



Coping with Trauma:

# *Traumatic Grief* AFTER PREGNANCY LOSS

Traumatic grief is a type of reaction that can develop from a pregnancy loss.

What does it look like, and what can you do if you are experiencing traumatic grief?

# What is Traumatic Grief?

An unintended pregnancy loss is a difficult journey - a woman would have had to experience physical pain and discomfort, as well as intense emotions including grief, shock, sadness, guilt and anxiety.

Some women with pregnancy losses may experience traumatic stress reactions in addition to grief. Grief results from adjusting to a loss of the baby; while traumatic stress reactions may arise due to the **sudden** and **unexpected nature of the loss**, and if the event poses an **actual or perceived threat** to the woman's life or body (e.g. life-threatening medical emergencies, intrusive medical procedures).



## What does traumatic grief look like?



A woman who has been experiencing traumatic grief may feel very fearful, anxious or stressed when she encounters memories or reminders of the pregnancy (even positive ones). She may also avoid places, situations, people, thoughts or conversations that remind her of the pregnancy loss. Other symptoms of traumatic grief may include:

- Intrusive, repetitive thoughts or memories of the terrifying details of the pregnancy loss or medical procedures
- Nightmares or flashbacks of the event that might have caused it
- Excessive focus on reminders of the pregnancy loss
- Hypervigilance, being easily startled or having excessive fears about the subsequent pregnancies
- Intense feelings of bitterness, sorrow, or anger related to the pregnancy loss
- Excessive guilt or self-blame about how the pregnancy ended
- Feelings of numbness, detachment, or hopelessness
- Loss of self-confidence
- Other physical and emotional symptoms such as increased physical aches, irritability, anxiety, difficulties sleeping or concentrating

Traumatic grief can make it difficult to grieve the loss of the baby and cope with changes that result from the pregnancy loss.

# When should you consider seeking support?



Reaching out and receiving support from your family members and friends can help one begin to cope with traumatic grief. However, there may be moments where additional professional support would be needed to support one experiencing traumatic grief. Some signs that one may benefit from further professional support can include:

- Persistent traumatic grief symptoms listed for more than **one month** after the pregnancy loss
- Difficulties in carrying out usual routines and tasks at home, work or school
- Difficulties interacting with family and friends
- Difficulties in caring for or bonding with other children and/or family members
- Having thoughts of harming or killing oneself, and/or hurting other people
- Using alcohol, drugs, and/or engaging in risky sexual behaviours to cope
- Repeated observations or concerns expressed by loved ones that one may not be coping well

If you are experiencing ongoing symptoms of traumatic grief, receiving early and appropriate treatment can help you get back to enjoying the activities and relationships that are important to you, in addition to improving your overall well-being.

# Where can you seek professional support from?

A professional trained in grief and trauma work can help you learn to manage traumatic memories, reminders, and responses, by working through changes in your thoughts and beliefs associated with the death. This helps to reduce the effects of traumatic stress symptoms, so that you are better able to process any remaining feelings and thoughts arising from your loss, while gradually reconnecting with others around you.

For subsidised treatment options, consider speaking with your polyclinic doctor or general practitioner (GP) for a referral to a psychiatrist and/or psychologist in public hospitals. You may also wish to consider seeking out private psychiatrists or psychologists, without needing a referral.

If you are currently seeing a psychiatrist or medical doctor at KKH, they can refer you to the **KKH Psychosocial Trauma Support Service (PTSS)**. PTSS consists of a team of clinical psychologists who specialises in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children. These forms of support can help you to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.





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