



Coping with Pregnancy Loss

Petra Boynton

ROUTLEDGE



Coping with Pregnancy Loss

Pregnancy loss can leave us with many unanswered questions, and knowing where to find answers is not always clear.

This book is for you if, like me, you've been affected by any kind of pregnancy loss – currently or in the past. It provides practical advice and self-care strategies to help you cope during or after loss, alongside ideas that will enable you to make sense of what's happened – including understanding your feelings and choices; outlining what you can expect during and after your loss; ways to navigate physical and mental health care (if appropriate); and thinking about how to remember your baby. It's for charities, support groups, therapists, and healthcare professionals who want to provide support and care.

We all react – and cope with loss – in different ways, and this book respects diverse needs when it comes to getting information and help. You don't have to feel like you are going through your loss alone. In this book you'll find reflection exercises, self-help resources, and stories and suggestions from other people about how they survived, which should leave you feeling more confident and better able to seek additional support if you need it.

Petra Boynton is an Agony Aunt/Advice Columnist, and Social Psychologist based in East Sussex; working in International Health Research on sex and relationships issues.

‘A deeply useful, practical and sympathetic resource that will be invaluable for anyone affected. It can be difficult to find the right words when it comes to pregnancy loss, but Petra Boynton has done just that.’

Justine Roberts, Founder and CEO of Mumsnet

‘Pregnancy loss can be devastating, and for some it’s a life-changing experience. It’s a time of shock, sadness and grief, but also one of questions and confusion. It’s times like this you really need a sympathetic ear, a shoulder to cry on, or someone that can support and guide you through. This book is the companion that everyone needs. Not only is it packed with expert information and advice, Petra’s empathy and compassion shine through on every page. From understanding why loss occurs, to how partners can be affected, to getting help and support, this is an invaluable resource.’

Dr Ranj Singh, NHS Doctor and TV Presenter

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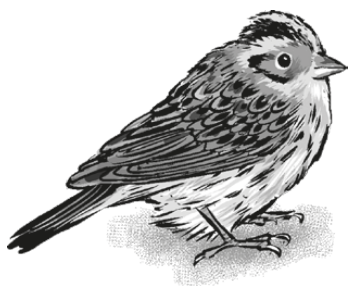
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Table of CONTENTS

	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
1	WELCOME	1
2	FACTS, FIGURES, AND SYMPTOMS OF PREGNANCY LOSS	6
3	HOW TO MANAGE YOUR LOSS	16
4	WHAT TO EXPECT FROM HEALTHCARE	40
5	YOUR EMOTIONS DURING AND AFTER PREGNANCY LOSS	53
6	MAKING SENSE OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED	62
7	THE NEEDS AND FEELINGS OF PARTNERS	75
8	TAKING CARE OF YOU	87
9	LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP	96
10	MOVING FORWARD	105
11	DECIDING TO TRY AGAIN (OR NOT)	109
12	PREGNANT AFTER LOSS	122
13	REMEMBERING	132
	SOURCES OF SUPPORT	145
	INDEX	152



I nicknamed the baby I lost in my second miscarriage 'bunting'.
Illustrator Sean Longcroft very kindly drew me one and you'll see this
little bird appearing throughout the book. I hope it brings you
reassurance as it does me.

Acknowledgements

To everyone who has shared their stories of pregnancy loss with me – this book would not have been written without your willingness to be so open. I hope it honours your memories and your babies.

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This book is for Anna Raeburn – who is wonderful and wise.

1. *Welcome*

Whoever you are, however you chose this book, I hope you find it consoling, supportive, and practically useful.

You may have picked this book if you or your partner are miscarrying at the moment; or have experienced pregnancy loss recently or in the past. Alternatively you may be a friend or relative of someone who has had a loss and want to know how best to support a loved one. Or you could be a therapist or healthcare provider looking to understand miscarriage and stillbirth better, or seeking resources to recommend for those in your care.

Pregnancy loss is far reaching and can affect us whether we are young or older parents; whether we are single or in a relationship; regardless if we already have children; however we conceived; whatever our gender or sexuality; whether we had one loss or many; recently or many years ago.

