

Grief and Healing

After the Death of Your Baby



All healing is first a healing of the heart.

Carl Townsend

Just as every baby is a unique and special person, every parent's response to the death of his or her baby is unique and special. Grief is normal and natural and highly individual. Grieving people have many common experiences and each griever has a grief unlike anyone else's. You may have heard that there are stages or tasks or processes that have some order and lead to the healing of grief. For most of us, there is no orderly progression of stages. The challenge is to figure out how to cope with something we've dreaded but never really expected to happen. The process is one of hanging on through many emotional ups and downs. The mere passage of time sometimes seems to bring an easing of the chaos and the ability to go on with your life. In fact, it is what *happens* during the time after your baby's death that eventually heals your heart.

A moment in our arms...a lifetime in our hearts.

A common desire of many grieving parents is to tell the story of their child. In telling about the facts of the child's beginning, the pregnancy, birth and life, however short it may have been, parents also share their feelings of hope and of sorrow. Through the recitation of their story over and over, they work out the meaning of this child's life and their parental role. Though the child is gone, the story will be theirs throughout their life. The story has three parts: The life and death of our baby, how I survived the grief of the loss and how I have continued to live, including how my baby's life now is a permanent part of my own life.

Finding others who can listen to your story can provide one of the key elements in moving through your time of intense grief. Family members will be going through grief in their unique ways and may not be available for this kind of support. An objective friend, spiritual leader, counselor or support group can give you a safe place to tell your story and share your feelings.

One emotion that seems almost synonymous with grief is *sorrow*. Plain old sadness. Hardly anyone loses a dear family member, friend or acquaintance. Just as every baby is a unique and special person, every parent's response to the death of his or her baby is unique and special. Grief is normal and natural and highly individual. Grieving people have many common experiences and each griever has a grief unlike anyone else's. You may have heard that there are stages or tasks or processes that have some order and lead to the healing of grief. For most of us, there is no orderly progression of stages. The challenge is to figure out how to cope with something we've dreaded but never really expected to happen. The process is one of hanging on through many emotional ups and downs. The mere passage of time sometimes seems to bring an easing of the chaos and the ability to go on with your life. In fact, it is what *happens* during the time after your baby's death that eventually heals your heart.

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Some say you are too painful to remember.

I say you are too precious to forget!"



Mementos and symbols of life and joy seem important to people who have lost a baby. It is easy to find the children's area of a cemetery. That's where you see balloons, teddy bears and toys. While others think removing items like nursery furniture and decorations, baby clothes, pictures and toys will ease the pain, parents may cling to such things for a time as reminders of their baby's life. Of course, it is the parents' decision. There isn't a right or wrong way to grieve, only griever's doing their best to get through it moment to moment. It is natural for parents to alternate dwelling on what has happened, the sadness of loss of the baby's life and of the potential for the future – and figuring out how to move ahead, care for their other children, carry on with a now altered life plan or develop a new vision for their future.

The episodes of our lives are like chapters in a book. While new chapters open, the previous chapters remain, taking on new meanings as life unfolds. This is especially true of the lives of those we love during our lives. Some are long, some are short. All of them make up the heart of our life's story, all of them go with us.

Marriage strains are not uncommon when a baby has died. Grieving is such an intensely personal experience that even the closest of partners cannot share it. The emotional capability to stand beside your mate supportively can be compromised by the absorption of your emotional energy in your own grief. Finding healthy sources of personal support can help each partner just to share love and compassion for the other, allowing both of them to focus for awhile on cooperating to meet the practical needs of the family while healing occurs. Counseling and educational or support programs for grieving people can be very valuable in keeping couples and families intact after a baby dies.

There is no foot so small

that it cannot leave an imprint on this world.

Your baby lived. Your baby has a name and a gender. Your baby had a unique physical appearance and presence. Your baby demonstrated a personality unlike any other. You are now the bearer of your baby's story. While you are stricken with the sad fact of the baby's *death*, you will tell the story of your baby's *life* for the rest of *your* life. Your faith, your philosophy or outlook on life, your experiences and your love form the framework upon which you will continue to weave the tapestry of this little one's presence and importance in our world. This is your unique duty and privilege. Your baby's life will shape the purpose of your life from now on.

We cannot, after all, judge a biography

by the number of pages in it;

we must judge by the richness of the contents.

Sometimes the "unfinished"

are among the most beautiful symphonies.

-Victor Frankl

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For information about grief support programs and resources,

call Geoff Piper at 253-584-0252