twin triplet support

Advice for Family and Friends

This leaflet is written with the help of bereaved parents who have sadly experienced the death of a baby or babies from a twin or triplet pregnancy.

It is for any family or friends of anyone that has experienced twin or triplet loss.

The importance and long-lasting impact of how family and friends act and the language they use during someone's journey after loss cannot be underestimated. It can have a significant impact on someone's grief.

When one or more of a family's twins or triplets die it can be a very traumatic time for the parents. Sometimes it will be expected and other times it will be sudden and unexpected.

The family may have experienced the death of both twins or all of their triplets, or they may have a surviving twin or triplet/s. Having kind and caring families and friends around can make such a difference.

As family and friends, it can be difficult to know what to say and do. We have put together some things that you might find helpful. Some of our bereaved twin and triplet parents have given us some suggestions of things that have helped them and some things that have not been

Please remember that everyone grieves differently so there is no one set rule. Parents will often prefer to be asked what they find helpful rather than avoiding mentioning anything about their loss.

Don't be afraid to ask 'how' they might want support or offer to help them but also remember it may change from day to day and that everyone is very different in how they manage their grief, so you may have to navigate it with them as time goes by.

"It's lovely when people remember special dates and use their names to talk about them."

"People acknowledging that I will always be a twin mum and my surviving twin will always be a twin."

WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY

"I don't know what to say but I am here for you/thinking of you."

"I am feeling unsure how I can help...is there anything I can do?"

"What can I offer to do that might help you at the moment?"

"I can't begin to imagine what you've been through or what you're going through."

"If you ever need/want to talk about it, I'll be here to listen."

"I'll always remember them."

"No need to reply but..."

WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY

“I’m going to leave a prepared dinner at your door. I’m thinking of you.”

“I love you and I’m here for you.”

“How was today?”

“How are you doing…?”

I also loved it when people actually asked normal questions about them. “Did they look alike?” How much hair did they have?”

“What did he/she look like? How was it meeting him/her?”

“What are their names?”

“What did they weigh?”

Please do say the twins’ or triplets’ names and mention the baby or babies that have died in conversations.

> “I love it when I hear my family and friends saying my twins’ names especially when I haven’t instigated the conversation.”

WHAT TO DO

These are suggestions that the family might find helpful:

- Invite them out for a coffee but understand if they do not want to or they cancel on the day.
- If they don't want to go out, offer to go and sit with them.
- Suggest a walk, as it can be easier to walk and talk.
- Offer practical help - look after any siblings, take some food around etc.
- Send a card or a text message to let them know you are thinking of them, especially in future years - on significant dates/birthdays/anniversaries.
- Acknowledge the surviving twin or triplet/s in cards on occasions such as birthdays.
- You might offer to help with sorting out baby items that may need to be returned such as double pushchairs, car seats, cots etc.
- Let them know in advance if there might be twins or triplets at an event such as a birthday party that they are planning to attend.

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

- Include the baby that has died as part of the family and have something in your own home to represent the baby or babies that died such as a special candle that you might light to remember them.

- Visit the cemetery or the special area that is important to the bereaved family.

- Include the babies that have died in written correspondence such as Christmas cards, birthday cards etc. If you are not sure you could always ask the family what they would like. Sometimes the families might use a symbol such as a star, heart, flower or something else to represent the baby or babies that have died in their own cards.

- Look after yourself too and acknowledge your own grief. It can be really difficult as a family member to support your son/daughter/brother/sister through this loss and their grief, but you are also managing your own grief too. Make sure that you are not putting either of the bereaved parents in a position where they need to support your grief however. Lean on your friends and other family members for this. The bereaved parents are going through a lot, navigating their own grief.

Charlie, brother of Jo, whose twin boys died in 2022 says

> “Following the loss of my twin nephews, Gabriel and Jude, signing up to a fundraising event to raise money for the charity that was supporting my sister gave me a sense of purpose at a time when it was easy to feel lost. As I navigated my own grief, I was able to focus on something that made me feel connected to the twins, whilst knowing that my money raised would go towards helping people like my sister and her partner in the future.”

WHAT NOT TO SAY

It can be incredibly hurtful when some of these unintentional things (shared below) are said to us after the death of one or more of our babies. Sadly, many of our families that we support have had more than one of these said to them.

“Oh well these, things happen.”

“Well it is quite common isn’t it?”

“At least”...avoid any sentence that starts with at least. “At least you have one. At least you can try again. At least you know you can fall pregnant. At least with just one it’ll be easier. At least it happened early.”

WHAT NOT TO SAY

"God picks the best ones as angels. God wouldn't give you more than you can handle."

"It wasn't meant to be."

"Thank god you have ..... (surviving twin or triplet/s)"

"Well, you only ever wanted one."

"They were so small, they would have had so many complications later on in life."

"Twins/triplets would have been really hard."

"Be grateful for your living children."

"You're young enough to try again."

"My friend's adult son died. That's much worse."

"You have no idea what it's like with three children. Two is enough."

"Everything happens for a reason."

Most of our families that we support would prefer to be asked about how they want to talk about and remember their babies.

At Footprints Baby Loss charity we offer peer-to-peer support which can be incredibly helpful to navigate the feelings of loneliness and isolation, even if the parents are surrounded by amazing friends and family.

www.footprintsbabyloss.org

Our support is provided by those who have had first-hand experience of twin or triplet loss. We understand the value of having a safe space to be able to communicate with someone who has been through something similar, and we provide a kind, caring and inclusive approach with our bereavement services.

Sam, mum to twin boys Jacob and George who died in 2012, and living daughters Poppy and Isobel says:

> **"I have been fortunate to have friends and family who are comfortable talking about and remembering the boys. My mum always sends a card on their birthday or picks out a little trinket for them. My best friend frequently brings them up in conversation and considers herself the godmother to both the boys and my living daughters. These acts of acknowledgement and remembrance are so important and special. Most parents who have lost a baby or babies are eager to talk about their children. It shouldn't be a taboo subject. While it may bring a few tears, it always brings back beautiful memories and love."**

It is important to acknowledge that the grief journey is long and can be unpredictable. Most bereaved parents will need support and empathy for years to come.

Dates others may not think of can cause quite significant waves of grief such as when they should have started school.

Parents will often feel 'changed' by this experience - both positively and negatively and it can take some time for them to accept and understand their new normal.

"I didn't realise that even filling in my surviving twins nursery application form would be so sad. I just felt like it was so unfair that I was only writing her name when I should of been writing both."

Thank you to our Footprints families for their contributions to the leaflet.

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