

Self-Care

April 2018, Volume 24, Issue 4

Navigating Grief with Self-Care

By Jean

It felt scary to be in the house alone that Thursday morning. The D&C for my second missed-miscarriage had happened less than a week ago, and I thought I had been coping pretty well up to that point. My husband and I had kept our plans for a trip out of town over the weekend, and I had met a close friend I could trust with my sad news for lunch on Monday. I told my boss and a couple close colleagues too, which is something I kept to myself for months after the first loss. This isn't my first rodeo, I thought to myself, I am doing all the right things.

And then the floor fell out beneath me. Wednesday, at what I thought was an everyday lunch out with some colleagues, I found out that a friend at work was pregnant. Her due date was the day after mine would have been if my baby hadn't died at 8 weeks.

I thought I was holding it together the rest of that day, but it all came out the next morning. The nice tight lid on the container of my emotions came flying off. I cried uncontrollably on the couch while I tried unsuccessfully to tie my shoes.

I lost my baby in January 2016 and started grieving through the winter and spring. Weekly visits to my counselor helped. I took walks at the park during lunch almost every day for a while. The cool air and occasional sunshine soothed and warmed my broken heart. That summer I took Fridays off from work to pursue new hobbies and go hiking.

Now, I give myself permission to gently close my office door if my young-parent colleagues are talking about the latest neat things their little ones are doing. I have accepted some of the unpredictable selectivity of the grief process. This baby I'm "okay" with while "THAT" baby shakes my emotional world off its very axis. I have navigated these waters enough to know who my safe people are to open up to. I also know when it is time to go to a support group meeting, open that box of keepsakes that helps me remember my lost baby, and rely on my inner wisdom. I even listen when that wisdom says, go have coffee for two hours with your friend on a Sunday afternoon, or "Today is a great day for a donut."

Jean Chase is a Portland accountant, wife, and animal lover. Her two babies, each lost at 8 weeks, are lovingly remembered by their mom.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy and infant loss

Upcoming Events

FACILITATOR INFO SESSION

& TRAINING

Saturday, May 19, 9am-3pm

Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland

If you are interested in volunteering as a meeting facilitator with Brief Encounters, please join us for a session on leading support meetings with compassion and understanding.

Training provided by Pat Schwiebert, RN. We ask that our volunteers be one year out from the anniversary of their loss but if facilitation is something you envision for yourself in the future please attend.

Please bring a lunch item to share potluck style. Contact Rachel at RachelM@briefencounters.org with questions and to RSVP.

TELL ME MORE:

Stories on How We Survived

Saturday, April 28, 5:30pm - 7:30pm

Corporeal Writing

510 SW 3rd Avenue, Portland

Hosted by Monica Welty in honor of her late son, Harvey Walker, please join us for an evening of storytelling and readings.

Donations will be accepted to benefit Brief Encounters.

NOAH'S QUEST MEMORIAL BRICK WALKWAY

Memorial bricks available for engraving

\$50 suggested donation

Email Shannon for more information - newsletter@briefencounters.org

NOAH'S QUEST

5K, 10K, Walk/Run, and Kiddie Run

June 23rd, 8am

Sandy Bluff Park

36910 Goldenrain Street, Sandy, Oregon

A benefit for Brief Encounters, for everyone who has lost a child or the hope of a child, and for those who care.

Register online at www.ci.sandy.or.us

(Select Online Registration under Quick Links then view Community Events under Register Now)

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From the editor...

I used to choke on the words “self-care”. I’ve never been good at taking time for myself and when Charlie died it was no different. But with time, grace, and an open heart, I’ve listened to other mothers like those in this newsletter who helped me redefine self-care. It doesn’t have to be a big event. Sometimes a moment for a deep breath, standing in a surprise ray of warm sunshine, or even giving my grief attention for a few inconvenient minutes is what I need. Mostly I’m learning that I don’t have to plan self-care, I can do what I need in any given moment and that’s ok.

Shannon Stemm Patel
mother of Charlie and her big sis



Upcoming newsletter topics...

May
MOTHERS

What makes you feel like a mom when you don’t have a baby to hold? Mothers’ Day is bittersweet for loss mamas; how do you plan to celebrate being a mother? If you have living children how do you/they include missing siblings?

