



Coping with the Loss of a Pregnancy or Baby

Developed by:

St. Joseph County Fetal Infant Mortality Review Program

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The experience of grief

Grief is natural and expected when you experience the loss of a pregnancy or baby, and it impacts your whole being. You can experience emotional, thinking, physical, behavioral, and spiritual grief reactions, and some bereaved parents may **experience trauma**.

Grief reactions like sadness, anger, guilt, and questions about why your loss happened, can disrupt your everyday routine. Sleeping less or more, having a loss or change in appetite, feeling very tired, and having trouble concentrating can make it hard to be productive at work and in other parts of your life.


Your grief is personal, and you may experience grief reactions differently than others in your life who are also grieving. This is natural since people grieve in different ways, and there is no one “right” way to grieve.

It may seem that the very center of your world revolves around the loss of your baby. The intensity of your grief and **trauma** reactions may lead to feeling alone, out of control, powerless, and overwhelmed. These feelings may be present not just in the first days or weeks, but also on and off throughout the months to come.

Many parents share that, over time, the heavy feelings and thoughts start to get a little lighter, and they begin to feel more connected and hopeful again.

It's important to remember that there is no set time for grieving.

There is support available to you. This guide is here to provide information, ideas, and helpful local and online resources you can use along the way.



Grief or Depression: What's the Difference?

It can be hard to tell the difference between grief and depression.





Losing a baby can deeply affect many parts of a parent's life. Grief can bring many different feelings and signs, which may change from day to day. For example, you might feel deep sadness or longing, cry often, feel tired or have low energy, have trouble concentrating, experience anger or guilt, notice changes in appetite or sleep, feel hopeless, have sore or empty arms, or get headaches. It's natural to feel sorrow and experience these signs for several months or longer.

Your loss is very big, and it can deeply affect you.



Pablo Picasso, Melancholy Woman, 1902


Parents suggest that these things can be helpful during this time:

-  Spend time with supportive family and friends who understand that grief is natural.
-  Try to eat regular meals and get rest or sleep at your usual times.
-  Give yourself permission to:
 - Focus on the baby at times (thinking about the pregnancy, talking about what you have been through or what you are feeling, looking at photos, planning ways to remember).
 - Turn to healthy distraction at other times (reading, television, talking to friends, walking, listening to music, simple chores, cooking, gardening).
-  Follow simple daily routines (for hygiene, dressing, walking, caring for other children, spending time with your partner) as much as you can.

What are signs of depression?

Some signs of depression are similar to the effects of grief like difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, feelings of hopelessness, not being able to feel pleasure, a sad mood, or feeling emotionally numb. It helps to remember this:

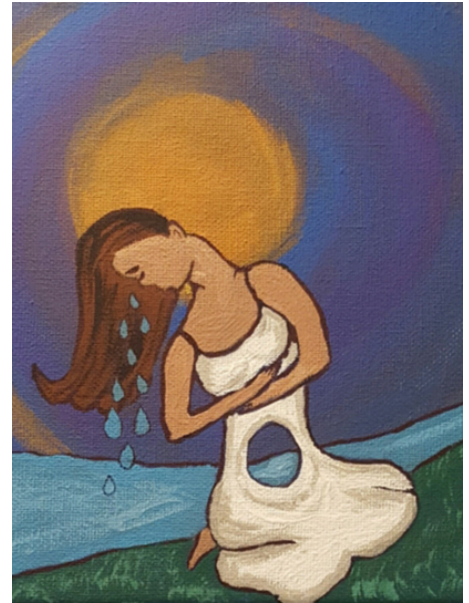
The main sign of grief after the loss of a pregnancy or baby is the intense focus on thoughts and memories of your baby, along with sadness, yearning, and longing.

 **The main sign of depression** is a sad mood that doesn't go away and isn't focused on your baby. In depression, thoughts tend to be very hard on yourself and negative. You might feel worthless, like you don't deserve life, or feel hopeless about everything.

Is it okay to feel intense grief after losing your baby?

Intense grief is a natural response in the weeks and months after your loss. Grief can be painful and difficult to bear. Even though it's a natural feeling, it can take a lot of energy—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Your usual ways of coping might not feel as effective right now.

Because of this, many parents find it helpful to get extra support, like exploring new ways to cope, or talking to a **faith leader**, mental health professional, trusted elder, or someone who has experienced a similar loss.



