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Light Your Candle: Navigating the Sacred Journey of Grief and Healing as a Loss Parent



Oct 13, 2023 9:39:11 AM

Families Real Stories

October 15 is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day,* a day that Ashley McDevitt, Care Solace's Director of Community Resources, and Vivian Richards, Director of Care Coordination, light candles to honor the babies they lost.

Ashley's son, Patrick, and Vivian's son, Edward, were both stillborn.

Ashley and Vivian want to break the profound silence that can surround this kind of loss because they believe that connection and conversation are vital to healing. They sat down with Care Solace to share what it's like to be a loss parent, how they support each other, and what they'd like other loss parents to know.

Care Solace: Managing grief in ourselves and supporting others with theirs is really challenging. There's no guidebook; there's no script. People who do care very deeply about someone who is grieving might stay silent because they don't want to say the wrong thing. Losing a baby the way you two did must have been unusually isolating. No one got to know Patrick and Edward, but you did.

Vivian: It's been three and a half years since I lost Edward, and there are still moments when it feels isolating. But there's also a sacredness to my grief journey, Ashley's grief journey.

I've learned to look for and acknowledge moments of healing — and those moments can be subtle, but they're extremely powerful. For example, healing can look like saying no to a baby shower invitation. Or walking through the baby department at Target and not crying. No one's going to give me a trophy for getting through a Target trip without crying, but for me, it's a moment of strength and resilience. And Ashley gets it.

Ashley: We all grieve differently, and we all have our own healing journeys. My tendency with hardship is to pull myself up by my bootstraps. When I lost Patrick, the world moved on, as it does. I thought I would just move on, too. But what I really needed was to learn to give myself permission to grieve... in a community rather than alone.

Without Vivian's support and understanding of this tragic, shared experience, I don't know that I could have healed as much as I have. Patrick was my first child. I have 3 sons now, and I still have healing to do.

When the anniversary of Patrick's death arrives, Vivian remembers. She knows even though everyone else may have forgotten, I won't ever forget.

Care Solace: Ashley, Patrick was your first, and now you have 3 more sons. Vivian, Edward was your last child, and you have 2 daughters. How has losing your sons impacted the way you experience pregnancy and motherhood?

Ashley: I lost Patrick right when it seemed like everyone around me was pregnant. I was one of seven of my friends pregnant at that time. As you can imagine, it was difficult to be around these friends who each went on to deliver healthy children. On one hand, I was happy for my friends who were starting their families. But on the other hand, I was devastated.

I wasn't sure I would ever be a mother. After a loss like that, you realize how delicate pregnancy and birth truly are and how a million little things have to go right for a child to come safely into the world.

There's layers of grief: grieving your child, grieving motherhood, grieving your own innocence and naivety about pregnancy and motherhood.

Vivian: And the thought of becoming pregnant can be terrifying because you know what can happen. You don't get to just be excited that you're pregnant or complain that you're puking.

Ashley: When I got pregnant again, I felt I shouldn't be happy — and I was terrified that something was going to go wrong. My son Conor was born one month before the anniversary of losing Patrick. I remember feeling overwhelmed with grief and, at the same time, such gratitude for Conor's new little life. I had to face the truth that grief and joy can coexist.

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Ashley McDevitt

Care Solace: Seems like a very difficult line to walk. There isn't any forgetting, but you also have to let go, not cling.

Vivian: For me, the letting go was letting go of the chains of grief. I can grieve without having grief be my identity. For a while, I was holding on to the suffering because I felt that if I let go of the suffering, I was letting go of my love for my son. And what I had to come to terms with was that I have a choice to hold space for both the darkness and the light. The light comes from the gifts my son's life offers after his death. I can hold this light alongside the immense darkness of my grief. It all belongs.

When you have living children like Ashley and I do, answering questions like, "How many kids do you have?" is so hard. Family pictures are never family pictures because someone is always missing. So there's healing, but it's not like getting cured from something.

