

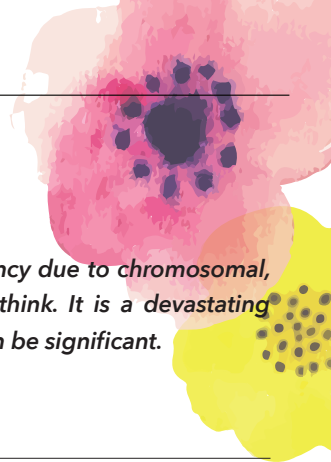
the turmoil of termination

THE
pink
elephants
SUPPORT NETWORK

due to fetal anomaly



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Although not often discussed openly, the termination of a pregnancy due to chromosomal, genetic or fetal abnormalities is more common than you might think. It is a devastating decision for a couple to have to make and the emotional impact can be significant.

AN INTRODUCTION

Technological improvements in pregnancy screening and diagnostic tools mean that couples are able to receive vital information about their baby earlier than ever before.

Most women undergo first trimester screening tests such as the 12-week nuchal translucency test, or an even earlier NIPT or Harmony test as a routine part of pregnancy, and in the majority of cases, their baby will be deemed healthy and the pregnancy will continue as normal.

In some cases however, parents will be faced with results that leave them not only devastated, but also having to decide whether or not to continue with their pregnancy.

It is rare that couples who choose to end a pregnancy do so without feeling heartbroken about their choice.

REASONS FOR TERMINATION

Most early terminations of pregnancy are due to chromosomal abnormalities that are diagnosed around the 10-12 week mark. Sometimes the decision to terminate can be a little more straightforward. For example, when the diagnosis is related to conditions that are largely not compatible with life.

Sometimes decisions need to be made for your baby and family that go beyond the cut and dry and involve considerations around quality of life both for your unborn child, you and your family. You may feel ill-equipped to handle a child with lifelong special needs or you may be concerned for the baby's suffering. Some situations may involve serious risk to your life, and your health may be protected by termination.

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EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Termination of a pregnancy due to an unfavourable medical diagnosis brings with it a whole host of complex emotions. You will undoubtedly feel overwhelming sadness and possibly anger that this happened, but there will likely also be heightened feelings of shame, self-doubt or guilt at choosing to end your pregnancy.

What if I was wrong? What if the doctors made a mistake? What if my baby was the exception to the prognosis? What if I'll never forgive myself? All of these thoughts and feelings are completely normal. Try to remember that you made your decision armed with all the facts available to you at the time, and whilst it will likely be the hardest choice you've ever made, you have made the one that is right for you and your family.

There is a very real fear of being judged negatively by others, and as a result many women will not feel comfortable sharing their decision with others, preferring to say they have miscarried. This silence can complicate the grieving process and make it more difficult for couples to authentically allow themselves to grieve the loss of their much-wanted baby.



"I knew I could not risk bringing someone into the world with such severe problems who would live for a matter of weeks."

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EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The early days of grief are difficult and it can feel like the darkness will never lift. Remember that grieving is a normal reaction to a loss and your loss is also compounded by the difficult decision you've had to make. Although it doesn't feel like it, we promise that you will not always feel like this. Some days will be better than others, but over time you will gradually feel the dark cloud lifting.



If you find that you need more support than you are receiving from family and friends, the **Pink Elephants** has beautiful support resources that you can access online as well as a free personalised **Peer Support Programme**.

The following organisations have 24-hour bereavement support lines:



Your hospital social worker or private counsellors will also be able to provide extra support.

Please know that you do not have to grieve alone. There is a community of support available for you should you need it.

“One day you are planning a whole future, the next that whole future is wiped out. I recall every decision, activity and event was now clouded by our loss.”

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WAYS TO COPE



Take time out

It can be helpful to take some time out to allow yourself the space to start processing what has happened. There is no prescribed amount of time, and whether it's weeks or months, allowing yourself the time you need to grieve is important and absolutely ok.

Share the real story

Many couples will choose not to tell others about the nature in which their pregnancy ended for fear of being judged, yet this may make it more difficult for you to grieve your loss. Perhaps confiding in those closest to you will help ease the burden of your decision and allow you to feel their love and support.

Seek support

Pastoral - If you have strong religious beliefs, seeking religious guidance to help you come to terms with what has happened can be helpful.

Spiritual - If your belief system is more spiritual, it may be healing to plan a ritual or a ceremony that is aligned with your beliefs to honour the loss of your baby.

Professional - Seeking professional support from the hospital social worker or a bereavement counsellor can be helpful in the early days.

Online support forums are another way to connect with people who have been through a similar experience.

Grieve together

You and your partner are the ones who know why you made the decision, so talk, share, be honest, cry together and hold each other. Also, know that often two people in a partnership will grieve differently. There is no right or wrong, and as long as you continue to communicate you will get through it.

Mark the loss

It may be helpful to mark the loss of your baby in some way. Perhaps purchase a piece of jewellery, or write a letter to your baby. Plant something beautiful in your garden, or place a small statue or water feature there. Lighting a candle on anniversaries or other special days is also a lovely way of giving meaning to your loss.

Self-care

When you are deeply grieving it can be easy to neglect yourself, and you may feel physically unwell and completely exhausted. It's vital to make sure you are sleeping well, eating well and doing some light exercise. Try to eat small regular meals, go for short walks or do some yoga, and have a warm bath and some calming tea before bed.

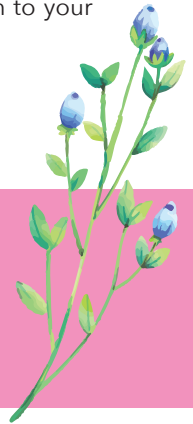
"What I learned from this experience is that there is no short cut in grief. As with everything, however, eventually time did seem to heal."

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MEDICAL FOLLOW UP

When there has been a medical diagnosis that results in the termination of a pregnancy there is likely a team of medical professionals you have been involved with. It is not uncommon as time passes to have questions or to have doubts and worry that there could have been a different outcome.

Most women will have a follow up appointment booked with their doctor so it can be useful to keep notes of these questions as they come up and to take them to your appointment. Even though you may know in your heart that you made the right decision, it can be reassuring to hear again that you have done the right thing for you.



It is also important to remember that a termination does not affect future pregnancies unless there is a complication, which is very rare. There is no right or wrong time to try for another pregnancy and it comes down to when you are physically and emotionally ready to do so.



Find more resources online at pinkelephants.org.au