When should I worry about depression (for myself or my partner)?

Feelings of grief change over time. In the first few weeks, strong feelings of sadness may make it hard to do normal tasks. But as weeks or months go by, these feelings will become less intense, and you will start to feel more connected and hopeful again. After the first few weeks, even though emotions may still be strong, it may become easier to do everyday things like shower or bathe, get dressed, have conversations, do simple chores, and take care of other children.

In depression, feelings don't change as much. Depression symptoms tend to stay the same and can make it hard to enjoy anything. You may feel disconnected from others, have constant feelings of worthlessness, or feel hopeless without it getting better over time.

If, after the first few weeks, you still have signs of depression, it is important to contact a doctor, midwife, or mental health professional. If symptoms are putting you or someone else at risk—like not caring for themselves, staying in bed all day, not being able to take care of other children, or talking a lot about guilt or feeling worthless—they should see a doctor, midwife, or mental health professional as soon as possible.

At any time, if you or your partner have thoughts of suicide or self-harm, this is an emergency. Please go directly to the nearest emergency room.

Depression is something that can be treated. You are not alone.

Your healthcare provider can help you figure out the best plan for you.

For grief, extra support can be helpful and sometimes necessary. This might include joining a support group, talking with a faith leader, or seeing a mental health professional. You can find some local and online options beginning on page 9 of this booklet.

If your provider decides you may have depression, treatment usually involves both seeing a mental health professional and using antidepressant medication for awhile. These two approaches work together to help you heal and feel better. If you had depression in the past or if it runs in your family, it's important to tell your provider so they can give you the best care.

The Difference Between Signs of Grief and Depression.

This chart will help you compare the difference between signs of grief and depression.







Symptoms	Grief	Depression
Mood/pleasure	The ability to feel pleasure changes	Inability to feel pleasure
Emotions	Able to feel a wide range of emotions	Fixed emotions; feeling stuck or hard to feel anything
Thoughts	Focus is on the loss of your baby	Focus is on yourself
Sleep	Problems sleeping are common	Problems with sleep may be a symptom
Ability to do normal activity	Struggles with daily activities may come and go	Ongoing trouble with daily activities
Social effects	Closeness with others is usually comforting	Ongoing isolation from others
Source	Your loss is the clear reason for the grief	The cause may be unclear



Things to Think About After Your Loss

Ways to Remember and Honor Your Baby¹

There are many ways to remember and honor your baby so that it feels right to you. You might want to:





-  **Make a special box or scrapbook** with things that remind you of your baby, like ultrasound pictures, clothes or a small toy, a hospital bracelet, footprints, or cards from others.
-  **Have a memorial or funeral**, to say goodbye and be with family and friends who care about you.
-  **Write your thoughts** in a journal or write a letter to your baby.
-  **Do something special** on holidays or on your baby's birthday or the date they died. You can do this alone or with others who want to remember your baby too.
-  **Plant a tree or place a stone** in your yard or garden in honor of your baby.
-  **Wear jewelry** with your baby's initials or birthstone.



Second Miscarriage, Rocky Hearst Bush

Who Can Support You During This Time ?

Think about the people in your life: Who has been helpful before? Who do you feel safe with right now? What kind of help would feel good? Is there someone unexpected who has shown they care?

-  Some people in your life might be good at sitting with you, listening, or checking in. Others might help by making food, helping with chores, or texting to say they're thinking of you. It's okay to tell people what you need—or to let them know if something doesn't feel helpful.
-  **You and your partner may feel grief in different ways.** One of you might want to talk more, while the other stays quiet. This doesn't mean your partner doesn't care. It just means you are both grieving in your own way.
-  **Support may come from people you didn't expect**—like a coworker, a neighbor, or someone you don't know very well. Try to stay open. It's okay to accept help. It's also okay to say “no thank you” if something doesn't feel right.
-  If you don't have people around you who can help, you may find support through groups, counselors, or faith leaders. You'll find some resource options on pages 9 through 11 in this guide.



Getting Help to Tell Other People in Your Life

After losing a baby, it can be **helpful to ask a trusted friend or family member to share the news for you**. They can also explain any special needs or wishes you have. You may want to let your family doctor, pediatrician, and people at your religious community and workplace know what happened before you see them again. If you have other children, you may want to tell their school or daycare so they can be gentle and supportive.

