

use your words

a guide on what to say to someone that has miscarried

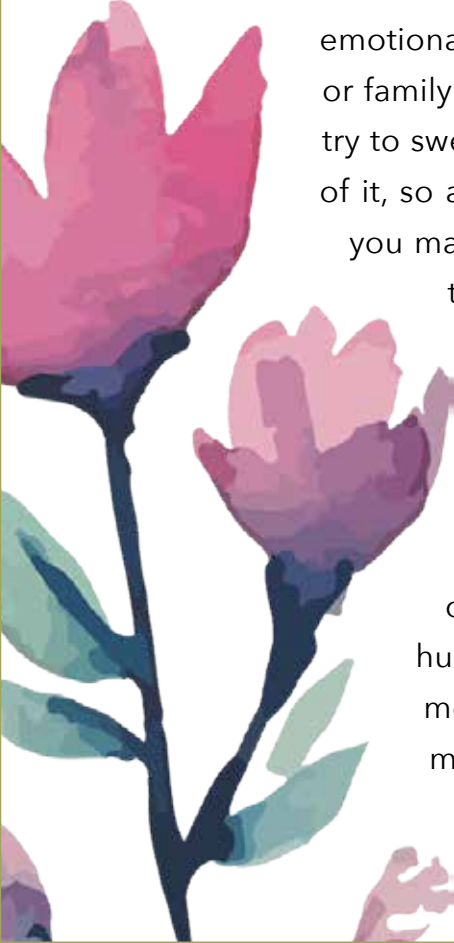
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It can be hard to know what to say to someone who has had a miscarriage and this not knowing how to respond can often leave you feeling awkward and the person who's had the miscarriage, feeling unsupported or invalidated in their loss. Likewise, you can be so afraid of saying the wrong thing that you say nothing at all, which can come across as though you don't care.



Of course if you haven't experienced miscarriage or loss, it's natural that it will be hard for you to know the 'right' thing to say. You want to be supportive, but genuinely do not know how to be. Depending on how early in the pregnancy the loss has taken place, you may not understand the emotional gravity of the feelings of your friend or family member. You may think it's better to try to sweep it under the carpet or make light of it, so as not to unnecessarily upset her. Or you may simply just want to try to point out the 'positives' in an otherwise pretty crap situation.

And for all these reasons, you may find yourself blurting out clichés that are not only unhelpful, but can (however unintentionally) cause hurt and make your friend or family member feel totally unsupported, misunderstood and not validated in their feelings of grief and the enormity of their loss to them.

So, what should you say to someone who has just experienced a miscarriage?
Or perhaps we should firstly address what NOT to say.



WHAT NOT TO SAY

"It wasn't meant to be."

Believe it or not, this really isn't helpful and it tends to shut the conversation down very quickly because she feels she can't express her feelings of grief.

"You can always have another one."

Firstly, you don't know this for sure, but more importantly, your friend wanted THAT baby. She and her partner had begun dreaming of and planning for that particular baby. Another one will never be that one.

"You wouldn't have wanted a baby with something wrong with it."

This may be so, but it is of no comfort to her at this time to hear that. She is grieving her perfect baby, who she will never meet.

"At least you know you can get pregnant."

Your friend is probably feeling like her body has failed her in some way and could be blaming herself for the loss, so this comment is not overly helpful and will not make her feel any better. It also tends to shut the conversation down.

"Be thankful that you have your other children."

Again, while we know this is said so as to focus on the positives or to cheer your friend up, all it really does is make her feel her grief isn't validated. Would you say to a person who has lost a child, "at least you've got your other children...?"

"At least it happened early and wasn't a real baby yet."

To your friend, from the day she saw two lines on a pregnancy test, her baby was real and very much loved. Yes of course there is a difference between an early loss and a late term still birth, but be assured your friend's baby was real and will never be forgotten.

"Miscarriage is really common...it happens to lots of people."

While this may be true, you are effectively shutting your friend down and minimizing her grief. Also please don't make comparisons to others who you know or have heard of who've had 4, 5, 10 losses. This is her miscarriage, her loss and her grief and for her, it's the most important loss.

"It's obviously God's will."

Even if your friend is religious, explaining away her loss as being part of God's plan could be very hurtful to your friend. If your friend is not religious but you are, please leave God out of it. Just support your friend through her grief as best you can.



WHAT TO SAY

"I'm sorry for your loss."

Simple but full of understanding and acknowledgement.

"I'm so sorry this happened."

Again, simple yet powerful and leaves the door open for your friend to talk and express how she is feeling.

