

# FAMILY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Social Work Department

## NEWSLETTER MARCH 2022



### “ HOW HAS GRIEF CHANGED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE? “

Welcome to the newsletter of the March bereavement group. Tonight we had 5 parents attending with a mix of people returning to the group after some time and some more regular attendees. It was an interesting coincidence that several of the children had died just before their birthdays, placing the birthing and dying anniversaries very close together. The parents spoke about how difficult this is when you can't separate these days. For some in the group these anniversaries occur in March, and this is what brought them to the group this month. One parent, when speaking about significant anniversaries said - **“It doesn't get any better, I still have days that are incredibly hard to get through. You just have to ride the waves and it's so hard without them”**.

All the parents felt that losing a child does change your perspective on life and, as the discussion progressed, it was clear that it can also change the perspective of your children. One parent said her perspective had **“changed and evolved as we have gotten further along the grief journey”**. Everyone agreed that there are some times when you may be feeling okay then something happens

that triggers the grief and you are right back in it. A parent spoke about being in a good mood then hearing a song on spotify that was played at her daughter's funeral and instantly she was right back there. Other parents definitely identified with this experience. As one parent said - **“You don't see it coming, and it's like a freight train when it comes”**.

In discussing changed perspectives, parents talked about their anxiety in relation to their other children and their sense that anything could change at any time. Just because one terrible thing has happened in your life, it doesn't protect you from other terrible things also happening. **“The fear of something happening again. The fear is horrendous”**. One parent spoke of how she was a very different parent to her second child than she was with her first - **“I feel so much guilt that I am not this bubbly, social person anymore....I can't be spontaneous, I have depression and anxiety. I am not the same mum that I was”**. Knowing how fragile and unpredictable life is, some of the parents told us how they had done things that they never would have done if their child had not died. **“We made a promise we would still live our lives to honour his memory. I think there**


**are things we have done that we wouldn't have done if he didn't die".** One thing they did was to take their almost 5-year-old and 20-month-old to Disneyland in the United States. She said lots of people questioned their sanity at the time but they had lots of fun as well as challenges and no regrets - **"I find I am creating memories"**. She also took a chance and resigned from her regular job to fully commit to her private practice, something she may not have had the courage to do before the birth and death of her child. Another parent said they took their very young baby camping and hiking with them. They intended to do more of this type of thing but then COVID came along and they were stuck at home. Now that restrictions have almost disappeared, they will get out with their child more. This parent commented that they will do things together, just the three of them. She told us that her social circle had pretty much vanished and that she, her partner and her child are a tight little group. In contrast, another parent talked about the people who had been able to stick through the journey and how important they are to her. After her child died in a tragic accident, she said these **"women gathered around me and helped me carry the grief. They helped me raise my other child when I couldn't. I couldn't have**

**got through without them. You have to know who your tribe is"**. She said not everyone could go the distance and some fell by the wayside, but she felt very blessed that there are people who stuck with her and got

her through the early times after the death of her child, and then through the separation from her husband. She did not blame those who couldn't stick but said - **"How freeing is it that the friends who couldn't stay by your side have moved on? I am grateful for the ones who could stay"**. She also shared with us the sadness of her separation from her husband and told us how they expressed their grief differently - **"My husband was very quiet in his grief. I had to save myself and that's why we separated.....I'm so sorry that it happened to us. You can't free yourself from grief unless you find some peace in it somewhere"**.

There was quite a lot of talk about guilt in the group. One parent talked about her guilt that she is not the bright and bubbly mother to her second child that she was to her first. Several of the parents spoke about feeling guilty if they were happy, particularly earlier in their bereavement. **"I felt guilty if I was happy. I needed to stay in the sadness"**. Guilt can come from being busy and feeling there is no place for the child in your life. One parent said: **"If I don't hold my child who died, no one will.....and I'm holding immense guilt because no one else is"**. A couple of parents spoke about feeling guilty about the freedom they had after their child died. One had been caring for her son for many months - **"Every minute of the day and night was taken up with caring for him, and then suddenly there was nothing to do"**. Another parent spoke about how she and her partner had

Love is strong.  
Love lives on.



had been caring for her son for many months - **"Every minute of the day and night was taken up with caring for him, and then suddenly there was nothing to do"**. Another parent spoke about how she and her partner had

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been anticipating the change in their ability to do things spontaneously, go out for dinner etc. once they became parents, but their child never came home, and she felt guilty that they could keep doing all the things they had been able to do previously. What helped one parent was when 2 other older people who had also lost children many years earlier told her she did not have to feel guilty: **“You’re allowed to be happy, it doesn’t mean you have forgotten your child. It was it’s okay She told helped the mem- understanding that to ride those waves”**. us how much this her. The fear of losing ories of your child or forgetting them was very real for the parents in the group, particularly in the earlier years. One parent created an album and every year on her daughter’s birthday asked everyone to write down a memory of her. She continued to do this every year and now has an album full of memories of her child. Another parent talked about the importance of having photos of her child around the house - **“There is no evidence he was here if there are no photos”**. She said there are possibly more photos of him around than of the other children, but they are physically here, there is a lot of evidence that they exist: **“for him, there are no dirty footy boots by the door; no school bag slung onto the floor..”**.