Sometimes it's enough to just to let others know about the loss. Other times, you may want to tell them how you'd like to be treated—like if you're open to talking about the baby or if you'd prefer quiet support. It may be helpful to send a letter or email to everyone to let them know what happened and how you're doing. You can find samples of this kind of letter on page 8.

If You're Thinking About a Future Pregnancy

Deciding whether to try for another pregnancy, or not, after a loss can be a very personal and complex choice. Here are a few things to think about as you consider your next steps.



Emotional Processing: After a loss, it's important to give yourself time to grieve. Trying to become pregnant again can bring up mixed emotions and worry.



Physical Recovery: Your body needs time to heal after a loss. Talk to your doctor to see when it might be the right time to try for another pregnancy.



Medical Evaluation: It's helpful to have a check-up with your healthcare provider to see if there are any health concerns that could affect a future pregnancy. This might include genetic testing or looking at complications of the previous pregnancy.



Mental Health Support: Grief and worry about trying again can be heavy. Consider therapy or joining a support group to talk about your feelings. It can help with anxiety or fear about another pregnancy. See options beginning on page 9.



Partner Communication: After a loss, you and your partner may not always feel the same about when or if to try again. This can create tension. It's important to talk openly about your hopes, worries, and expectations to help make this decision together. A mental health professional can help you with these conversations.

Physical Recovery after Pregnancy or Infant Loss

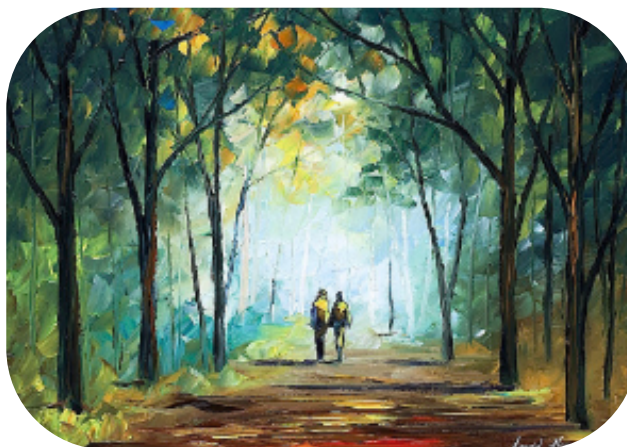
Taking care of your physical health

Try to get enough rest and sleep, even though grief can make it harder. Don't be afraid to let people help you with daily chores or just be with you. Having support can make things a little easier. Eating well is important too. Try to eat three balanced meals each day, even if you don't feel very hungry. Light activity, like walking, can help your body and your mood. **Most of all, give yourself time.**

Physical symptoms of grief

Grief affects both your emotions and your body. Common physical symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Stomach aches
- Tightness in chest
- Getting colds or infections more often because you are tired or run down.



These physical symptoms are a natural part of grief but if they are very strong, don't go away, or make it hard to do your daily activities, talk to your doctor or other healthcare provider. They can check for other health issues and help you find support or resources that can make things feel more manageable.

Postpartum warning signs²

Call 911 if you have:

- Pain in chest
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Seizures
- Thoughts of hurting yourself or others

Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- Bleeding that soaks through one pad every hour, or blood clots the size of an egg or bigger
- An incision that is not healing
- A red, swollen, or painful leg that is warm to the touch
- A temperature of 100.4°F or higher or 96.8°F or lower
- A headache that doesn't get better with medication or very bad headache that changes your vision.

Breast Care & Breastmilk³

Not everyone will produce breastmilk after a pregnancy or infant loss, but it is more likely if you were further along in your pregnancy.

This can be an emotional reminder of your loss. Some people find comfort in donating their milk, while others may want to focus on stopping milk production.

Donating milk

For some, pumping and donating breastmilk can be a helpful way to heal. If you choose to donate through a milk bank, you may need to complete some tests and screenings. Then, your milk can help babies who are sick or need extra care in the hospital. To learn more about donating milk, talk to lactation staff at your hospital or visit The Milk Bank at themilkbank.org.

Relieving breast discomfort



If your breasts feel full or painful, take a warm shower and allow the milk to gently come out from your breast, just enough to be less painful. If you have any of the following symptoms, call your healthcare provider: hard lumps, pain that continues even after trying comfort measures, fever over 100.4, or flu-like symptoms.



You can try **using cold packs or compresses to your breasts** to help reduce swelling and relieve pain.



