

Made Known

MOM PAMPHLET

I am changed.

By Stephanie Paige Cole

blood from your body
has pulsed through my heart, my veins
of course I am changed.

Sacred

By Stephanie Paige Cole

Your life began and
ended in my womb
I am a sacred space
because of you

“Tis a fearful thing to love what death can touch.” – Yehuda HaLevi

GRIEF

In the minutes, days, weeks and months after your child dies, the grief and pain is often all consuming and impossible to describe. While there is no right or wrong way to grieve, there are common grief reactions. You may experience some, all, or none of these in random order or at unexpected times over the next few months and years:

- » Shock and Numbness
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Difficulty performing basic tasks
 - Time confusion (i.e. five minutes feels like five hours and vice versa)
 - Denial and disbelief
 - Fear and panic
 - Physical and mental exhaustion
 - Lack of appetite or overeating
- » Searching and Yearning
 - Aching arms and/or phantom kicks
 - Anger and bitterness
 - Obsession with getting pregnant again
 - Lack of strength
 - Avoiding newborns or expectant parents
 - Vivid nightmares or daydreams
- » Disorientation
 - Social withdrawal
 - Feeling you are “going crazy”
 - Depression
 - Forgetfulness
 - Insomnia
 - Isolation and loneliness

- » Reorganization and Resolution
 - Renewed energy
 - Interest in activities
 - Ability to plan for the future
 - Increased self-esteem
 - Ability to laugh and smile (without guilt)
 - Ability to make decisions more easily

It is often believed and said that grief follows clear stages, and the goal is to get through them all so you can move on. The truth is, grief looks different for everyone. It isn't fluid. It isn't congruent. It ebbs and flows. There is also no end goal when grieving. There will be a time when you are able to live a "new normal," but your loss will be a part of you forever.

If you are worried about how you are handling your loss (i.e. all-consuming depression, thoughts of suicide, self-medicating with alcohol or drugs, etc.), reaching out to a psychiatrist, counselor or trusted friend for help is a necessary step.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

It is not uncommon to feel as though the grief or sense of loss is weighing heavier than it has been; especially as life seems to be moving on for everyone. You can also expect your baby's due date and/or anniversaries of their birth and death to be difficult days/weeks for you. During these especially heavy times, it is important to remember you won't feel this deeply grieved forever, and you need to continue to take care of yourself during this season.

Grief takes work. It can be exhausting at times. Make a list of activities that fuel you (crafts, hobbies, hot baths, reading, exercising, writing, etc.) and then use this list when your sorrow is weighing down on you. Here are some you might add to your list:

- » Eat a healthy diet.
- » Exercise.
- » Seek counseling.
- » Pamper yourself. (time off work, a massage, declining invitations to baby showers or parties)
- » Use relaxation techniques.
- » Find a support system.
- » Create memories or honor your baby.
- » BE PATIENT with yourself.

OTHERS' RESPONSES

Telling friends and family about your child's death can be an exhausting and heartbreaking task. If it seems too overwhelming to break the news over and over, ask a close friend or family member to help make the necessary calls.

Unfortunately, family or friends you believed would comfort you the most may disappoint you deeply with their responses. But there will be others who surprise you with their heartfelt reactions. The important thing to remember is that everyone wants to help. Even when their comments or actions (or lack of response at all) hurt, giving others grace despite your grief will keep the bitterness from growing. Relationships will change. Those you were close to before your loss may drift away, while mere acquaintances will turn into lifelong friends. Find the core people who seem to bring you real comfort, and don't be afraid to lean hard on them when the grief becomes too heavy.

LIFE AFTER LOSS

You have probably heard the phrase “new normal” a number of times. It best describes life after a loss. You cannot expect to fully recover—to be the same person you were before your baby died. But you can find just as much hope and joy in living your new normal. And while there is no magic date—one year later, ten years later—in which you will feel healed, time lessens the frequency and intensity of your grief.

Some common questions or concerns include:

- » **What do I say when people ask how many kids I have?** Many women assess the situation day by day. If you don’t want to get into a lengthy conversation, it’s okay to only mention your living children and know you love and remember the baby you lost in other ways. Other women simply say “I have two living children” or mention their living children without putting a definitive number on how many in total: “I have a four-year-old daughter.”
- » **When can I try to get pregnant again?** While this may be the last thing on your mind right now, it’s understandable to want to fill your arms and heart with a baby. Even if your doctor has cleared you to get pregnant again, be careful about jumping into another pregnancy right away. Consider what feels right for you. If you can wait a while to get through the heaviest grief work, you are more likely to be emotionally healthy during a subsequent pregnancy.

HONORING YOUR CHILD

Many mothers feel the strong need to honor and remember their child. There are many ways to do this, whether it is a one-time event or an annual tradition. Here are a few things you could do (but feel free to get creative and do what feels best for you and your family):

- » Name your child.
- » Create a memory box, shadowbox or collage.
- » Put together a video or slide show tribute.
- » Plant flowers, trees or bulbs in remembrance.
- » Purchase jewelry or a holiday ornament with your baby’s name or special date on it.
- » Write a letter to your child.
- » Celebrate his or her special day each year.
- » Make a donation in your child’s honor.
- » Get a memory bear—a special teddy bear made with a clothing item or blanket.

Books

To Linger on Hot Coals by Catherine Bayly and Stephanie Paige Cole

The Anguish of Loss by Julie Fritsch with Sherokee Ilse

Three Minus One: Stories of Parents’ Love & Loss by Sean Hanish & Brooke Warner

A Silent Sorrow by Ingrid Kohn and Perry-Lynn Moffitt

When a Baby Dies by Rana K. Limbo and Sara Rich Wheeler

Empty Cradle, Broken Heart by Deborah L. Davis, Ph.D.

Don’t Take My Grief Away From Me by Doug Manning