

FAMILY BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Social Work Department

NEWSLETTER JULY 2026



“Poems, blogs, books and words – expressing love and grief.”



Welcome to the bereavement group newsletter. In July the group met online. This had been requested by a number of people in the survey that was sent out last year. The topic for this group was ‘Poems, blogs, books and words – expressing love and grief.’ In the course of the evening, we talked about different ways the parents in the group expressed their grief and their individual experiences before and after their child died.

We began by talking about using written words to express grief with some parents in the group telling us about their experience of writing letters. There is apparently an app that helps write letters. A parent who has written to her child said *“writing letters to my child sat really hard with me, but I’ve done it once”*. She also said that she used an Instagram page to update everyone when her child was alive. It was *“a way for me to process complex medical situations by having to explain them in a palatable way....That’s something that I lost. I stopped using that page because I didn’t want to feel that I was putting my grief out on other people”*. Another parent said: *“writing letters absolutely breaks me....I don’t have a religion or anything, and I don’t feel like my child hears me in what I write...but it opens me up when I say I am sorry for what he went through”*. Some parents had participated in a VSK bereaved parent weekend and were invited to write a letter to or from their child: *“We felt like we couldn’t speak from (our child), but one of the other mums wrote from her child. It was so nice to hear another parent’s letter from her child...I thought to myself, I could never do that, but when I heard it read out it was very powerful”*. When discussing journalling, a parent said - *“I have been weirdly avoidant of it since the bereaved parent’s weekend. I think I found it so helpful*

to write a letter (to my child), and I want to write a big letter to say I am sorry for everything that happened, but I am being avoidant of that, even though it’s helpful – helpful but painful”.



Some people find journalling an excellent way of getting their thoughts and feelings out of their head and onto paper, but one parent said *“I can’t put words on paper; it all feels too much right now”*. Another parent writes a journal when she cannot sleep. One parent felt lucky that she had already discovered the benefits of journalling before her child was here but said she hasn’t been doing it as much lately, *“even though I know it is the best thing for me”*. Writing isn’t for everyone, but for some people writing things down helps them to feel less overwhelmed.

Even expressing your grief in words others will understand often feels impossible: *“I’m finding it harder as time goes on to express how I feel, especially to other people.....societal expectations maybe. You’re expected to keep on keeping on at this point”*. Society expects that things will get easier over time, but this is not really that simple, particularly early on - *“How do you express some-*

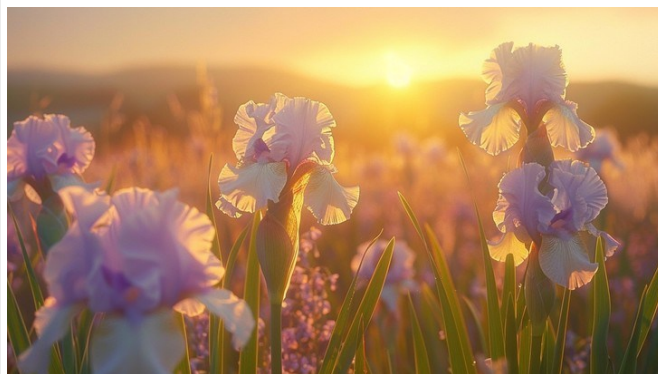
thing that is getting harder and harder when people expect it to get easier and easier”? Some parents were concerned that speaking of their grief or of their child was putting their grief onto others and making them feel bad as well. One parent spoke of feeling she needed to protect other people. *“I feel a huge amount of guilt for other people’s grief, like this is somehow my fault and that’s something that has been really hard for me”*. Another parent said *“Sometimes you feel like you are imposing on others. There are good days and there are bad days, and if I want to talk about my child that’s okay, and if they can’t cope with that, that’s their problem, not mine.....True friends and family will wrap their arms around you”*. A parent reflected that because the bereavement is so fresh people are very uncomfortable talking about it, when all she wants to do is talk about her child. She also commented that the amount of love you feel for your child cannot be measured by how long they lived. Parents also reflected on the impact of the words and experiences of others on them - *“I get increasingly angry as time goes on at people who just have the most normal or perfect childbirth...and they have no clue....it’s never in their mind about what can happen”*. Another parent told us she feels “peeved” when she sees Facebook images of other people’s children with the caption ‘he’s perfect’: *“It makes me feel that what we had wasn’t perfect”*. Comments such as ‘as long as they are happy and healthy’ can also be hard to hear when your experience was not that. A parent spoke of the fact that she feels a really close friend who has recently had a baby is avoiding her, potentially because she does not know how to interact with her. There was a general feeling of disappointment with the responses of others to them now they are bereaved parents. One parent said: *“You will never get any kind of compensation, and no response will ever really be enough, I suppose”*.



