

Professionally Speaking...

by Denise M. Paul MA,CT,CPLC

The New You

On the day your baby died you became a totally different person. Your life can be measured as “the time before he/she died and the time after he/she died.” The pain of your precious baby’s death changed your life forever. You are a “new you.” Grief affects you in many ways: spiritually, socially, behaviorally, cognitively, and physically. In one instant, you have turned into a person that you don’t even recognize, and who you may not even like. You may have found that your family and friends are uncomfortable with the “new you.” Society in general wants you to get back to the “old you”, but that person no longer exists. You have experienced the worst pain that anyone can imagine, and while you feel the need to mourn the loss of your baby and keep your baby’s memory alive, friends and family would prefer that you don’t focus on those painful memories and try to move on with your life.

Grieving parents in my support group report that it’s exhausting to grieve, while trying to hide their feelings from people who don’t understand and who are not affected by their loss. Grieving is hard work, which is why it is called “Grief Work.” I’d like to encourage you not to hide your feelings. You have the right to be sad, mad, jealous, ashamed, vulnerable, and shocked, just to name a few of the many emotions that are perfectly normal for parents in your shoes. You can’t expect people to know how you are feeling, unless they have experienced the loss of their own baby. It’s just not the same as losing a grandparent, a sibling, or a parent. If you feel strong enough, I recommend that you find your voice and educate people about how this loss is affecting you, and tell them how they can best support you on this journey.

You might want to wear a sign on your chest that says, “My heart is broken. My baby died. I’m not the person I used to be.” However impractical that sounds, I know that it would help you to proclaim to the

world how broken you really feel. A more practical thing to do would be to wear a necklace or a pin with your baby's initials or birthstone on it. This serves two purposes – it allows you to keep your baby's memory close to you every day, and it is a sign to others that you are mourning the loss of someone very special. People may be tempted to ask you about the significance of your outward sign, which would give you the opportunity to share your baby's existence with them.

Profound grief is debilitating and the pain that you feel is unbearable. It's supposed to be. It's hurts so much because you loved your baby so much. You will never be the same. You are the parent of an Angel Baby.