

Grief and Joy- Simultaneously grieving the loss and celebrating the birth of multiple birth children

Unique to Multiple Births

In spite of everyone's best efforts, sometimes parents may lose one or more of their babies. Should this be your situation, the following has been prepared to guide you through this difficult time and to offer ideas on dealing with the reactions of others around you. May you find comfort from these suggestions.

Loss with multiple birth children occurs on three levels: 1) the loss of your precious baby(ies); 2) the loss of a unique parenting experience; and 3) for your survivor, loss of a special sibling. Emotions experienced can be varied and sometimes seem to make no sense at all. You may ask yourself: "Did I prefer one baby over the other?" "Did I really only want one?" "Was this my fault?" Talking with a caring person or professional counsellor can be helpful.

There can be inner struggles when dealing with simultaneous joy and despair. You may wish to push all thoughts of the deceased baby(ies) from your mind and concentrate on the survivor(s) and their well being. Or just the opposite and you may end up feeling guilty about not focusing on your surviving child(ren). This is normal. You need to do what works for you. You may only have your babies together for a short time, so however that connection works for you, makes perfect sense. Be gentle on yourselves.

You may have to deal with thoughtless remarks from family or friends such as: 'You couldn't have handled triplets anyway.' 'At least you still have a baby.' 'You have two babies who need you, get on with it!' Children are not interchangeable. Each child is valuable and because there is a survivor(s), it does not mean you can't/shouldn't grieve. Take the necessary time you need. It is a challenge to move forward when you have not grieved what you have lost. Don't feel shy about gently/firmly reminding others that you have lost a baby(ies); and you have every right to mourn in a way and time frame that works for you and your family.

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Managing Simultaneous Grief and Joy

We would like to offer you some ideas on coping with grief, guilt and joy simultaneously.

Ask any questions of your doctor that you might have, and ask until you have answers that you understand. Be prepared, however, for the fact that some questions may have no answers.

As parents, try to set aside some time to spend together to share your grief and lost dreams. Be prepared to have setbacks - this is normal. You are not the same people you were before and there is a new reality to be faced. The loss of a child or multiple children will stay with you forever. The best advice is to learn how to incorporate your grief into your everyday lives so that you can keep on living. How to incorporate grief and pain may be different for each parent.

Be prepared to have feelings triggered for what seems like no apparent reason. Do your best not to ignore your feelings. It is only by going through them that you can eventually begin to feel any peace.

Remember to include the grandparents in your grieving process. They too may be struggling to celebrate the birth while still grieving the loss of their grandchild(ren). You may find valuable support in each other. In addition to losing a grandchild(ren), remember they may also feel sad for not being able to protect you and your partner from such terrible pain.

Don't keep feelings bottled up inside. Talk with a caring person whenever you need. Join a local bereavement support group. Seek out parents online with similar losses. Such support can be important for both parents & grandparents too.

If you have older children, remember that they will be grieving as well. Consider asking them to draw a picture or write a note to help them cope. Including them, instead of sheltering them, will allow them to share their feelings and understand why people around them are sad. They may help show you the joy in your surviving baby(ies) as they will want to love and play with their new sibling(s) the same way any older sibling would. They will likely have many questions and ask them over and over in their attempt to understand.

Please don't be alone in your grief. There are many caring people available to support you.

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Memorial Ideas

Every family will remember and grieve for their lost child/ren in their own ways. We offer you suggestions/ideas from other families that have walked a similar path.

If this package has found its way to you early enough there are some things you can do.

Take pictures of your baby(ies), together and separately if possible. You may wish to take family photos, including any other children.

Ask to have hand and foot prints taken: perhaps a hair clipping.

Dress and bathe your baby(ies) and spend some time with them, even overnight.

One family whose babies were all born the same day did not want to impact the celebration for their survivor, so they chose a different day to memorialize their deceased baby.

A triplet family has a wooden initial alphabet block that they include in every family photo as a reminder of the one baby they lost.

One couple donates a baby layette each year in their son's name to the hospital on the day their son died.

Other families make donations, either monetary or volunteer hours, to a meaningful organization in their deceased baby's name. Over time they encourage the survivor(s) be involved with the donation.

Written by Lynda Haddon and Heather McAuley- Multiple Birth Canada

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Support Contacts

Multiple Births Canada

Loss Support Network

There is no charge to join the MBC Loss Support Network.

You do not need to be a member of MBC.

Simply email: loss@multiplebirthscanada.org

Toll Free in Canada: 1-866-228-8824

Lynda P. Haddon www.jumelle.ca

Centre for Loss in Multiple Birth (CLIMB)

www.climb-support.org

Email: climb@climb-support.org

Check The Compassionate Friends of Canada, Inc. website for a group near you www.tcfcanda.net

Bereaved Families of Ontario

www.bereavedfamilies.net

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