Ashley: I realized the power of sharing is a catalyst for healing. Witnessing others — like Vivian — be open and vulnerable inspired me to share. It was difficult in the beginning, but eventually it broke me open in the most transformative way.

Care Solace: How did you two first discover you shared this experience?

Vivian: When Care Solace was still a small company, each team member discussed things that were going on for them both professionally and personally in our all-hands meetings. Our CEO Chad Castuita believes in the power of sharing.

Ashley: In one of those meetings, Vivian talked about her loss and how she was navigating her grief. After that meeting, I sent her a message to tell her how much I appreciated her openness and her vulnerability. I also shared that I, too, had experienced loss of a child. And from there, we were bonded.

There have been moments when I've been overcome with gratitude because Patrick had given me this beautiful gift — the gift of so deeply and immediately bonding with Vivian. We've connected with other brave, amazing, women, learned from them, shared with them, and honored our babies together.

Vivian: Since my loss was after Ashley's, she brings me hope. If she is able to survive this, then so can I. Even 3.5 years later, sometimes I wonder if I can make it to the next milestone, through the next trigger. I remember telling my girls, "Ms. Ashley has a baby boy in Heaven too." They asked, "Do you think he gets to play with Baby Brother?"

Knowing Ashley is surviving this journey allows me to draw from her strength and fuels my own resilience.

Care Solace: How has working at Care Solace been instrumental to your own healing?

Vivian: It's amazing to work in a place where you're encouraged to share your personal journey. Chad is always talking about the power of sharing and connection. In our individual work, Ashley and I encounter parents who experience loss in many different forms. I find it one of my greatest honors to be able to express my condolences on behalf of Care Solace and as a loss parent.

Ashley: I am a big believer that everyone needs tools to help them navigate difficult times in their lives. What we are doing at Care Solace is making it easier for people to find and access tools that can change their trajectory. And for me, Care Solace has been special because my colleagues, like Vivian, have been a tremendous support system as I navigate my journey.

Care Solace: Last question. What would you most like other mothers who have lost a child in this way to know?

Ashley: Sometimes it is hard to see and believe, but there is healing on this journey. Sometimes the healing will happen when you least expect it — in small but profound moments that can lead to big moments of healing, and all in its own time. There are supportive people out there that can help guide you on our way.

Vivian: What I want to say is that you will survive this. Just saying those words I feel a rattle deep in my spirit and emotion rising to my eyes. So many people ask, "Does it get better?" The truth is that it "gets different." Some days the "different" feels like "better," but mostly it's just "different." And that is ok.

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Vivian Richards

And consider sharing your story of loss, like Ashley and I are doing. Your willingness to be open and authentic may help you heal — and provide immense support for others along their grief and healing journeys.

Explore how Care Solace can collaborate with your school district, municipality, or organization to provide around-the-clock mental health support for individuals who have faced the loss of a child, regardless of their circumstances or insurance coverage. [Learn more today.](#)

*Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day is an annual day of remembrance observed on October 15 for pregnancy/loss and infant death, which includes miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS, ectopic pregnancy, termination for medical reasons, and the death of a newborn.

Ashley McDevitt

Care Solace's Director of Community Resources

Ashley oversees our Provider Research and Development Team, managing our community provider database. She collaborates with providers to promote Care Solace's services, ensuring diverse, high-quality options nationwide. Ashley guides community providers in using our platform effectively, enhancing accessibility and expediting care connections. The team also prioritizes agencies under district agreements for seamless referrals.

Vivian Richards, LICSW

Director of Care Coordination

As a third-generation Licensed Social Worker, Vivian has dedicated the past decade to eliminating barriers to care. Prior to Care Solace, she coordinated care for patients in both medical and psychiatric inpatient settings in Alabama and South Carolina. At Care Solace, Vivian leads our growing Care Coordination team and is honored to help connect clients across the nation to mental health care providers and resources.

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