

Professionally Speaking

By: Denise M. Paul MA, CT

The Pain of Loss

Following the death of a baby, parents often ask me, “How long am I going to feel this pain?” For some people, the pain of grief seems so intense that they can barely tolerate it. A father who recently lost one of his newborn twin daughters tearfully described the pain of his grief like a rusty knife being jabbed and twisted into his heart one hundred times. This graphic depiction of the pain he experienced helped me to understand the profound effect that his daughter’s death had on him. I always tell parents that it is the pain of love that they are feeling. It hurts so much because you loved your baby so much. After the shock subsides, we meet the hard reality and begin to comprehend, little by little, what has happened to us and what has been torn from us. It is a time of emotional outbursts in which we experience pain, anger, guilt, fear, despair, failure, jealousy and other powerful feelings in order to heal. To allow and experience these feelings, to find an expression for them and deal with them, is the main task of healing following the death of your baby.

One of the Reconciliation Needs of Mourning, as outlined by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a noted grief specialist, is to feel the pain of the loss. It may sound counterintuitive, but allowing oneself to embrace the wide range of thoughts and feelings that result from the death is the best way to heal. Although it hurts to think about and talk about your baby who died, it is a vital part of the grief work that is essential to the healing process.

Hopefully, you have given your baby a name so that you can speak about him/her as a valued part of your family. If you have not yet named your baby, it is never too late. If your baby was too small to determine the sex, you can give the baby a name that is unisex, such as Chris or Rory. Some moms have a feeling that they were carrying a boy or a girl, and it’s OK to go with that instinct and give the baby a specific boy or girl name. By naming your baby you are letting people know that this baby was a real person who holds a special place in your heart. It also lets people know that you want to remember your baby and you can do so without falling apart.

Processing your loss and resolving your feelings takes time and you may want to help yourself by dedicating undisturbed time to this effort. Seek out people who understand what you are feeling and who allow you to talk about your baby. Support groups, such as UNITE, Inc., are the best places to find support from parents who have had similar experiences.