This book was written to help you:

- make more sense of what is going on and understand how you are feeling;
- locate and navigate healthcare, therapy, and support services;
- feel less alone;
- strengthen your relationship (if you are in one);
- feel more in control;
- be assertive when dealing with friends, family, work colleagues, and others in your community; and
- remember, and move on after loss in ways that suit you best.

How to use this book

To ensure you are able to find the right information to suit your needs I have used subtitles and section headings within chapters so that you can anticipate what is going to be talked about. You can skip what is not relevant, or return to any topics that are important but you may not currently feel up to reading.

A guide to what's in the remainder of the book can be found in the at-a-glance guide below.

Chapter 1: Welcome

Outlines what to expect from the text, and ideas for getting the best from the book.

Chapter 2: Facts, figures, and symptoms of pregnancy loss

How often loss happens, symptoms, planning for a loss, what to do in an emergency.

Chapter 3: How to manage your loss

Treatment options for early and late miscarriage, stillbirth, ectopic pregnancy, molar pregnancy, and stillbirth. Communicating your loss with other people.

Chapter 4: What to expect from healthcare

Describes health practitioners who you may encounter and care standards.

Chapter 5: Your emotions during and after pregnancy loss

Outlines the diverse range of reactions you may experience and how to deal with them.

Chapter 6: Making sense of what has happened

Common reasons people give for their losses, and where to get help if other people are unsupportive.

Chapter 7: The needs and feelings of partners

Identifying how partners may react, why they can be left out, and where to get help.

Chapter 8: Taking care of you

Suggestions for looking out for your own wellbeing.

Chapter 9: Looking out for your relationship

Identifying relationship stressors; tips for communicating; finding a therapist; tips if you have separated or are single.

Chapter 10: Moving forward

Assessing what is going on in your life and if any changes are required.

Chapter 11: Deciding to try again (or not)

Noting if you are ready to conceive; ways to enjoy intimacy; contraception and fertility advice.

Chapter 12: Pregnant after loss

Planning for a future pregnancy; reactions if you find you are pregnant; other losses; coping with birth and early parenthood.

Chapter 13: Remembering

Ways to memorialize your loss.

Sources of support

Recommended charities and self-help groups.

Bibliography

Additional work used to inform this book.

Every chapter contains exercises, quotes from people describing their losses, further reading materials, and recommended websites. You may wish to read the book alone, or share all or part of it with your partner, friends, relatives or your doctor. And you may get more from the book by making notes, and reflecting on key sections that are meaningful.



THE 10 CS OF PREGNANCY LOSS

Some things are **CONSISTENT** – pregnancy loss is a common, and an inevitable part of pregnancy for many of us.

Some aspects are **CHANGEABLE** – the circumstances relating to your loss(es); your attitude towards your loss(es) and that of others around you; the kind of care you may need or receive; and how the **COMMUNITY** and **CULTURE** in which you live responds to pregnancy loss.

Some things are **CONTRADICTORY** – you may not be sure what is going on or know what to do for the best; have many **CONFUSING** and bewildering reactions to your loss; or be given lots of **CONFLICTING** advice.

Some parts of pregnancy loss you can **COPE** with, while others may be a **CRISIS**.

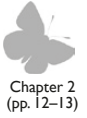
There is no one-size-fits-all approach to pregnancy loss. It is not a **COMPETITION**.

Why did I write Coping With Pregnancy Loss?

I've worked as an Agony Aunt (advice columnist) for the past two decades and get many messages from people affected by pregnancy loss. At the same time I have been lecturing and researching within International Health Research, supporting individuals, organisations, and charities to provide better miscarriage care. In 2014 I carried out research for the Miscarriage Association (funded by a Beacon Bursary from University College London's Public Engagement Unit) learning how loss affected partners. I have also had three miscarriages.

Disclaimer

This book is not a replacement for medical care, and there is information in Chapter 2 on where you can get help and what to do in an emergency. Other people have also written excellent texts about many of the topics covered in this book, including clinical information, and I have linked to a selection you might want to use if you wish to read more.



Chapter 2
(pp. 12–13)

Links to websites and social media provided in this book are correct at time of going to press, and will be kept updated at www.copingwithpregnancyloss.com.



BEFORE YOU GO FURTHER...

As you are reading this book it may help you to occasionally check in with yourself and ask:

How am I feeling?