June
FATHERS

Father’s Day can be a painful time for fathers who have lost some or all of their children. Fathers are always fathers, even if their children are not here with us. As a loss-daddy how do you parent your baby/babies? What makes you feel like a dad?

Newsletter Submissions

We welcome and encourage submissions to the newsletter. Submissions may be published anonymously if requested. Sharing your story can provide healing and comfort for you – and other parents. The editor reserves the right to edit and select from the materials submitted. Views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Brief Encounters, but those of the individual authors. Please send titled articles and submissions to: newsletter@briefencounters.org

Newsletter printing provided by AnchorPointe

*I lied and said I was busy.
I was busy; but not in a way most people understand.*

*I was busy taking deeper breaths.
I was busy silencing irrational thoughts.
I was busy calming a racing heart.
I was busy telling myself I am okay.*

Sometimes, this is my busy – and I will not apologize for it.

–TheMindsJournal.com

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

2116 NE 18th Ave., Portland, OR 97212

Message Phone: 503-699-8006

Web: www.briefencounters.org

Twitter: twitter.com/briefencount

Facebook: private/closed groups Brief Encounters
Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support and Brief Encounters
Parenting After Loss

Established in 1992 by a group of parents, Brief Encounters is a non-profit, non-sectarian support group for parents whose babies have died before, during, or after birth. At informal, mutually supportive meetings, bereaved parents and their families share their stories, discuss issues that arise from pregnancy and infant loss, and remember their children. Through talking or just listening, we learn what grief is --- and how, through understanding and caring, we heal.

EXECUTIVE BOARD AND STEERING COMMITTEE

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Monica Thompson (Spanish interpreter)

LOVE GIFTS

Please send Love Gifts and messages to 2116 NE 18th Ave., Portland, OR 97212. For Love Gifts to be acknowledged in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive it by the 10th of the prior month. Please assist us in reducing the chance of errors by using the form on page 5.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR REMOVAL FROM MAILING LIST

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at database@briefencounters.org.

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED: INCLUSIONS OR CHANGES

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at megan.k.wright@comcast.net. For children to be remembered in a specific newsletter issue, we must receive your request by the 10th of the prior month.

SAFE ARRIVALS

Please send Safe Arrivals to newsletter@briefencounters.org.

Kindness

By Meagan

Kindness used to mean smiling at someone. Standing up to a bully. Giving away my last dollar. Then my child died and kindness took on a whole new meaning. An internal meaning – one just for me. Selfish kindness. Kindness that is only focused on my own survival. Kindness to myself regardless of the cost to others.

The greatest kindness I learned was to let go. To let go, not of the pain or the love – those will never leave, but to let go of trying to be everything to everyone else. To just learn to be enough for myself. To let go of the need to please. The worry about looking foolish. The wondering what they all think. To let go of always saying yes when my heart screamed no. To let go of the strive for perfection. To allow what is to be enough – not trying to change it or control it. To let go of mutually exclusive emotions. To let go of meta-emotions. To allow myself to just feel sad without analyzing why I'm sad or how my sadness affects others. To live in a world where joy and sorrow can coexist on a subatomic level – and to be okay with that.

The greatest kindness I learned was to stand up for myself. To let it be okay that my grief made others uncomfortable. To hurl it at them instead of making it better for them. To make no apologies for my heart. For my love. For my son. To cry when needed. To laugh when needed. To make them squirm. To remind them that I will never be the “before” again. To say “dead baby” as needed until I, and they, all really believed it.

The greatest kindness I learned was to grab on to peace. To violently wrest it away from those who hold it hostage. To erect barriers around my heart to keep out those who refuse to understand. To reject old friendships that don't allow me to explore this new me. Kindness is my battle cry. Kindness is the truth I tell. It is pulling no punches. It is finally, truly, authentically living.

In March 2012 Meagan's first son, Anderson, was stillborn at 39 weeks due to a cord accident. She has found some healing in writing and connecting with other bereaved parents.

Finding Calm: Self-Care in Five Minutes a Day

By Katy

Enduring twenty years of endometriosis, seven years trying to conceive, and two miscarriages has taught me one thing: if I don't take care of myself, no one will. When I am able to carve out even five minutes a day to sit quietly, read a peaceful article, or allow myself a warm bath, I find I am gentler with my husband. I am a better co-worker and a more compassionate friend. I'm

less stressed and more hopeful. In short, everything is just better.

