



# GRIEF AND LOSS

How your church can support families in the First Thousand Days through grief and loss

## LUNCHTIME CONVERSATION REFLECTION

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to become FTD-Friendly.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)

### Psalm 139:13 - 16

*"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

## WHAT IS A MISCARRIAGE AND STILLBIRTH?

Amongst women who know they are pregnant, up to 20% of these pregnancies will end in a miscarriage (baby loss before week 21) or a stillbirth (baby loss from week 21 to delivery). In rural and undeveloped

areas, this rate is even higher. Despite this statistic this topic is rarely spoken about, and society tends to neglect the devastating psychological effects it has on mom and dad. While society may see miscarriage or stillbirth as a lesser loss than other kinds of bereavement, the grieving parents share in God's view of their baby as a whole person, and their grief is just as intense and profound and requires the same compassion and support from those around them.

**Did you know:** 1 in 4 women globally will have a miscarriage or stillbirth

Around the world, stigma, shame, and guilt emerge as common themes after a miscarriage or stillbirth, and women who lose their babies are made to feel that should stay silent about their grief; and in the absence of answers to what causes a miscarriage and stillbirth, it leads to women feeling guilty that they caused their miscarriage, which is not true. No mother is responsible for causing her baby to die – and she needs to know that. Lifestyle choices may make her pregnancy a high risk one, but it does not cause a miscarriage or stillbirth.

We also see that miscarriage and stillbirth are not the only causes of grief and loss in the First Thousand Days (FTD). Couples that are doing IVF which is unsuccessful; women having to give up hope of becoming a mother; single women and men who want to have a family but don't meet someone; losing a husband or wife whilst caring for a baby in FTD are just some other ways in which moms and dads experience grief and loss.

### **AS FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND FAMILY OF FAMILIES EXPERIENCING LOSS, WE CAN RESPOND TO THEIR GRIEF:**

- Acknowledge their loss as real - never underestimate the impact of a miscarriage on a mom or dad, however early
- Don't try to minimise their loss by saying "you were just three months"
- Allow them the space to speak about their baby, or not - don't be afraid to talk about the baby and the loss. Be there for mom and dad - simply hold them and listen, whilst encouraging them to express their pain and anger
- Allow them the space to question their faith (quoting Scripture may not be helpful at this time)
- Don't settle for platitudes to help them (and yourself) feel better
  - Rather than saying "At least you know you can get pregnant", try just to listen. You may ask "How are you?"
  - Rather than saying "At least you have a healthy child already", perhaps say "I'm deeply sorry for your loss"
  - Rather than saying "Everything happens for a reason, this wasn't meant to be", try saying something like "I'm so sorry. I can imagine this is very sad for you."
- Don't say you know how they feel unless you too have had a miscarriage
- Don't hurry their healing, but if it persists and tips into depression, suggest going with mom/dad to get help - women who lose a baby in pregnancy can go on to develop mental health issues that last for months or years- even if they have gone on to have healthy babies
- Remember that the anniversary of their loss can awaken emotions - call or send a card of remembrance

### **HOW TO BE A FTD-FRIENDLY CHURCH FOR FAMILIES WITH GRIEF AND LOSS**

We listened to Graeme and Nicole who gave us some practical tips on how to be a FTD-Friendly church journeying with families through grief and loss:

**Speak Up:** break the silence on the stigma, shame and guilt families go through when losing a child through miscarriage or stillbirth. As a church do something on the 15<sup>th</sup> October which

is “loss of a baby awareness day” and by remembering this day you will be able to **build loving connections with families in FTD** who who have or are experiencing loss.

**Pray:** for families who are going through loss (e.g. in church, on a WhatsApp group, in their homes). Allow mom and dad to be angry with God, it is ok to be in that difficult space – as Christ followers we can be the stand with mom/dad and pray for them and show mom/dad the practical love of God when she is not feeling His love. Remind mom and dad it is ok to not be ok.

**Surround families:** Be sensitive to where mom and dad are right now – this can not be “fixed” overnight and mom and dad need the time to grieve, for however long it takes. As the local church, meal deliveries, going and sitting with mom/dad, going for a walk, checking in with them and allowing time to grieve, doing the laundry, picking up other kids or organising someone to clean the house can be ways to surround them.

**Create warm welcoming spaces:** Let families know that if they have experienced loss, they are welcome in your church; have a support group for moms and dads dealing with loss; be the hands and feet of Jesus and show the love of God to families who do not know Him but need comfort.

**Equip and prepare:** Prepare your congregation to support in times of loss (e.g. counselling in grief course), whilst equipping mom and dad with support groups during this time or linking them to local support groups and counselling.

**Collaborate and refer:** know your local organisations and services that offer counselling and support to families grieving – there may be ones in different languages. Look on Facebook for local support groups for grief and loss. [Compassionate Friends](#) is a nation-wide group that offers friendship and understanding to grieving parents.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- [Born Sleeping](#) – Support Groups & [Facebook](#)
- [The South African Depression and Anxiety Group](#) (SADAG): 0800 567 567 or SMS 31 393 (free to call and SMS)
- [53 Hours](#) - resources
- [Living Hope – Family Strengthening](#)
- [Loss Support Groups and Counselling](#)
- [FAMSA](#) national office at 011 975 7106/7
- [Lifeline](#) - Crisis: 011 728 1347, WhatsApp call counselling line: 065 989 9238
- [Find help:](#) therapists for loss and grief in South Africa
- [Life Counsel](#) - Based in Pretoria
- [Mama Nurture](#) – bereavement facilitators
- [SANDS: Fathers Grief Too](#)
- [SANDS: The Next Few Days](#)
- [SANDS: Early Loss](#)
- [Book:](#) Empty arms, hope-filled heart: a prayer of hope and healing for the mother who has lost her child