

Professionally Speaking...

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What Are Your Options?

The death of your baby may have left you feeling like you will never find joy again. The physical and emotional toll that your loss has on your body and mind is tremendous, and it takes a great deal of strength to come back from the depth of grief and despair.

I am currently reading the New York Times best-selling book, *OPTION B*. Sheryl Sandberg writes about facing adversity, building resilience, and finding joy in the face of adversity, following the sudden death of her husband. In an attempt to recover from his loss, she wrote this book in collaboration with psychologist Adam Grant. Ms. Sandberg encourages the reader to know that after the most devastating events, it is possible to grow by finding deeper meaning and gaining greater appreciation in our lives. I realize that the possibility of moving on is very difficult to imagine when your heart is completely shattered, but you have no choice.

Journaling is a therapeutic technique that I often recommend for people who are mourning the loss of their baby. It is helpful to write down your feelings so that they can be read and acknowledged. However, I often find that it's difficult to get started unless you are given a specific topic or a prompt.

Another tool for recovery is a gratitude journal, in which you keep a log of things that you are grateful for. In other words – you count your blessings. By acknowledging what you do have, rather than what you have lost, you naturally look towards the positive things in your life. It may be uplifting to think about the good in your life, but when your baby dies, it's nearly impossible to think about something to be grateful for.

The authors of the book *OPTION B* quote philosopher, Soren Keirkengard by saying, "Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward." This means that the death of your baby has shaped who you are. Despite the profound grief that you feel, you must figure out a way to incorporate this loss into your life and move on. This can be done by re-building your self-confidence in order to navigate the present and the future. Mothers in my UNITE Grief Support Group often tell me about the feelings that they are experiencing following the death of their babies. The feelings that I most often hear are: guilty, scared, isolated, ashamed, vulnerable, hopeless, failure, and jealous. Their self-confidence is destroyed because moms believe that they are responsible for nurturing their babies to life. When their babies die, they often blame themselves. One of the things that must be re-built is self-esteem and confidence. Psychologist Adam Grant points out in the book that simply counting your blessings doesn't boost your confidence.

Grief permeates your whole life. Even when you go back to work and resume your usual activities, you are carrying all of your feelings associated with grief. At first, it may be difficult to simply get out of bed in the morning and brush your teeth. In the first days, weeks, and even months following the death of your baby, you can barely function. So how do you boost your confidence when you are feeling so sad? *Option B* offers a unique technique that I'd like to share with you.

Start by writing down three things that you have done well each day. Even though you feel that you are barely functioning, focus on the "small wins." It can be simple things like putting on make-up, or enjoyed a cup of tea. In an experiment, people wrote down three things that went well and why every day for a week. Over the next six months, they became happier than a group who simply journaled about memories and feelings. In another study, people wrote down things that went "really well" and why. The results were that their stress levels dropped, as did their mental and physical health complaints. The phenomenon of incremental progress will uplift you on your very difficult grief journey.

Following the death of your baby, you have two options: you can curl up in a ball and cry all day, or you can slowly move forward, re-investing in life, while keeping the memory of your baby always in your heart. Your heart is broken, but it still beats.