



Coping with Traumatic Grief after the Loss of a Child

What is traumatic grief?

Some women who have gone through the loss of a newborn or baby 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 experiences traumatic grief may feel very fearful, anxious or stressed when she encounters memories or reminders of the loss (even positive ones). She may also avoid places, situations, people, thoughts or conversations that remind her of the loss.





Other symptoms of traumatic grief may include:

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



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





■ When should you consider seeking support?

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

- Persistent traumatic grief symptoms listed above for more than **one month** after the 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 you 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 them to better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