We might think we don't have time for self-care. And, that's true if we take an all-or-nothing approach. But hour-long naps and 90-minute yoga classes aren't the only ways to soothe ourselves. Sometimes, we only need a couple of minutes. Here are a few simple self-care practices that take five minutes or less:

Notice your body before you rise.

How does this body feel today? How does the air feel on your skin? Simply notice, there's no need to change anything.

Immerse yourself in your coffee or tea.

Listen to the sound as your favorite cup brews. Enjoy that sip as it hits your tongue. Savor the aroma. This moment is just for you.

Spend two minutes really brushing your teeth.

Inhale the scent of your toothpaste. Feel the bristles as they glide along each and every tooth. Notice the smoothness of your clean teeth.

Do a quick body scan.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath in. Notice the skin around your eyes. Is it crinkled? Is your jaw tight? Is your brow furrowed? Are your shoulders as high as your ears? Just notice. You don't need to change anything.

Drive in silence.

Turn off the music and enjoy the sounds of driving. Roll your window down and take in the scent of the rain. Enjoy all the colors as they whiz by. It's OK if you don't quite go the speed limit.

Download a guided meditation.

Check out Aura for 3-minute guided meditations you can do anywhere. It's a free app with hundreds to choose from. 10% happier is good, also.

Try a self-compassion exercise.

Visit the Practices page on Dr. Kristin Neff's website, www.self-compassion.org. Her free, 5-minute exercise can be very soothing during difficult times.

Do I still fly off the handle / fall into a heap of tears / go on an anxiety-ridden magic carpet ride every now and then? Yes. Yes I do. But, not as often as I used to. Some weeks I don't get a single yoga class in, but I'm usually able to find a few minutes most days to slow down and find a bit of balance.

I challenge you to do one small thing. Just one small thing for yourself this week. If you need an accountability partner, why not ask a friend to do one small thing a day (or just a few a week) with you?

Chances are they could use a little self-care, too.

Katy is the founder of Grayling Jewelry in NE Portland. She is a mother to two unborn babies, two lively rat terriers, and one very grumpy cat.

Love Gift Donation Form

Enclosed is a donation of: \$
In memory of:

Message to be included in the newsletter with your
donation acknowledgement:

Birth date:

Death date:

Donated by:

Please consider your employer's matching gift program when submitting a donation. To receive a receipt, please provide your return address:

I wish for my gift to remain anonymous.

Name(s) of Parents:

Please assist us in reducing the chance of errors or omissions by sending your Love Gift message with this form. Please **do not** send your message separately to the editor or database manager. Thank you!

Send form and payment to: 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland, OR 97212

Checks can be made payable to Brief Encounters.

For credit card payments, please provide the following:

Name as it appears on card:

Credit/Debit # _____ - _____ - _____ - _____ Exp date ____ - ____ CVC# _____

Please note: For Love Gifts to be acknowledged in a particular newsletter issue, we must receive it by the 15th of the prior month (example: June 15th for July issue).

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS is a non-sectarian, non-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3), Federal ID #45-4822283.

Grief Massage

By Monica

When Kira showed up and gave us massage three times in the first six weeks after Harvey died, I didn't fully understand what a huge gift she was giving. And I was a massage therapist myself! All I knew at that time was how very hard it was to be in my body: I ached all over. My skin crawled. I couldn't stop crying. My head pounded. I lay awake at night replaying the traumatic events of my son's short life like a movie in my mind. I ate like a bird and never felt hungry. The most basic tasks exhausted me to my bed. During those massages, I got some relief, if even just to close my eyes and feel something different for a while. If even just to be lulled into the half-sleep that massage induces and allow me to float above my life for a few minutes at a time. If even to sob and have her just be there with me, quietly and steadily doing her good work.

After several months went by, I began to realize that the benefits of massage address nearly every single physical symptom of grief I was experiencing. I searched the web to see if anyone else applying massage directly to impact grief. I found The Institute for Grief Massage and its founder Aimee Joy Taylor in North Carolina. She had developed a specific protocol and technique called Grief Massage and a few years later, when she created an online course, I took it and learned exactly what a unique and perfect match massage is for the physical symptoms of grief.