Wearing cabbage leaves inside your bra may also provide relief.

Discontinue use if your breasts become irritated. **To use:**

Throw away the outer layer of raw, green cabbage leaves. Peel off the inner layer. Wash and crush the leaves, then put them inside your bra. Replace them with fresh leaves every 1 to 2 hours. These can be worn continuously until your breasts feel more comfortable.

Decreasing milk production



Try spacing out the time between pumping or expressing milk. For example, if you pump every 3 hours, try waiting 4 hours, then 6 hours, and so on. Only express enough milk to feel comfortable.



Wearing a supportive, wireless, bra can help reduce milk production and ease pain. A wireless bra will be more comfortable while reducing the risk of a blocked milk duct and infection.



Talk to your healthcare provider about safe medication that can help ease pain and stop milk production.

For support with breastmilk following a loss, please contact local resources:



St. Joseph Regional Medical Center - Lactation Services
574-335-4127



Memorial Hospital - Breastfeeding Services
574-647-3475

Sample Letters to Share Information About Your Loss

For Family, Friends or Community Members

Dear [Name],

We wanted to share that we recently lost our baby. This has been a heartbreaking time, and we are still grieving.

We're letting you know so that you don't feel caught off guard when we see each other next. We know you may have been expecting baby news, and we want to gently avoid painful questions.

Right now, we are *[choose one or add your own]*:

- not ready to talk about it, but your quiet support means a lot.
- open to talking, and we appreciate your care and kindness.

Thank you for thinking of us.

With care,
[Your Name(s)]

For a Pediatrician or Health Provider

Dear [Provider Name or Office],

We wanted to let you know that we recently experienced the loss of our baby. It has been a very sad and difficult time for our family.

We are sharing this ahead of our next visit so that you're aware and can help avoid questions or comments that may be painful. We also want you to know because of how our loss may be affecting {Sibling name}.

At this time, we are *[choose one or add your own]*:

- not ready to talk about the loss, but we appreciate gentle care and support.
- open to quiet check-in if you feel it would be helpful.

Thank you for being thoughtful with your care.

Sincerely,
[Your Name(s)]

For a School or Teacher

Dear [Teacher's Name],

We wanted to let you know that we recently experienced the loss of our baby. This has been a very hard time for us, and we are still grieving.

We know you may have been expecting to hear news about a new baby in our home. We're sharing this so you can help avoid any confusing or painful questions, especially around [Sibling's Name], who is also working through this loss in their own way.

Right now, we are *[choose one or add your own]*:

- not ready to talk about it, but we appreciate quiet support and kindness.
- open to gentle conversations if you would like to check in with us.

Thank you for your understanding and care during this time.

Sincerely,
[Your Name(s)]

Local Grief Support Organizations

Updated May 2025

Angel of Hope Memorial Garden

<http://www.angelofhopemichiana.org>

Located in South Bend's Pinhook Park, overlooking the St. Joseph River, this garden was created to be a place of reflection and remembrance for all who have lost a child. You can visit their website for information about ordering a personalized memorial brick to be part of the garden. This organization holds several events throughout the year in honor of families and their lost children.

Ava's Grace

<https://diocesefwsb.org/avas-grace/>

Offers faith-based emotional spiritual, and practical support to families who suffer miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss, including memorial masses, an annual retreat for couples, and a monthly support group via Zoom.

Virtual Support Groups

The Compassionate Friends of South Bend Indiana

Local chapter of The Compassionate Friends, a non-profit organization whose mission is to support families after the loss of a child.

Local Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/132176043533689/>

National website: <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/>

Dustin's Place

<https://www.dustinsplace.org/>

11802 Lincoln Hwy, Plymouth, IN 46563

Offers free grief support groups for children, teens, and families. Also offers a free summer children's grief camp.

In-Person Support Groups

Northern Indiana Chapter – Hope Mommies

Local chapter of Hope Mommies, a non-profit Christian organization whose mission is to support those who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss.

Local Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1189893537721311/>

National website: <https://hopemommies.org>

Ryan's Place

<https://ryansplace.org>

Goshen-based organization that provides grief support to children, teens, and families. This includes free support groups for adults and children, as well as a day camp for children who have experienced the death of a loved one.