"You must really be hurting right now."

Recognize her pain. Whether or not you understand it or agree with it is irrelevant.

"I know how much this baby meant to you."

Perfect. You are acknowledging that something precious has been lost.

"Take as long as you need to grieve."

It may seem obvious, but sometimes it can be really helpful for your friend to feel like she has permission to be sad, particularly if her loss happened early in the pregnancy. Let her know that her grief has a place with you.

"Listen and say nothing."

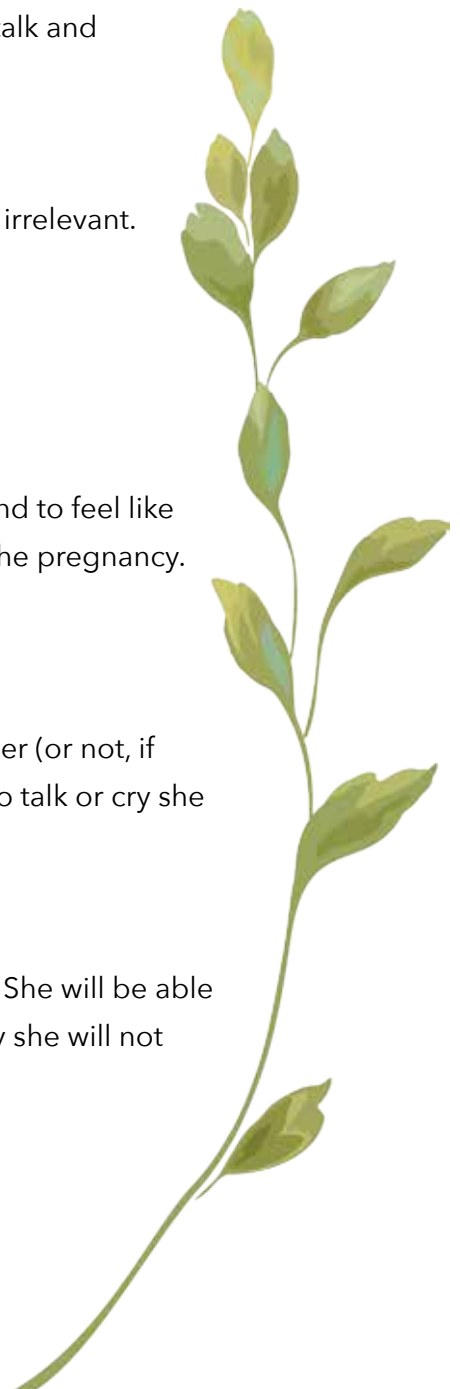
Sometimes even just sitting next to your friend, putting an arm around her (or not, if she's not a huggy person), can be very supportive. Tell her if she wants to talk or cry she can, or else you can sit together for as she needs.

"Let her know if you've been through it too."

Being around people who 'get it' will be of great comfort to your friend. She will be able to express herself freely and feel safe in doing so. And most importantly she will not feel alone.

"How is your partner coping?"

While partners may not have the physical and/or hormonal aftermath of miscarriage to deal with, they still may be grieving. It's thoughtful to ask how they are.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Let her feel all that she is feeling, whether it's sadness, anger or intense grief. Let her cry and let her work through all the emotions she's feeling. They will most likely fluctuate day by day, and that's completely normal, just keep on listening and supporting/being there for her.

Cook her a meal or two, or arrange to have a food delivery service drop a few days worth of food to her. Although she may not feel like eating, just the fact that she doesn't have to think about cooking for her partner or the rest of her family (if she has other children) will be a great relief to her.



Offer to help with other children, or to take/pick older kids up from school. Practical and specific offers of help are better than generalized 'Let me know if I can do anything' well meaning statements, because in most cases, your friend will feel uncomfortable or burdened to even have to think of a way you can help.

Check in every few days to see how she is doing. A simple text is enough, just to let her know that you haven't forgotten she is hurting and you haven't forgotten her loss.

If you are really worried about her and feel that her behavior or state of mind is becoming harmful or dangerous in some way, speak to her partner or seek professional advice.

Something to bear in mind if you are pregnant (or become pregnant soon after her loss), is that it may be difficult for your friend to be around you. Please don't be offended and if you can, let her know that you understand/respect her need for distance from you at this time but you're still there for her.

A woman's reaction to a miscarriage is very individual but whatever they are feeling, they should have their feelings supported by those around them. Remember, the best way to help them is to listen, first and foremost. If, after that, you want to say something, be empathetic, loving and acknowledge their loss.