

## *Professionally Speaking...*

Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

### **I Lost My Baby – But I Lost More Than That**

From the moment that you learned you were pregnant, your mind started formulating a future with that precious baby. Your identity as a parent started to form. When your baby died, you were forced to figure out what it means to be the parent of a child that is no longer with you. You lost your baby, but you also lost your identity. If this was your first child, you may wonder if you can still identify yourself as a parent. The answer is “yes.” You are the parent of an Angel Baby.

Your role as a friend and family member may change, as you may find it difficult to interact normally with parents who have children to share their life with. You may no longer want to attend baby showers, Christenings, and holiday gatherings because the pain of seeing others with babies tugs at your heartstrings too much. You may lose friends following your loss because some friends do not have the capacity to support you in your grief in a compassionate way. Unfortunately, many friends and relatives do not recognize the depth of your pain, and it is difficult for them to imagine your grief. Their lack of empathy can be very painful, and when you realize that they are on a different path, your friendship may be challenged.

Your sense of security and predictability may be lost. A perfectly normal pregnancy can be shattered in a moment when a fetal heartbeat is not detected at a routine doctor visit. Your baby’s death undermines your sense of being masterful, in control, and able to solve any problem. Everything that you thought was safe is challenged and you feel open to other problems. When you realize that you don’t always have the power to prevent bad things from happening, a sense of vulnerability is triggered.

When your baby dies before birth, you lose a part of your future. You grieve not only for your baby, but also for your visions of parenthood. You already have hopes and dreams for this baby. You have already begun planning a life with this baby. Now you realize that you will not be watching this little someone playing ball, singing at kindergarten graduation, or graduating from high school. You will not be taking them fishing, watching them start a career, get married, and have children of their own. You will not be a grandparent to that baby’s children. The loss lasts a lifetime.

Your faith in God may be challenged temporarily or permanently following a loss if you blame God for taking your baby. I often hear, “Why would God bless me with a baby, if He was only going to take him/her away?” Parents often feel very angry with God and sometimes refrain from attending church services for weeks or months following the death of their baby. On the other hand, spirituality or religion can play an important role in your transformation and healing.

Your entire personality may have changed following the death of your baby. You may lose your sense of joy. The rest of the world seems to be having fun and going on as usual, while you are learning to cope with a “new normal.” You may suffer from Anhedonia, a psychological condition characterized by an inability to experience pleasure in normally pleasurable acts. You may feel incapable of recapturing the happy, carefree person that you once were, and this can be very frustrating and painful.

Perhaps most painful of all, you lose some measure of hope for the future. Your baby’s death makes you feel vulnerable to tragedy and reluctant to count on your plans coming to fruition. This feeling can be magnified if you have had more than one loss.

While recognizing what you have lost, it is also important to acknowledge what you have gained since your baby died. You can live in honor of your baby by acquiring a new or renewed sense of purpose and meaning in your life, which becomes part of your baby’s legacy. Surviving the death of your baby may teach you about life and reveal new strengths. You may feel more in touch with your feelings and understand the value of mindfully observing them, acknowledging them, and letting them flow through you. Perhaps you have come to experience the grace of new friends who have supported you in your grief. You may become more assertive and stand up for yourself instead of trusting fate to others. Self-compassion may be a gift that you are more likely to give to yourself and you may feel a heightened appreciation for what you have. Parents often comment that they value life and family more following the loss of a baby. You may focus on what you really want out of life, realizing that life is too short. With all these lessons learned, skills acquired, and relationships made stronger, you will hopefully feel better equipped to process the joys and challenges that life has to offer.