Coping With Miscarriage Essay, Research Paper

Coping with Miscarriage:

The Male Perspective

Fathers who have experienced stillbirth, infant death, or miscarriage walk a uniquely sorrowful and challenging path K[facing] the intense challenge of parenting a child who cannot be physically held, tickled or read to.

(Drury, 1)

One of the hardest things a couple may face in their lifetimes is the tragedy of miscarriage, also known as spontaneous abortion. While the loss of a loved one is always hard, losing a child that you ve never had the chance to hold is an especially difficult challenge. There is very little sense of closure, because in some ways there was never a proper beginning. This is not to say that people don t love the child that they have lost; it simply means that it becomes very hard to say goodbye when you haven t even gotten to say Hello .

It s an accepted fact that this is an extremely difficult issue for a mother who experiences a miscarriage. However, we often overlook the pain, confusion and anguish that the father of the unborn child feels. It is not something you ever recover from emotionally K Men often find it very hard to talk about their deep emotional feelings K subsequently the effect of miscarriage on men is often under-estimated. (qtd.in Blacklock 4) There is no set formula for coping with it. That can be maddening for many men because they generally feel as if they must fix things. Unfortunately, there is no way to fix the pain that they and the mother feel. However, by educating themselves about the causes of miscarriage, the frequency of it, and by learning about other peoples experiences, and their methods of coping with personal tragedy; men may be able to deal with their partners grief and their own more effectively.

Many people who have been through this difficulty have found it useful to know more about the issue. There is an enormous wealth of information published in books and on the Internet that can help men cope with this extremely difficult challenge. Some people find it useful to know that they are not alone in their grief. Each year close to one million families are faced with the tragedy of infant loss. Approximately 15-25% of documented conceptions end in miscarriage. It is estimated that up to 50% of all conceptions end in miscarriage. (Jen s 1) This is because many doctors now believe that when a woman who normally has a regular cycle is late by a few days, then it is more than likely that she has experienced an early term spontaneous abortion.

Grieving fathers also find it beneficial to understand some of the underlying causes of miscarriage. Oftentimes the cause of a miscarriage cannot be determined, but the conventional belief of doctors is that chromosomal abnormalities are generally at fault. It is important for men to realize that in all probability they did not contribute to the miscarriage, and that there is little that they could have done to prevent it. Miscarriage is simply a tragic event that will take time for them to accept. Unfortunately, fathers often blame themselves or the mother for the loss, believing that something they did or did not do caused the miscarriage. The reality is that pregnancy is an incredibly complicated process that can terminate at almost any time for a variety of reasons.

Listed below are some of the factors that may cause miscarriage.(Jen s 2)

Y Genetic Abnormalities – caused either by, anomalous cell division or exposure to harmful environmental factors.

Y Poor Implantation in the Uterus.

Y Maternal or fetal infection.

Y Body failing to produce adequate pregnancy hormones.

Y Immune reaction to the Embryo.

Y Incompetent Cervix.

Y Cord accidents.

Y Placental accidents.

Y Random accident

Because miscarriage can be such a seemingly random accident, it is also important to understand what things or actions are not believed to contribute to spontaneous abortion. Doctors believe that sex during pregnancy is fine as long as there are no mitigating factors. Unless a woman is on bed rest exercise during pregnancy is actually recommended. Travelling during pregnancy does not cause miscarriages. 1 The human body is a remarkably resilient organism and women s bodies are designed to protect a developing fetus from a variety of potential external hazards. Men should avoid the unhealthy trap of blaming themselves or their partner for their loss. The miscarriage did not occur because they made love or because the man wasn t around to move a piece of furniture. Learning about what factors contribute to miscarriage and what actions do not cause miscarriage may help men to understand more about the issue and eventually help them to accept the pain of their loss and realize that both partners will need time to recover emotionally.

Men often feel a lot of guilt following a miscarriage, believing that since they are responsible for getting their partner pregnant they are somehow responsible for the pain their partner is going through. Men do not experience the same physical pain and hormonal changes that women go through after a miscarriage. As a result men feel guilty when they have trouble understanding the often irrational and occasionally contradictory stages of grief that the mother experiences. They become locked into the role of protector and guardian and find themselves avoiding any thought of their own pain, believing that if they allow themselves to think about their baby s death they will not be able to help their partner cope with her own grief.