Some parents talked about other friends and family members talking about their child and even buying mementoes. They know their child is not forgotten. One family has a shelf with photos of their child and lots of items of memorabilia. Other people add to the shelf when they see something that reminds them of him. A parent commented that family and friends know they are very comfortable talking about their child so therefore they also talk about him. She also told us that she has always taken the other children to the cemetery to visit his grave and put flowers or other things there. The children have always found

this a fun time and sometimes ask to go and visit their brother - **“They have such a strong connection with him, and a part of that is being out there (cemetery). They still have a sibling connection”**. She also commented that she feels this makes them more compassionate. Those who had lived without their child for longer reassured others that you never forget. For one parent, coming to this group is a way to ensure she has some space just for her son as there is so much else in her life now that it can feel like he is crowded out - **“This is his time, each month he’s got something in my diary. It comes from a sense of guilt for not having space or time for him. It felt like he was getting crowded out”**. This parent told us how hard it was to find space for him during COVID when the other children were at home all the time with home schooling and working from home. It made her realise how many little things she does for her child each day, almost incidentally, things she couldn’t do in the busyness of COVID. Another parent who had lost her youngest child as a teenager said she felt that: **“the milestones were taken away from me. I was robbed of his life and the experience of going through the milestones again”**. Another parent commented that this mother didn’t get to finish her parenting.



This led on to a discussion about finding joy in your life after you have lost a child. One parent told us at the beginning of the group that **“five years on, I am still haunted...it can be hard to find joy in life”**. A number of parents spoke of feeling guilty if they were happy. Another parent commented that she felt that if she was having a good day, other people would think she had moved on and was no longer grieving. She said: **“I had to accept that some people just won’t get it”**. Parents spoke about how important their other children are for them, both in finding a reason to go in the early days and in bringing





joy. Some of the parents in the group did not have another child when their child died and spoke about being an ‘invisible mum’. They also spoke about how grateful they were for their other children and the role they have played and are playing in helping them find joy and purpose in life - **“I’ve done the very best that I’ve been able to do.....Thank God for the children we do have”**. While your other children do help to bring joy, someone said: **“You need to live your joy through your other child, but at every milestone there is always a sadness that their older brother never got to see him achieve this and never got to achieve the milestone himself”**. This ‘bittersweet’ experience was shared by all in the group, with the ongoing sadness of what they and their child had missed out on only being emphasised as their siblings or peers achieved new milestones. Parents talked about always seeing the missing child in the group – **“All I see is the missing child that’s not there playing with other children”**. While other children brought joy, they also brought poignant reminders of what their sibling (or friend) did not experience and therefore of what the parent had missed out on.

Some parents spoke about making conscious decisions to be happy and to live life and allow their other children to live a full life. They talked about how difficult this was in the early years and can still be. **“It was a conscious decision to not put my fears in my kids, especially in the early years”**, and, **“We made a promise we would still live our lives in his honour, his memory”**. This has been more difficult at some times than others and in some situations than in others and it can take a lot of energy. A parent said: **“I am**

**consciously aware of trying to allow the light to come back into my life. I’m conscious of the effort that I put in”**. It also takes conscious effort to put on a mask when you need to go out and face the world when inside you are full of grief. One parent commented that it was hard inner work in the early days. A number of parents make use of counselling to help them to do this ‘inner work’. Grief is exhausting!

We spoke a little of what the child had brought into the lives of their families. One parent said: **“He was so full of wisdom my son. When his older sister was having some difficulties, she said she wished he was here because he was so good at giving advice”**. Another parent commented – **“The gift that our children left us with, those little things make my life more fulfilled than I could ever have imagined. I take my [child who died’s] gift with me every day. He changed my life, he left a beautiful gift”**. There is also the anticipated relationship that never eventuated – **“I miss the mother-daughter relationship, it’s the future that you miss as well. It would have been so special for her to come through the door and tell me what’s been happening”**.