Many parents find much comfort in the words of others that eloquently express their own thoughts and feelings

in books and music. A parent told us about a book he had found very comforting - *“Everywhere Still by MH Clark”*. He read a few paragraphs from the book to the group:

“I miss you; I love you and I know I always will, and even though you aren’t here now, I feel you everywhere still”



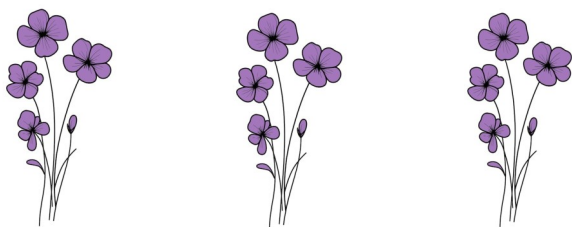
“I have all of your memories, sometimes they hurt my heart to hold, sometimes they are warm, sometimes they are cold”

“Sometimes I try to wish you back, and wish it worked like that”

He told us it *“feels like I am having a deep conversation with my little boy”* when reading books like this. Other parents could identify with the feeling of closeness some books can bring. *“Books are amazing, how when you read them, it feels it was written for my little girl”*. A parent read a special book about feeling connected wherever you are, to her baby in utero. She also played a particular song to “her tummy” when pregnant and when in the hospital and also at her child’s funeral - *“It’s too hard to listen to that song and read that book at the moment”*. Music and songs can be very powerful and can come up randomly and when you least expect it- *“I was driving home from a friend’s house, and it didn’t matter what song I was listening to, it just all felt like it was all about (my child). It didn’t matter what song came on the radio, or which station I turned on, it all felt like it was about him. I was fine and then crying my eyes out in the car”*.

Photos are a big part of remembering and keeping your child present in your life. Some parents told us how grateful they are for other friends or relatives who took photos - *“Photos; thank goodness for in laws and my sister for making all of those memories to last”*. Another parent spoke of how important photos were when their child was born during COVID - *“Photos and memories*

are so important, no one could come in and be with us (due to COVID). I feel like I live in fear of forgetting a fleeting moment, and if I see a photo of something I haven't thought of, I feel so guilty for not remembering". Many parents have many photos of their child, and scrapbooking can be a way of remembering your child through the photos. A parent told us that his wife always used to scrapbook - "Photos, videos, some in books and things like school communications etc. Looking back on them gives me a lot of comfort".



The discussion in the group then moved on to explore the experiences of grief, the multiple losses that come with the death of a child and how grief feels/manifests. A parent spoke about all the things she wanted to know and never will, something she called micro losses - "We wish we could have known what eye colour he had, how he sounded when he laughed, all those sorts of things. There is so much longing for what you didn't get to know about him". Another parent spoke of how her husband is grieving the future and the opportunities their daughter didn't get to have while "I feel like I am the opposite and am really grieving what we had". There was a lot of conversation about tears, finding space and time to cry. A parent said: "it feels natural to me, to feel sad, and that's where the love is, and that's what I want to be feeling.....But it's not sustainable, I don't think our bodies can be crying all the time but it's kind of nice when you get a little window of sadness". Parents spoke of creating a bit of space for tears and sadness by looking at photos or scrapbooks that are full of memories. A parent said he felt connected to his child when he cried and - "now I find myself creating time and actively thinking about him and I allow myself to cry and give him a little piece of my time; time that is just for him". A parent also spoke about feeling she was not good at modelling for her son - "I've always been that person who didn't cry, and now I can't stop and it feels confronting". Someone responded - "It's a whole new way of being and grieving".

There can also be guilt associated with feeling less sad for a while or for 'doing well'. If you are doing well, not in tears every day does that mean the love is less somehow? "You have to juggle functioning in normal society as well. So, I go and do the normal things and am reminded how dull and boring normal life is....you sort of play along".

A parent agreed and told us if there is a period of time when he hasn't done the things that remind him of his son or hasn't thought of him for a while he feels guilty - "I don't want it to feel like that....I want him to always be front of mind".

As parents have often reflected, grief is not just emotional, it is also physical. This was very much the experience of the parents in this group - "Grief is exhausting. I wasn't prepared for how exhausted I would be." Another parent told us - "Some days I still cannot get out of bed, I cannot find the simplest of words in my brain, things are in my brain but I cannot get to them. I wonder if I am ever going to function like a human being again", and "It is wild how physical it gets: the heart-break is so physical. It's wild". Parents talked about what it was like to sit with their grief and with difficult thoughts and that this was what they wanted to do, while others spoke of how difficult that is and how they try to avoid this. One parent told us that she was struggling to sleep and having panic attacks every night. In the quiet of the night, you can't get away from the thoughts - "the silence of having to go to sleep was unbearable". She came to realise that if she allowed her thoughts time in the daytime she would sleep better at night. Difficulties with sleep are almost universal when you are grieving. A parent in the group said "It only hurts this much because we loved so much and I don't think it matters whether it was 4 years or 5 days".