Many men are terrified of being helpless. If they say something that seems to upset their wives they are afraid that they will not know what to do, that they will upset their partner. Many men believe that anything that upsets their wives means that he has failed in his role as a Protector. That dwelling on what has happened will delay recovery. Most men genuinely believe that to put tragedies behind and to move on in life is what is expected of them (Jones p8)

. As a result of the way that men are expected to deal with emotional trauma many men often don a mask of stoicism that is misinterpreted by those around them as indifference to their loss. This can cause problems within their relationship with the mother when she misunderstands and believes that the father doesn t care about the loss of the child. Unfortunately this happens because this mask is the way that society has taught men to cope with emotional turmoil

One of the biggest hurdles that men face in coping with the pain is the societal expectation of them following the miscarriage. Society often forgets the fact that one-half of a pregnancy involves the father, and that men often feel the same anguish and same loss when miscarriage occurs. (cornwall pp2)When the subject is brought up (if at all) people will generally ask men how the mother is faring rather than asking them how they feel. They will be admonished to be there for the woman and expected to ignore their own pain. All too often they are left out of the support network, at a loss to know what to do but still expected to ‘be strong’ for their partner and to take care of bureaucratic tasks, such as informing the family, canceling orders for prams [strollers] or registering the death. (Cornwall pp3) It would be beneficial if society would recognize that men feel pain at the loss of a child and help them toward a healthy recovery. Men do not tend to receive much support; instead it is usually assumed that they must be fine since they were not actually pregnant. This is not necessarily the case, all too often they feel left out and alone. This leads to frustration and anger as evidenced by one young father X

Why is it that no one seems to care about me KDo they believe that just because I am a man I do not feel the pain of her death? Men do feel pain KMen are vulnerable but we are not expected to show it. I just wish that someone would remember that she was my baby too (Jones p9)

People often say well-intentioned things that grieving fathers may find to be offensive or hurtful. Most people simply don t know how to properly express their sympathy and use cliches that are intended to be helpful but actually cause more harm than good. While these people may believe that what they are saying is true, the bereaved father might certainly feel otherwise.

Many grieving parents have compiled the following list. (Jones p11)

x You can always have another one.

x Be thankful you never knew him.

x You’re young enough to try again.

x You should not have worked, not after the previous one.

x God wanted another angel in Heaven.

x It would have been deformed.

x You should have stayed in bed.

x You will soon get over it.

x Time heals all wounds.

x It is always darkest before the dawn.

x Never mind, things will look up.

x There must have been something wrong with it.

x Behind every dark cloud there is a silver lining.

x You wouldn’t have wanted her if she wasn’t perfect.

x I know just how you feel.

The father who is confronted with this situation may feel like lashing out or ignoring it altogether, yet they will probably find it more advantageous to politely disagree and express their grief in a healthy fashion. This will help the person they are talking to understand their faux pas and allow the father to communicate his feelings about their loss.

There are a few things that men can do to help themselves and their partners recover from the emotional devastation of a miscarriage. They should accept their grief and understand that allowing themselves to feel emotional pain is healthy and normal. Men should be aware of the dangers of internalization; writing out their feelings may help them to express this grief in a healthy fashion if they feel unable to communicate their pain to others. Men need to accept that the mother feels a deep emotional loss and that he may not always be able to fix her pain. Her anguish is some thing that only time will mitigate and the best he can do is try to be understanding and supportive. It will also help men to understand that the irrational mood swings the mother may experience are often related to hormonal fluctuations that occur after the loss of a fetus. In time her body chemistry will stabilize and her mindset will be less tumultuous. Communicating his feelings to the mother will help her to understand that he cared about the baby as well. This is important to a grieving mother as it helps them to realize that their partner understands her pain and that he loved the baby also. The parents may want to hold a memorial service for the child they lost. This service can help provide a sense of closure where none seemed possible. It can also provide the parents with a forum in which they can express their grief to others. Some fathers may find it useful to create a shrine or special place to commemorate their unborn child. Planting a flowerbed or a tree may provide them with a focus for their emotions, a place where they can remember and cherish the hopes and dreams that they had for the child they lost.

There is no exact method or prescribed formula for men to use in dealing with the tragedy of miscarriage. However, by learning more about this painful issue he may discover what he can do to help both himself and the mother. The knowledge that he gains from the research he does will help him to understand that he is not alone, and learning about other people s experiences may help him develop coping mechanisms that will help him to recover from his loss.