Some of the parents shared their wisdom learned from their various journeys:

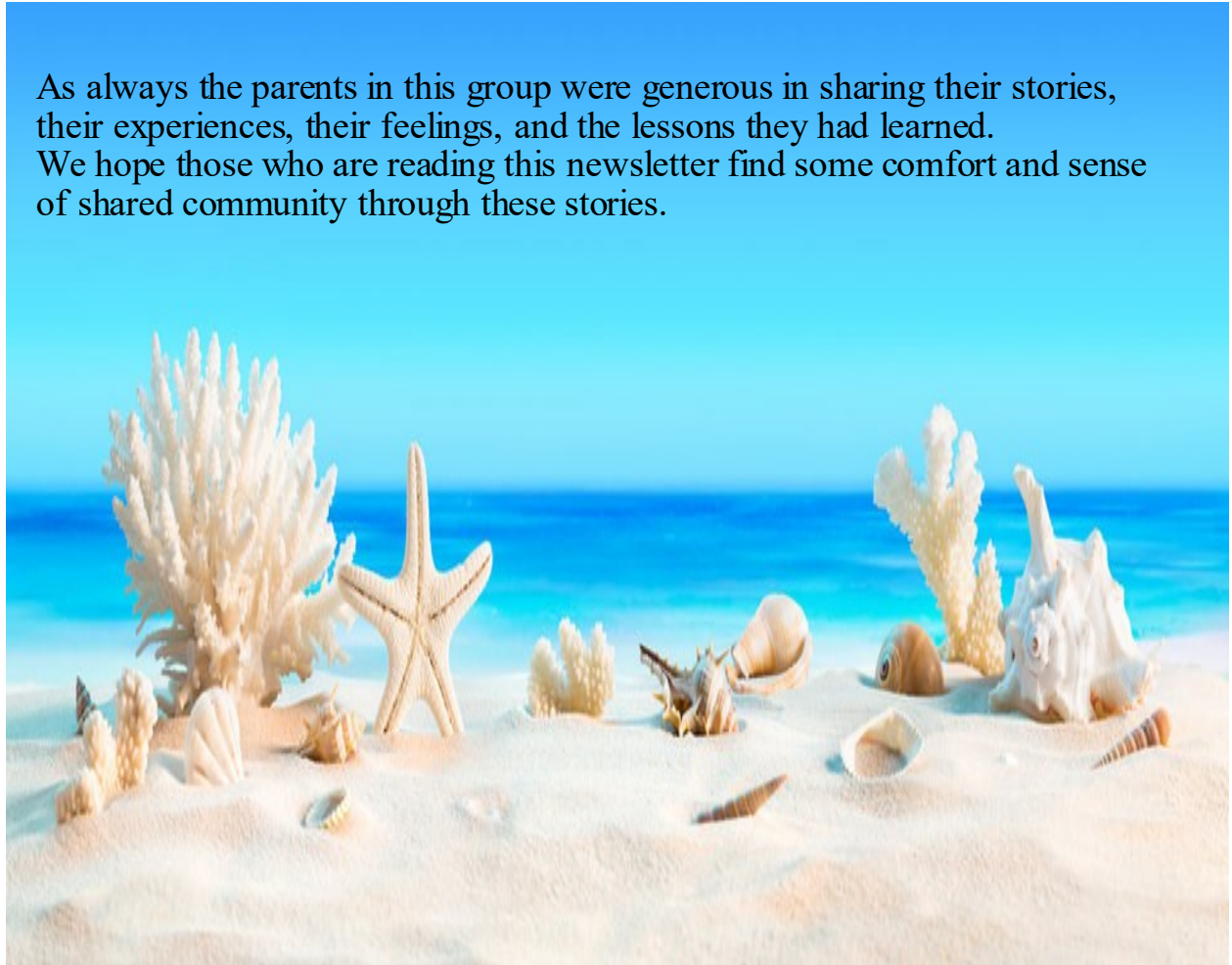
**“This is your walk, and you need to do it with your head held high, with or without your children”**

**“You need to learn to ride the waves – sometimes you are in the gentle waves and then you are suddenly hit by a tsunami and feel like you are drowning”**.

**“I live life each day now as we are going to have good days and bad days. Taking it day by day. Try and live in the now, this is what’s happening now, let’s not worry about it”.**

**“Time allows you to see things differently and navigate the trauma”.**

As always the parents in this group were generous in sharing their stories, their experiences, their feelings, and the lessons they had learned. We hope those who are reading this newsletter find some comfort and sense of shared community through these stories.





“THE LOSS OF MY CHILD  
HAS NOT DEFINED ME,  
BUT IT CERTAINLY HAS  
FOREVER *changed me.*”

UNKNOWN AUTHOR



## *Our letter box is Waiting!*



Contributions such as responses and reflections on the groups' themes, poems, letters, songs, reviews of books that you may have found helpful, quotations from parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters and friends, feedback about this newsletter are most welcome. Share your thoughts, experiences, questions with others who are bereaved. Please forward them to:

Family Bereavement Support Programme  
Social Work Department  
Royal Children's Hospital  
50 Flemington Road  
PARKVILLE VIC 3052  
Phone: 03 9345 6111  
Or email: [Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au](mailto:Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au)

The next meeting of the  
Family Bereavement Support Evening Group (Via Zoom)

**Thursday 21st April 2022 at 7.30pm**

Please join us to discuss the topic:

*“Different expressions of grief – how people grieve differently  
and the challenges of this in a family or relationship”*

If you wish to attend this group please

email: [Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au](mailto:Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au)



The newsletter is always a team effort.  
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**Social Work Department, RCH**



