

Infertility & Infant Loss:

Speaker: Kenny Conley

Just Those Few Weeks

For just those few weeks . . .
I had you to myself.
And that seems too short a time
to be changed so profoundly.

In those few weeks . . .
I came to know you and to love you.
You came to trust me with your life.
Oh what a life I had planned for you!

Just those few weeks . . .
when I lost you,
I lost a lifetime of hopes,
plans, dreams and aspirations.
A slice of my future simply vanished overnight.

Just those few weeks . . .
It wasn't enough time to convince others
how special and important you were.

How odd,
a truly unique person has recently died,
and no one is mourning the passing.

Just a mere few weeks . . .
And no "normal" person would cry all night
Over a tiny, unfinished baby,
or get depressed and withdraw
day after endless day.

No one would,
so why am I?

You were just those few weeks, my little one.
You darted in and out of my life too quickly.
But it seems that's all the time you needed
to make my life richer and
to give me a small glimpse of eternity.

- S. Erling

EPIDEMIC STATISTICS

Let's talk numbers:

- Most estimates say that 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage.
- Of women who know they are pregnant, 1 in 6 will likely end in miscarriage
- Three out of every four miscarriages happen in the first trimester.
- The reason for most miscarriages are chromosomal abnormalities.
- Stillbirth, when a child dies after 20 weeks affects just 1% of all babies, accounting for about 26,000 babies every year (in the US).
- Essentially, about 1 in every 160 pregnancies end in stillbirth.
- More than 5 million people of childbearing age in the United States - or one in every 10 couples have problems with infertility.

LAURA BUSH QUOTE

"George and I had hoped that I would be pregnant by the end of his congressional run. Then we hoped it would be by the time his father announced his presidential run, then by the presidential primaries, the convention, the general election. But each milestone came and went. The calendar advanced, and there was no baby. The English language lacks the words "to mourn an absence." For the loss of a parent, grandparent, spouse, child or friend we have all manner of words and phrases, some helpful, some not. Still, we are conditioned to say something, even if it is only "I am sorry for your loss." But for an absence, for someone who was never there at all, we are wordless to capture the particular emptiness. For those who deeply want children and are denied them, those missing babies hover like silent, ephemeral shadows over their lives. Who can describe the feel of a tiny hand that is never held?"

MARRIAGE IMPACT

Miscarriage and stillbirth has the potential to bring a couple closer together, but it also has the potential to tear them apart. In the United States, marriage has a 40% to 50% divorce rate. According to one study:

- Couples who experience a miscarriage are 22% more likely to divorce following their loss
- Couple who experience a stillbirth are 40% more likely to divorce following their loss.

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO A GRIEVING PARENT

- You're young, you can have other babies. (babies are never replaceable)
- You need closure.
- You need to move on.
- You need to put this out of your mind.
- Don't dwell on this.
- Try not to think about it.
- God must have needed another angel up in heaven.
- You have an angel in heaven.
- Your baby is in heaven and feels no pain.
- Your baby is in a better place.
- This happened for the best.
- This happened for a reason.
- There is a lesson to be learned.
- You will be a better person because of this.
- There was probably something wrong with the baby.

- It's nature's way of taking care of sick babies.
- Better for this to happen now, before you knew the baby.
- It's better that this happened early in pregnancy or before you brought the baby home.
- It could be worse. You could have been full-term.
- It could be worse. It could have happened at home a few weeks later.
- It could be worse. You could have died, too.
- It could be worse. At least you know you can get pregnant.
- Why didn't you call your doctor sooner?
- Maybe your doctor should have found the problem sooner.
- My friend's doctor didn't . . .
- My doctor did . . .
- Couldn't anything be done to prevent this?
- Couldn't anything be done to fix this?

WHAT TO SAY TO GRIEVING PARENTS I don't know what to say.

- I'm sorry this has happened.
- I'm sad for you.
- This is awful. How are you? (And don't take "Fine" as an answer. And then really listen to the answer.)
- I am here. I want to listen. Tell me how I can help. (offer specific suggestions such as doing laundry, preparing meals, caring for other children or pets, running errands, etc.)
- Tell me about . . . the delivery, the time with your baby, the funeral, what you miss the most

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Dominate the conversation
- Use clichés
- Pass judgment
- Avoid them because this makes YOU uncomfortable
- Give advice
- Share your story unless asked to by the parents
- Talk only with the mothers (include fathers and other family members)
- Refrain from asking about the baby or how they are doing because you are afraid it will make them cry or upset them
- Wait for them to call you when they need something
- Discard baby items or move items in the nursery or home of the parents unless they ask you to do so
- Hide the loss from children

WHAT TO DO

- Listen more than you talk
- Allow for silence
- Refer to the baby by name
- Be genuine and caring
- Allow parents to express their feelings and tell their story without passing judgment
- Encourage them to be patient with themselves
- Include both the mother and the father and include other family members
- Ask what you can pick up at the grocery store

- Offer to babysit their other children
- State a specific time/date you will check on them and then do so
- Call on the baby's birthday or the anniversary of the loss
- Acknowledge parents as PARENTS because that is what they are even though their baby is not with them.
- Ask them about their baby or how they are feeling (if they don't want to talk about it at that time, they will tell you)
- Offer to drive them to the hospital, to doctor's appointments, to the funeral home, etc.
- Let parents make their own decisions even if you do not understand or agree with them
- Offer to help with arrangements or meals
- Attend the funeral or memorial service Include children as much as they want to be included and answer their questions directly and honestly

SUGGESTIONS FROM GRIEVING PARENTS

- "Do not judge our grief reactions. Each person is an individual and will have his/her own coping skills and life experience that they bring to the loss. Each of us will deal with this grief in our own ways."
- Grief does not have a time frame, nor does it ever really end. It is important not to have expectations that we will ever be "finished" or "get over" the death of our children.
- The "stages and phases" of grief that you may be familiar with (denial, anger, bargaining, etc) may not be clear or even seem to apply when a child has died. Grief doesn't go away, but it does change with time. The raw pain and heartache will ease, but the love for this baby will not ever end.
- Grieving and mourning is about REMEMBERING and finding a place for our baby in our hearts and their lives. It is NOT about forgetting.
- We are not contagious. Don't be afraid to talk to us.
- Remember our babies. We haven't forgotten, and we don't want you to forget, either.
- Ask me how I am doing and understand that sometimes I won't feel like talking about it.
- We might cry when we talk about our babies. That's because we are sad and miss our babies. Not because you asked.
- Ask to see the baby's pictures, footprints, handprints, or other mementos. It may make you uncomfortable, but it's important that we get to share these special, treasured items and that we get to "brag" about our babies.