What help do I need right now?

Is there anything I am particularly troubled by? If so, who can help me and what can I do about it?

How am I going to care for myself today?

Follow the butterfly

Butterflies have long been used as a symbol of pregnancy loss. In this book you'll see butterflies in the margins directing you to sources of help elsewhere in the text.

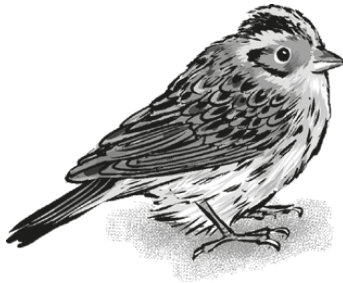


2. *Facts, Figures,* AND SYMPTOMS OF PREGNANCY LOSS

After my miscarriages I kept seeing the same figures mentioned. You may have noticed them too. An estimated 1 in 5 pregnancies (20%) end in baby loss, with 85% of losses happening in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Knowing this can be reassuring. It helps you realize you are not alone and that other people have gone through pregnancy loss too. It reminds us that while it may be upsetting, early miscarriage is very common. And it may be comforting to note while 1 in 5 pregnancies does not last, 4 in 5 do, encouraging many of us to try again to get pregnant.

Numbers are not always useful, however. Knowing how often miscarriages occur makes little difference to living through and after loss. It may be particularly troubling if you have had multiple losses, or if you feel any loss needs to have more humanity to it than just a statistic. And just because pregnancy loss is common, it can still come as a shock or disappointment.





PREGNANCY LOSS IN NUMBERS

1 in 5 pregnancies (20%) end in miscarriage

12,000 pregnancies (1 in every 80–90) per year are ectopic.¹

Around 1 in 600 pregnancies is a molar pregnancy.²

In 2015 there were 2.6 million recorded stillbirths worldwide. The vast majority (98%) in low-income countries.³

Recurrent miscarriages affect 1 in 100 women in the UK (in low-income countries this figure is higher).⁴

After two consecutive miscarriages you have a 91% chance of conceiving again. This reduces to 20% if you have had seven or more miscarriages.⁵

Miscarriage rates in women double after age 40 and triple after age 45,⁶ and if partners or sperm donors are aged 40 or older.⁷

Other factors that can increase miscarriage risk include previous pregnancy loss(es); assisted conception; regular or high rates of drinking alcohol; and being underweight.⁸

Having a previous live birth, healthy lifestyles, having sex, and nausea during early pregnancy are all linked to a reduced rate of pregnancy loss (though they cannot guarantee no loss will occur).⁹

Having some context to pregnancy loss can be useful. But it may leave you with further questions or worries. Which in turn can increase feelings of guilt, fear or anxiety (see Chapter 5).



Chapter 5
(pp. 53–57)

“I went searching for information online and found lots of data but I got the most reassuring answers talking to my doctor and reading information leaflets on a pregnancy loss charity’s website.” Ginny



MISCARRIAGE SYMPTOMS

Physical symptoms of loss can include

- Pain in your stomach or lower back
- Period-like pains/cramps (may be more intense than usual period)
- Passing clots or what looks like tissue. (If you are able to save this, put it in a container and keep refrigerated until you see your doctor)
- Vaginal bleeding: needing to use a new sanitary pad every hour or less
- Either not developing pregnancy symptoms (e.g. morning sickness); or existing symptoms reducing or stopping (e.g. breast tenderness may reduce, or in a later pregnancy loss you cannot feel baby moving)

Psychological symptoms of loss can include

- Crying, anxiety, fear, numbness, confusion, disbelief, sorrow, desperation, rage (see Chapter 5)



Chapter 5
(pp. 53–57)

If you are unsure of your symptoms but are worried you might be miscarrying call your doctor, Early Pregnancy Unit (if available), or local hospital to find out what services are available to you. It is always better to check.

Some losses can be very painful and you may bleed heavily (see section later in this chapter, ‘In an Emergency’). But sometimes there are few or no symptoms prior to losing a pregnancy. It can also be the case that some pregnancies have very few symptoms, or people experience cramping or light bleeding during their pregnancy (particularly in the early weeks), but go on to carry their baby to term.