

Professionally Speaking...
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Own Your Feelings

Parents have an intrinsic need to describe in words the pain that they are feeling following the death of their precious baby. As I honor their stories by listening with my heart and my head, I learn what their grief is like. While I have never personally experienced a miscarriage or a stillbirth, I have had the privilege of companionship hundreds of parents on their grief journey, where they help me to see what they see and feel what they feel. When someone says something that stops me in my tracks, I write it down.

“I feel like something is killing me, but I’m not dying.”

It was important for this mom to say these words. She needed to voice how terrible the feeling of losing her baby was. These words conveyed to me the excruciating pain, both physical and emotional, that she was suffering on a daily basis. Something was killing her, but it was difficult to put into words what it was that was attaching her to the core. She knew that she would not die from this attach, and in her right mind she did expect to die, nor did she want to die. She just wanted the pain to stop.

I was struck by the fact that she wanted to share this with me. She allowed me to honor what she was saying. She needed to be heard. She needed her thoughts to be validated. I don’t recall what my exact response to her was, but in essence I said, “I hear that you are in pain. I know that losing your baby feels like a stabbing, continuous assault. I know that part of you would rather die than live with this pain for the rest of your life. I will help you hold this pain.” I did not try to change the subject or try to lighten her load by encouraging her to keep busy. I looked at her in amazement, realizing how brave her confession was.

This encounter taught me about the depth of pain that some parents feel when they experience a miscarriage or a stillbirth. It prompted me to write this message about the importance of finding people who you trust to uphold your feelings. Seek out people who offer a safe place in which to bear your soul. Cling to family and friends who will allow you to say honest and heartbreaking truths about how you are doing. Only confide in people who will not take your feelings away from you.

It is a natural tendency for family members and friends to want you to be happy. They’d like to hear that you are managing your grief in a very efficient way so that

they don't have to face your sadness. Conversely, it is the grieving person's tendency to not want to impose their grief onto others, so when asked how you are doing, your response is, "Ok." Imagine what a friend would do if they asked you how you were doing, and your response was, "I feel like someone is killing me, but I'm not dying." If you said that to the wrong person, I'd be afraid of what their response would be! You may even lose some friends.

I'm urging you to be honest with your feelings. Say how you are feeling out loud to someone. But make sure that it is a person who you trust to honor your feelings. The beauty of support groups is that everyone understands. One person may be brave enough to say something profound, and I can guarantee that at least a few others in the room will feel the same way, and will be grateful that someone else said the words that they too were feeling.

If it's too difficult to talk about how you are feeling, then write your thoughts down in a journal. The simple act of taking pen to paper can be very therapeutic. I suggest that you purchase a blank journal book and begin writing. Note the date of each entry so that you can see your progression of thoughts and feelings as the weeks, months, and years go by.

It's so important to acknowledge your feelings. If you can't say them, then write them. This is all part of doing your grief work, which is so important to your healing process.