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To the child in my heart

Precious, tiny, sweet one, you will always be to me
so perfect, pure and innocent, just as you were meant to be.

We dreamed of you and your life
And all that it would be.

We waited and longed for you to come and join our family.
We never had the chance to play, to laugh, to rock, to wiggle.
We long to hold you, touch you now and listen to you giggle.

I'll always be your mother
He'll always be your dad
You will always be our child
The child that we had.

But now you're gone... but yet you're here
We'll sense you everywhere.

You are our sorrow and our joy
There's love in every tear.

Just know our love goes deep and strong
We'll forget you never - The child we had, but never had,
And yet will have forever.

(author unknown)

introduction

Over the past twenty years I have been greatly privileged to have been invited to share with families who have experienced a loss involving their children. This loss has taken many forms. For some it has been the discovery that their baby has a life threatening disorder before it has even been born. For others it is the realisation that even surgery cannot make their child's life normal, but for many it is the ultimate loss through death that marks their lives forever. The greater experience of those who have contributed to this book is the loss of a baby.

As I have travelled with families through their grief, I have been given a glimpse into the enormity of the feelings experienced. At different times they have swung from anger to acceptance; from despair to joy. The roller coaster of emotion has needed to be felt, as their grieving has been a job of work that can be delayed but which must be experienced before they and all the members of their family can move on.

Many of these families have joined together to write this book, hoping that it will provide a helping hand along the grieving path. It contains many personal experiences and ideas of ways to cope with the ever-changing emotional turmoil. We also hope that it will give the readers confidence that they are not the only people to experience such a strange mixture of emotions.

Hopefully this book will provide some of the support that you are looking for. Keep it by the bedside and dip into it as your experiences change. The different sections will help you understand your changing feelings as you go along the journey of grief. Every time you read of another's experience you will know that you are not alone.

Suzie Hutchinson, Director, Little Hearts Matter.



the overwhelming feelings of grief

Many parents who have suffered the loss of a child worry if what they are feeling is okay or alright. The strength of the emotions involved is much greater than anything that they have felt before and because the emotions of sadness are so extreme, they worry that they may not be normal.

To help you realise that many different emotions can be present at the same time, I would like to tell you what a mother told me about the way that she was



feeling a few weeks after the death of her son.

“Leading up to his death was like being in a fast moving river. I felt like I was being rushed along by something much greater and stronger than I was. Branches were hanging over the sides of the banks with fingers reaching out for me, but I couldn’t grab any of them as the river quickly moved me on. Gradually I became aware of a noise, the sound of falling water. The noise grew louder and louder – so loud that I was totally enveloped within it.

“At the time of Ben’s death, I was completely alone within this noise. I felt isolated. Suddenly I was flying through the air with water falling all around me. I felt numb with cold, unable to scream, resigned to the great drop below. I was falling, falling, unable to brace myself as a great pool of water rushed ever closer. Down, down into the heart of the freezing cold water. I was grateful as it drew me in, away from reality. I could see the light shining above the surface but I felt cocooned in the enveloping water.

“Gradually my body began to rise until I found myself floating in the centre of the pool. The shore seemed so far away; so many feelings to experience before I could reach dry land. There, standing on the shore, were my husband and other children waiting for me to reach the banks, as they had. Slowly but surely I began to swim to the edge and to the hope of life beyond the depths of icy water.”

This story has always stayed with me because it so clearly tells us that there are many feelings that can be felt and that they may happen in any order, but the hope is that we will all reach the shore.

Suzie Hutchinson