Grief is essentially a prolonged and extreme physiological stress reaction in our bodies. It casts us squarely and often perpetually in the Sympathetic Nervous System, commonly known as "Fight or Flight (or Freeze)". This is a high alert state with stress hormones saturating the brain from the adrenal glands, dilating the pupils so the eyes can take in more information, sending the blood out from the core of the body to the limbs to prepare to run, decreasing unnecessary functions such as digestion, shortening and shallowing the breath, and speeding the heart. Massage on the other hand, engages the Parasympathetic Nervous System, termed "Rest and Digest". This is a deeply restorative state in which stress hormones are inhibited, the gaze softens, the blood returns to the core of the body to nourish internal organs, digestion improves, breathing is deep and full, the heart rate slows, the immune system engages more fully, and restful sleep is restored.

Massage, of course, also decreases muscular tension. Chronic stress, like grief, will increase tension throughout the body, especially in the neck, shoulders and lower back. When we lose a child around the time of their birth, the mother is also dealing with a postpartum body: muscular pain and strain from childbirth (whether natural or surgical), hormonal fluctuations and lactation, all cause further physical issues. Also unique to us are things like empty arm syndrome, when a mother has aching in her arms after her baby has died. Massage can

ease every one of these symptoms, especially when received on a regular basis, but even just once can be impactful.

Especially for us bereaved parents, the physical repercussions of our losses stay with us for a timeframe that is both undeterminable and unique to each of us. Even after the initial months or years pass, we continue to be subjected to the waves of grief. The ones that come out of nowhere and the ones that come from identifiable grief triggers. Anniversaries: for us we often have birth, death, and due date anniversaries. Holidays are never easy and not ever the same. We are called back to our trauma and loss during a particular season or time of year, when we were at the end of our pregnancy, when we first received a devastating diagnosis, when we or our child were hospitalized. The body remembers as well and sometimes better than the mind. Receiving massage around anniversaries, holidays, grief seasons, and when triggered can be a huge support in moving through those times, give you some relief while you are receiving the massage and at the very least, it is something to look forward to, that both feels good and is good for you.

During a massage, you are not asked to be anywhere than where you are. You don't have to talk about your grief (if you don't want to) or worry that your tears or silence or despair will be met with wide eyes and awkward stuttering of condolences. Rare is the place where you get to be in the presence of another person and just be: with your grief, with your body, with the quiet. During Grief Massage, you aren't alone but you also aren't obligated to be or do anything. We are trained to hold the space for your grief and address its physical symptoms.

Grief Massage can be done with clothes on, applied to only the limbs and head and can be a very gentle, nurturing touch. If you prefer, you can also receive a more traditional massage, with oil and firmer pressure, and either way you will receive great benefit. Those of us included below have a strong background in working with clients who have experienced grief and trauma. Consult your doctor before receiving massage.

Monica Welty (Grief Massage)

www.EtherealWellnessBoutique.com 415-341-5604

Linda Jutzi (Grief Massage)

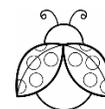
www.MindfulMassageMilwaukie.com 503-970-0817

Heidi Creighton (Trauma Touch Therapy)

www.HeidiCreightonLMT.com 503-706-2842

Kira Rodenbush

www.BodyAwareMassage.com/massage-therapists/kira-rodenbush-lmt 503-891-3033



BRIEF ENCOUNTERS MEETINGS

Our support group meetings are a safe place to talk about your child, your loss, and your grief. You are welcome to share, or just listen. A facilitator guides the meetings.

For more information or directions, please call 503-699-8006.

PARENTS OF INFANT LOSS & PREGNANCY LOSS, INCLUDING EARLY PREGNANCY LOSS

Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you.

