

## Let's break the silence about miscarriages

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We want to address a socially significant issue that affects millions of couples: the loss of pregnancy to miscarriage.

As many as 1 in 5 pregnancies in the United States ends in miscarriage. The precise cause of a miscarriage is often unknown, but miscarriage is so common that virtually every one of us is likely to know someone who has lost a pregnancy. It is likely that either a friend, a family member or you, the reader, have experienced this type of loss, as have we, the writers.

What remains puzzling about such a common experience is the utter, and often devastating, silence that surrounds miscarriage. As someone who experienced a miscarriage said, "I can't think of anything else that is so very common, yet nobody talks about it."

The reasons miscarriage remains shrouded in silence are many and varied. In our death-avoidant culture, talking about the loss of a pregnancy can force us into uncomfortable territory. Add to the topic of death other difficult and controversial issues like sexual and reproductive health, and it's not surprising that miscarriage remains a taboo topic of conversation.

What's curious, though, is the number of people who share that after they revealed a miscarriage, friends, family, acquaintances, co-workers and people from all other parts of their lives admitted that they, too, had suffered such a loss, yet the discloser never knew. So why does the silence surrounding miscarriage persist?

People who have suffered a miscarriage might be reluctant to talk about the experience because of how others may respond. It's typical for confidants to respond with well-meaning but insensitive comments like, "Maybe it just wasn't meant to be" or "You can always try again." Some might even place blame on a woman with comments that imply that the loss was her fault, like, "Maybe you were under too much stress."

Although the potential for such comments can make disclosure risky, there are plenty of reasons why it's helpful for couples to share their miscarriage experiences. The ability to grieve openly about the loss can help couples cope as they struggle to make sense of the loss, especially when the pregnancy was a desired one. Couples who avoid talking to each other or to friends and family might feel isolated, resentful and angry if their desire to discuss the miscarriage is neglected.

For those of us who might be in a position to support someone coping with a miscarriage, we can follow simple guidelines to make the discussion a little less awkward. First and foremost, do not trivialize the loss. A miscarriage is physically and emotionally painful. It can mean the loss of a couple's hopes and dreams for their future family, or for their desire to enter parenthood. So take the loss seriously.

Second, resist the urge to offer advice. Simply giving the person space to vent and express their emotions is more important than telling them what to do next.

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Finally, it's important to acknowledge that men, too, feel the grief of a miscarriage. Though women experience the loss in a way that is undeniably unique, men also benefit from the chance to talk about what has happened.

Think about what you can do to help change the culture of silence about miscarriage. Even small steps toward breaking the silence matter. Whether it's summoning the courage to tell your own story or inviting a loved one to share theirs with you, you can make a huge difference in helping others feel safe enough to discuss an all-too-common experience.

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