In-Person Support Groups



Local Grief Therapy and Counseling

Updated May 2025

This list is a place to start if you're looking for a grief counselor. You don't have to choose someone from the list - what matters most is finding someone you feel comfortable talking to. It's okay to try a few counselors before you find the right fit. If you're not sure where to begin, your doctor might be able to help you find someone. You can also contact your insurance company, by using the number on the back of your card, to find out which providers are covered.

A Beautiful Mind

<https://www.abeautifulmindinfo.com/>

2410 Grape Rd Suite 1, Mishawaka, IN 46545

574-243-9370

Offers therapy for individuals, couples and families.

Bontrager Therapy Services

<https://www.dawnbontrager.com/>

203 E Mishawaka Ave, Mishawaka, IN 46545

574-256-3699

Offers therapy for individuals, couples, and families.

Center for Hospice Care

<https://cfhcare.org/>

501 Comfort Place Mishawaka, IN 46545

574-243-3100

Offers individual, family, and group counseling for children, teens and adults.

Also offers Camp Evergreen: a day grief camp for teens and a day camp for youth and families.

Emily Lehmen Counseling

Associates

<https://www.emilylehmanlmhc.com/>

510 Lincolnway E Suite E,

Mishawaka, IN 46544

574-400-7250

Individual counseling in person and online.

Family Psychology of South Bend

<https://family-psychology.com/>

922 E Wayne St., Suite 205-206, South Bend,

574-280-8199

Offers counseling for individuals, couples, and families.

Lisa Haines, LLC

www.lisahainesllc.com

574-635-1117

lisa@lisahainesllc.com

Grief counselor that offers services only via telehealth.

Mental Health Awareness of Michiana

<https://mhamichiana.org/pro-bono-counseling-project/>

405 W Dubail Ave, South Bend, IN 46613

574-393-8809, option 3

Offers the Pro Bono Counseling Project, which provides **free**, short-term counseling with a volunteer mental health professional.

OAKLAWN

<https://oaklawn.org/our-services>

OPEN ACCESS walk in clinic

415 E. Madison St, South Bend.

Hours available Monday through Friday.

Check website for details.

WALK IN CRISIS CENTER

420 N. Niles Ave., Suite 100, South Bend

Open 8a to 8p daily, ring bell for entrance.

574-533-1234

Call 24/7: 574-283-1234

Story of Hope Counseling

www.facebook.com/storyofhopecounseling

574-904-9959

Mishawaka, IN

storyofhopecounseling@gmail.com

Offers counseling services for individuals, couples and families.

Tree of Life Healing Arts

<https://traceymalesawheaton.com>

429 W. LaSalle Ave #2, South Bend

574-520-8444

ajourneyinward@gmail.com

Offers counseling for individuals.

National Organizations/Websites

Updated May 2025

Bereaved Parents of the USA

<https://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/>

A nationwide organization designed to aid and support bereaved parents and their families who are struggling to survive their grief after the death of a child.

Facts about Miscarriage

<http://pregnancyloss.info>

A website dedicated to providing information, help and healing.

First Candle

<http://firstcandle.org/bereavement/online-support-groups/>

Offers peer-to-peer online support groups for individuals and families coping with pregnancy and infant loss.

Virtual Support Groups

Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death (MEND)

<https://www.mend.org/>

A grief support site for parents after a miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death.

Mother in Sympathy and Support (MISS)

<https://missfoundation.org/>

MISS helps grieving parents after the death of an infant, stillbirth or SIDS.

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline

Call or text: 833-852-6262

Free, confidential, 24/7 mental health support for parents and families before, during, and after pregnancy. English and Spanish speaking counselors are available.

Virtual Support Groups Phone-Based Support

Postpartum Support International

<https://www.postpartum.net/>

Support for families experiencing mental health issues related to childbearing, including online support groups, phone or text helpline, educational resources, and more.

Virtual Support Groups Phone-Based Support

Preeclampsia Foundation

<https://www.preeclampsia.org/>

Provides patient support, education, and resources related to preeclampsia and other hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, as well as a platform to share personal stories.

Return to Zero Hope

<https://www.rtzhope.org>

Provides compassionate and holistic support for people who have experienced unimaginable loss during their journey to parenthood.

Virtual Support Groups

Share Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support

<http://nationalshare.org/>

A grief support site offering: stories, poetry, chat, support, and memorial information.

Sisters in Loss

www.sistersinloss.com

Creates a space for Black women to share pregnancy and infant loss and infertility stories, offering culturally relevant support and healing resources.

