

SEX & INTIMACY AFTER LOSS

Grief will have an impact on your sexual relationship and this may be unrelated to your feelings of love for one another. For some couples, sex provides the intimacy and reassurance they need from each other.

Sex may become a tension point. When a person is drained emotionally and physically, depressed, angry, or when communication breaks down, sex may be the last thing they desire. Mothers also cope with physical and emotional changes as part of the natural postpartum process which can make them less responsive to intimacy.

Sexuality and physical closeness are biological needs that seek balance.

Sexuality after a loss is extremely unique to each person. It is not uncommon for couples to initially need tenderness and nurturing more than intercourse. Some may have an aversion to sex because they feel their present grief had its beginning there. Fear of a new pregnancy and by extension, the possibility of another loss can be inhibiting. Sometimes sex can be used to cover up feelings of grief to avoid facing the pain. Temporary sexual disturbances in both men and women are normal.

Talk openly with your partner about your feelings and anxieties so that your reactions won't be misinterpreted. Negotiating your sexual relationship requires more nurturing, sharing, acceptance, and reassurance. Be sensitive to your own, as well as your partner's emotional needs during this stressful time. By talking, listening, and holding each other, you can maintain feelings of affection and intimacy without the pressures of intercourse. With patience, mutual tolerance, and understanding, these problems will resolve themselves as healing progresses. Getting away to be alone together may help. If problems persist far into the second year of grieving, you may find professional help beneficial and validating.

Grief will change each of you individually, along with your marriage and family. Sex and intimacy is not something that needs to be feared, but rather an opportunity to know yourself and each other better. It can be an opportunity to grow.

Write answers to these questions individually, then come together to share your thoughts and feelings. It is an excellent way to communicate and discover mutual understanding that is realistic and in the best interest of both of you.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- What are my needs regarding closeness, sensuality, and intimacy?
- What is it that I don't want at this time?
- Do I allow myself sexual feelings, or do I think that wouldn't be okay?
- Am I afraid of sex because, theoretically, it could lead to a new pregnancy and another loss?
- Can I talk openly with my partner about my feelings, needs, and what may or may not be possible right now?
- How am I affected by not sleeping with my partner? What can I do to prevent too much tension from building within me?
- If our relationship is troubled right now, with whom do I want to talk about it?
- Are our difficulties serious enough to warrant professional help?

Suggestions for Couples:

- Let your relationship be your number one priority.
- Be patient with yourself and your partner.
- Try to accept that your partner may not be grieving the same way as you are.
- Strive for openness, honesty, and kindness in your communications.
- Allow yourself your own feelings. Communicate what goes on inside of you and give your partner the chance to express his or her pain. Give each other room to grow in the relationship.
- Work at increasing your affection, caring, and respect for each other. Discover ways to nurture and express these feelings.
- Enhance one another's healing through physical closeness and touch.
- Discover things to do together that bring you joy, and enjoy life and each other.
- Nurture the thought together that, as precious as your baby is to you, there is still much worth living for.