People in the group talked about how different things can trigger intense emotions and that many triggers are unexpected and unpredictable. "Those unexpected triggers are hard...especially when you try to do something normal, you have no control when it smacks you in the face". Other parents commented that they feel they should see these triggers coming. Things like seeing little girl's clothing sales. This parent commented: "Maybe that's why it feels hard, none of that is getting easier". Another parent told us how hard it is to see other children her daughter's age doing things her daughter never did due to her condition. Parents in the group said that the hardest thing is that it doesn't seem to be getting any easier, when both they and the people around them expect that it should be.

A couple told us that they tried to do something they couldn't have done with their child by going to Bali with a group of friends who had been with them through the journey. This trip did not bring them the relief they had hoped for - "There was one day when I just couldn't stop crying, I didn't want to be in

this place having fun....I would have done anything to be sitting at home struggling with all the things that I had to struggle with". No matter where you are, there will always be reminders of what you had and have not got anymore or of what you never got to have. Even in Bali: "there was a guy complaining to me about how hard it was to look after a newborn while in Bali.....the child was exactly the same age as ours was when he died. I could see them interacting and I thought 'I don't get to have that'.

Some of the parents in the group were aware that their child was not going to have a long life and they talked about living with your child under these circumstances. *"We had 4 years of micro grieving, you never know if it's the last time, or the last thing, and being in fight or flight for so long, and trying to work out what this life is now".* The mother spoke about feeling constantly like they had to be prepared and always planning, until she realised that there is nothing that can prepare you for it and she let all that go. She said: *"I remember it was said at the funeral that she lived more in her 4 years than some people do in 80 years....She lived on love....A life full of love and adventure. She was a trooper".*

There was some discussion in the group about relationships and about other children in the family. Parents agreed that grief puts stress on a relationship, particularly when the couple grieve differently - *"My husband and I grieve so differently, he wants a hug but I feel like -don't touch me".* Some in the group felt the greatest strain was not after their child died but while the child was alive and requiring lots of care and lots of hospital visits and admissions. Parents also commented on the emptiness and loss of purpose once their child had died - *"When he died it was so apparent what a huge part of our life he was, our life revolved around him".* Some parents spent so much time in the hospital that google maps had updated their home address or workplace to the hospital.

Joining a group and being with other bereaved parents can be incredibly helpful. A couple spoke about how welcomed they felt at a VSK bereaved parents' weekend, even though they had felt almost intimidated about attending a group. Parents appreciate being given the space to talk about their child with people who are not trying to avoid these conversations. *"It's comforting to be around people who have been in similar situations, and hear everyone's similar experiences – 5 days or 10 years, so many cross overs, so many similarities".* When you have experienced something as big as the death of your child, there is no need for small talk – other bereaved parents understand this - *"You know the hardest, worst thing. There is no space for small talk".* Parents also reported feeling relieved when they realised that other parents had also had to make impossibly hard decisions and choices – they were not alone. A parent said *"These bereavement groups are great; I don't know if everyone knows how much they make a difference to other people",* and another comment:

"This is a space to be able to chat about your child. It is not because you are desperate; you just want to keep your child's memory alive. Unfortunately, you can't do that with everyone in your life". "It felt instant – what bonds us. We all have a horrific shared experience. I could spend hours learning about your children. I always felt like I didn't fit in, now I'm trying to find my place". A parent who has been attending the group for a while told us *"It gave me an understanding; it will get better. We all go down our own unique paths, but I've always been comforted by the stories of others".*

As the group was coming to an end, a parent new to the group and quite recently bereaved said - *"I have never felt more seen, I don't feel as lonely".* In this space parents are able to express their grief, their thoughts and their feelings without judgement, and be heard and seen by the other people in the group with the compassion and understanding of shared experience.

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

The next meeting of the
Family Bereavement Support Evening Group will be held on:

Thursday 20th August 2026
7.00pm—8.30pm

“Connecting with grief through nature”

With our guest, Kayte Kitchen—Therapeutic Garden Program Coordinator and Therapist

Spiritual care and meditation space, Murrup Bik
50 Flemington Rd
Parkville, VIC 3052

If you wish to attend this group please
email: Bereavement.Services@rch.org.au

The newsletter is always a team effort.
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And thank you Angela Traviss, for ensuring the
newsletter is formatted, collated and distributed to interested people

Social Work Department, RCH

