in discussing Grief and Death

When you know ahead of time:

- Connect with baby now - writing poems, singing lullabies, drawing pictures. A beautiful book, written by a BFW mentor can be found at www.mendinginvisiblewings.com
- Find out all you can about the birthplace, take a private tour with parents to discuss what they might expect after the birth, and whether they'll be given footprints, pictures or bracelets.
- Encourage parents/family to bring in a camera, contact Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep about the possibility of free professional photography (or other local birth photographers). Take lots of pictures of family holding baby, during the birth, during any bath or procedures or when mom has baby on chest.
- Encourage family to bring in outfits(s) for the baby. They can bring at least 2 blankets (one to go with the baby, and one to keep), maybe a little stuffed animal parents can keep after taking pictures with it and the baby.
- Bring lots of tissues, keep hydrated.
- You or another family member can organize a meal schedule to feed the parents after they go home.
- Funeral planning: Many funeral homes have a very low fee for a baby's funeral (Thresholds can do in-home funerals). Planning a goodbye ritual or beginning to plan one before birth may be helpful. It may lessen anxiety.

Things to do at the birth or postpartum:

- Stay in the present.
- Don't lie or underestimate a potential problem.
- Listen to what they say.
- Make sure the parents get fed and drink water.
- If waiting, partner can get some air.
- Ask for more information if they discuss how they felt connected to their partner or the baby.
- Separate the process of birth from the outcome when appropriate.

Things to say:

- Acknowledging that they are parents.
- Listen to what they say and let them lead the way looking for their small windows of humor or coping skills or solutions, utilize their vocabulary.
- If mom is foggy about moments with the baby, ask more questions about what she does remember. Invite her to journal those memories and see if more comes up as she does.

Things that might be important to discuss (or not your business):

- Funeral arrangements
- Burial arrangements
- Photos of baby with parents
- Informal photos taken
- What to do with the baby stuff back home (car seat, diapers etc) They can confront all of them or have them gone before they arrive.
- Who can bring meals and support them?
- Who do they let know and how? (facebook, co-workers and friends)
- How are they going to cope with the people who expect them to have a baby?

- Grief and coping: crying in the middle of the night
- Physical recovery
- Emotional recovery
- Spiritual resources

Don't avoid:

- Saying the child's name.
- Acknowledging the experience.
- Staying in contact with parents - even just to say you were thinking of them.
- Really hearing the parents as they frame their own connection with their baby.

Things NOT to say:

- Your baby is in a better place.
- God knows best.
- How are you? (Try how are you coping?) and expect honest answers
- Everything happens for a reason.
- You can always have another one.

Holidays to remember:

- Baby's birthday by week, month and then years (and it is the mother's birth day as well)
- Deathday by week, month, years
- Due date
- Mother's day
- Father's day
- All holidays

Maybe later:

- Mother may want to do a blessing for the baby or for herself
- Create an album of photos for the baby
- Write the baby's name in various places to celebrate life
- Book for subsequent baby
- Gates of healing postpartum
- Dealing with other happy families
- Non-judgement on drugs for depression
- Postpartum resources for depression

Resources to possibly give:

- Mending Invisible Wings Journal
- Still Standing Magazine (sooo many resources here)
- Discuss pros and cons of sifting through chat groups : people healing, triggering your own trauma, some without any support while others can be helpful
- Read When Bad Things Happen to Good People
- Getting them in contact with other parents who have had such loss / death in the community
- Ted talk on the illusion between grief and joy / Nancy Berns Beyond Closure: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0rCfXSdYPE>