Star Legacy Foundation

<https://starlegacyfoundation.org/>

This website offers a variety of support groups for parents and grandparents experiencing perinatal loss, information about pregnancy after loss, and a phone support line.

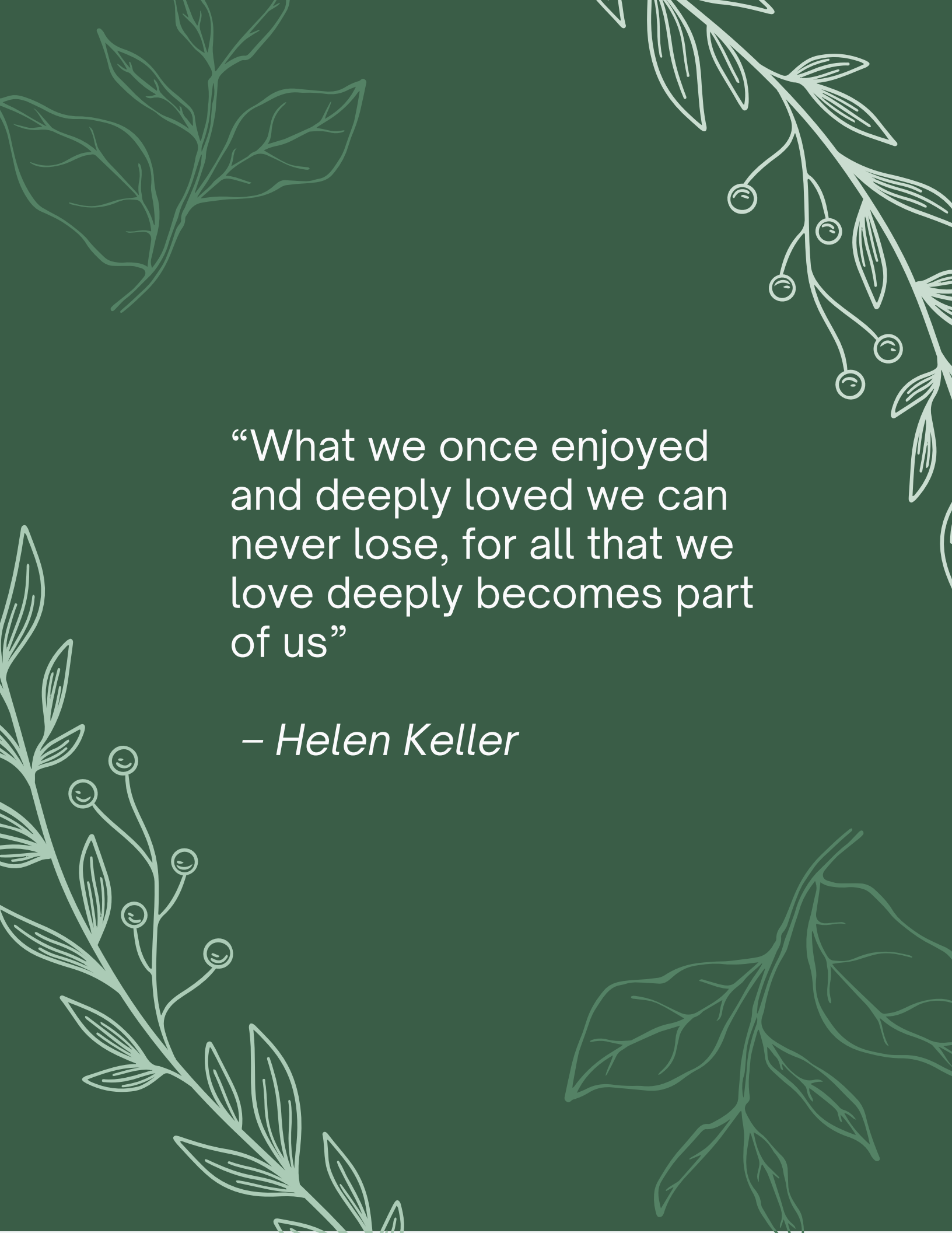
Phone-Based Support

Unspoken Stories (March of Dimes)

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/community-stories/unspoken-stories>

Builds a supportive community by sharing honest stories of pregnancy, parenthood, and loss, encouraging connection and understanding.





“What we once enjoyed
and deeply loved we can
never lose, for all that we
love deeply becomes part
of us”

– *Helen Keller*

