



### **Lactation After Loss**

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- Immediate considerations for bereaved parents includes creating a safe space for families who have lost a baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or shortly after birth.
- Anxiety often happens after an intense loss and it triggers feelings of intense grief and of being overwhelming. Being able to talk about grief is very therapeutic.
- Families report that they feel unheard by their caregivers who do not offer support at the time of their loss.
- Caregivers can offer three critical areas of support during the loss of an infant: 1) culturally sensitive emotional and spiritual support; 2) safe lactation suppression and other options; and 3) resources.
- It is important to remember that as caregivers and breastfeeding supporters the people we set out to support will be our best teachers.
- Bereaved parents need: to have their questions answered; to be understood; to receive medical explanations; and to know if this will happen again.
- Caregivers need to emphasize the “care” within their role. Caregivers set the stage for emotional support and recovery.
- Caregivers can change the trajectory of the healing process. Caregivers set the stage for support and recovery.
- Grief is a process that is not linear. Acknowledge all of the emotions even the ones that do not seem “normal.” Suppressing emotions only prolongs grief and the grieving process.
- Listening to the bereaved can be the best type of support. Silent support offers an important component for the family. Avoid saying things that can be triggering or angering for the family experiencing the loss. Empathy goes a long way.
- Culturally sensitive support goes beyond “one size fits all” for families.
- As caregivers, do not assume what the family needs. Strategies include: 1) Listen to the bereaved parents for cues. 2) When in doubt, ask. 3) Do not expect certain emotions. 4) Offer to connect them with someone who can help.
- Lactation is an unexpected physiological response to loss that can lead to intense feelings. Lactation can be physically and emotionally painful for a parent. They may suffer engorgement, leakage, desire to feed, and the need for suppression.
- Guidelines for lactation management must be provided and options for lactation suppression, donation, and disposal.
- If a parent decides to donate their milk to other families offer them resources. Frozen or stored milk is accepted by human milk banks.
- Options for milk suppression take one to three weeks to be effective. Advise parents only to remove enough milk for them to become comfortable whether it be hand expression or an electric pump.

- Caregivers should offer options and information for the management of lactation after loss but not make decisions for families.
  - Lactation after loss requires specialized care and the families need care that goes above and beyond what is normally required by caregivers.
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