Meets the second Monday of each month, 7:00pm

April 9, May 14

Contact: Rachel Murfitt (RachelM@briefencounters.org)

This group also meets the fourth Tuesday of each month, 7:00pm

April 24, May 22

Contact: Daniele (DanieleR@briefencounters.org)

PARENTS OF PREGNANCY INTERRUPTION DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS

Out of consideration for other bereaved parents, we ask that children not attend these meetings. Thank you. Meets the fourth Thursday of each month, 7:00pm

April 26, May 24

Contact: Heather (HeatherS@briefencounters.org)

PARENTS OF SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCIES, ADOPTIONS, & PARENTS TRYING TO CONCEIVE

Babies welcome. Meets the fourth Monday of each month, 7:00pm

April 23, May 28

Contact: Heather (HeatherS@briefencounters.org)

All meetings held at The Peace House, 2116 NE 18th Avenue, Portland

RESOURCES

Brief Encounters Online

WEBSITE

The Brief Encounters website www.briefencounters.org is a great resource, including past newsletter issues, upcoming events and announcements, helpful links, numerous resources, support meeting information, etc.

TWITTER

@briefencount (twitter.com/briefencount) is the Twitter handle to follow for news and helpful links and information about pregnancy loss, infant death, and grief resources.

FACEBOOK

Brief Encounters Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support and *Brief Encounters Parenting After Loss* are the names of our private/closed Facebook mutual support groups. Because they are private, each group requires approval to join, and posts are hidden from anyone who is not a group member.

Please remember to take the usual precautions to protect yourself when using any social media outlets, keeping in mind that online communication is never completely private or secure. And remember that everyone who posts or reads will be in different places in their grief, so let's all be mindful and considerate. You can find articles about online safety with a quick online search. Be safe.

Counselor Referrals

Not all counselors are familiar with the issues that parents face after the death of their baby or during infertility treatment. If you feel like you would like to talk with a counselor, listed below are individuals who have been recommended to us by parents in the BE community.:

- ♥ Gaby Donnell, LCSW, Inner NE Portland
503-287-2295 www.mootherootscounseling.com
- ♥ Teni Davoudian, Ph.D., OHSU
503-418-4500 www.ohsu.edu
- ♥ Britta Dinsmore, PhD, SW Portland
503-913-4791 www.brittadinsmore.com
- ♥ Adria Goodness, CNW, PMHNP, SE Portland
503-224-3438 www.adriagoodness.com
- ♥ Rachel Starck, LPC, North Portland
503.929.2773 www.thethrivingmama.com
- ♥ Laurie Cox, LCSW, NE Portland
503-819-6354 mootherootscounseling.com/laurie-cox
- ♥ Lauren Marie Barthelemy, LPC, SE Portland
412-715-2391
- ♥ Debbie Benschung, MSW, LCSW, SW Portland
503-944-5032 DebbieBenschung.com

- ♥ Tina Lilly, MS, Inner SE Portland
503-380-0424 www.foryouaremadeofstars.com
- ♥ Ava M. Stone, Ph.D., PC, SE Portland
503-279-8160 www.pacificcenter.org
- ♥ Tara May, PhD, Vancouver
360-904-1008 www.taramay.com
- ♥ Nalini Kuruppu MSW, LCSW, North Portland
503-753-9157
- ♥ Kari Maljai, LPC, SE Portland
503.936.7658 www.pnwbh.com
- ♥ Brooke Noli, MFT, Inner NE Portland
971-645-1180 portlandbirthcounseling.com
- ♥ Brynna Sibilla, LCSW, Inner NE
503-280-1101 www.psychotherapyportland.com
- ♥ Jennifer Singleton, PhD, PC, Downtown,
503-242-1558
- ♥ Lynne Phillips-Werbel, LCSW, Beaverton
503-690-9119 www.wildwoodpsych.com
- ♥ The Dougy Center (for bereaved siblings)
503-775-5683 www.dougy.org

Editor's note: We would appreciate receiving suggestions, changes, or corrections to any of these resource listings; please send them to the editor at newsletter@briefencounters.org

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Support for bereaved parents of pregnancy
and infant loss

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Portland, OR 97212

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Self-Care

Change of Address or Removal from Mailing List

Please contact our database manager Megan Wright at 503-646-1335 or by email at database@briefencounters.org.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

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April 24, May 22

See page 7 for a detailed schedule

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April 26, May 24

PARENTS OF SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCIES, ADOPTIONS, & PARENTS TRYING TO CONCEIVE

Meets the fourth Monday of each month, 7:00pm

April 23, May 28

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