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It takes time to recover from the loss of an infant. While time is a great healer, the following suggestions may help in your recovery.

Accept the grief. Grieving is a normal, natural process that leads to a healed heart. But remember, everyone feels and shows their grief differently. There is no "right" way to grieve.

Talk about your feelings. Although talking about your feelings might be uncomfortable at first, you need to let your family and friends know that you're going through and what you feel comfortable talking about. Talking about your feelings and your loss will help you deal with both. Remember, however, that not everyone expresses their feelings the same way or at the same time.

Keep busy. Attempt tasks that will occupy your mind. Avoid frantic activity but do try to do what you think you can handle. Keep realistic expectations for yourself. Don't let yourself become overwhelmed by all the things you need to do or minor details. Try to concentrate on the task at hand, one thing at a time.

Watch your health. Bereavement may cause you to neglect your health. Eat well. Your body is still recovering from your physical and emotional loss. Good nutrition is key in helping you cope with your grief. It will give you the extra energy needed for handling the emotional roller coaster ahead. Try to minimize your intake of caffeine, high fat foods, sugar, alcohol and nicotine.

Get enough sleep. Having enough rest will help you have the energy to face the feelings ahead. Some suggestions for getting a good night's sleep are: try not to discuss upsetting subjects late in

the evening, cut out caffeine containing products after dinner, try not to go to bed angry or reduce mental and physical activity at least a half hour before going to bed and don't go to bed before you are tired. You might also want to take a hot bath or drink a glass of warm milk before going to bed.

Record your thoughts. Write a journal or make a tape of your feelings, thoughts and memories. Some parents write letters to their babies, sharing feelings they never had the chance to express.

Talk with others who have had similar experiences. Having the opportunity to talk with

BE PREPARED FOR DAYS WHEN...

- ...you receive phone calls or mail offering you baby services (e.g. diapers, pictures, magazines, etc.)
- ...you see other pregnant women or infants who could be about your baby's age
- ...your due date arrives
- ...you visit your obstetrician for your six-week checkup
- ...there are family gatherings or special holidays
- ...you see TV commercials or programs relating to babies
- ...you shop at the supermarket and start down the aisle with baby products
- ...well-meaning friends "drop in" unexpectedly
- ...baby announcements arrive from friends/relatives
- ...you read news events relating to infants or children
- ...you think things are going well and you feel that you're doing a good job of coping and progressing and suddenly you have a bad day you feel lousy
- ...you meet people who don't know what happened

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THIS IS WHAT I DO WITH KERIN **MARION COHEN**

On December 20, 1977 I was a happy expectant woman. Very happy and very expectant. Actually there were two things I was expecting, a baby and a book. A publisher was considering for publication

This denial-isolation stage of grief would and will continue to come and go in various forms over the months and years and the rest of my life, and is not spoiled by outside contact. But the original period of constant alloing as important to me. I needed to be alone—alone with my husband, alone with my baby alone with my other children, alone with my riting, and just plain alone. And so, although the counselor at the maternity center here I bore Ker in told me about an infant-death support group called UNITE, and although she gave me the name and phone number of a contact person for the group, I decided not to call—at least not yet.

“GRIEF IS UNIVERSAL”

Grief is universal,” my mother reminded me during that horrible, horrible week, but I didn’t feel very universal. And as usual, I resisted her intellectualism and her culture. I didn’t like it when she told me, once again, all about how tragedy breeds art. I’d been a good poet before my tragedy I thought bitterly and it aint art I’d wanted to breed this time. And I didn’t want to think about the other’s whose tragedies had bred art (like Mahler with his *Kinder totenlieder*), or those whose tragedies hadn’t bred art. I didn’t want to think about the other’s not just yet. I wanted to be alone, unique, self-pitying, moody depressed, and mad. Ker in-grief is not like other grief,” I later wrote in a poem.

Then, too, I remember envisioning the group as being something like the local PTA. A bunch of typical organization-type super mothers. After all, I’m a feminist,” I thought, “a PhD and a poet”

I’ve never before fit in with a group of people just picked at random. Why should this be any exception? And why should I confide my Ker in thought to people with whom all I have in common are circumstances (Looking back, I feel annoyed and ashamed at myself for feeling that way I hope believe in solidarity I’m glad and proud, however, that I don’t feel that way anymore.)

I also felt slightly resentful, on the defensive. Why should the fact that my baby died mean I need psychological help?” I asked. It’s not my fault the baby died.” I didn’t realize that the psychologist, like the other group members are there to help us over unexplored territory and to reassure us that what might seem to us like crazy behavior is really part of the normal grieving process. Also, just in case there is somebody in the group who really did need psychological help, it is important to have it available. There are quite a few things I didn’t realize then that I realize now, and so I stayed private for a while. Relatively private, that is. Looking back, and having compared notes and memories with others in the group, I see that I didn’t exactly lock myself in the bedroom. True, I tried to make my nights as long as possible, and spent most of my days crying, riting, or napping, and grocery shopping only when absolutely necessary. But I also went through shopping a few times when I felt it might be possible to cheer myself up, those rare hours when I thought there might actually be such a thing as being cheered up. And I made Elle a summer party I’lled out the copyright for ms for the woman’s poetry anthology I’d co-edited, taught math one evening a week (telling the class what had happened to me, and was crying in front of them. They were very sympathetic, and one of the women students raised her hand. The same thing happened to me,” she said.) and little by little, I talked to good friends, along with sincere conversations about Ker in and me.

"Is there anything I can do?" they ask. "Yes"
I answered. "Talk with me about it. Talk and listen.
Just talk baby talk."

So they did. Told me about their past labor s
too. As they would have if Kerin had lived.
It helped somehow. Eased the pain. Oh, so
temporarily but eventually I aited to tell
it over and over again, what had happened,
how I felt. And as time went by and as my good
friends staggered their condolence calls (I'd get
to or three a week), I got to talk about it one
to each one, ease the pain each time. But of
course, only temporarily

Eventually friends and time wore thin. Not that
my friends ceased to call and talk and listen.
But it hadn't happened to them; they had their
own lives and interests, interests similar to what
mine had been before. They didn't want to talk
about it ad infinitum. And I could tell.

So as the weeks passed I decided, one morning
when I was feeling especially blue, to phone
the UNITE contact person. Well, Carol was so
responsive, so honest, so caring, and had so
much time for me. She'd had a stillbirth three
years before, and a healthy baby since, so we
talked about her as well as me. We talked all
morning long. If all we had in common were
circumstances, that was enough. We talked
about things I hadn't been able to talk about
with my good friends. And I asked questions



the “acceptance” stage of grief (i.e., finally realizing, at least more than before, that it really did happen).

Another vivid memory of that first meeting as all the big bellies women who had lost their babies long before me and who were no pregnant again. It moved me. And how I envied them. Ever since I’d gotten that bloodcurdling phone call from the hospital, I’d been thinking, almost chanting, “another baby another baby!” I couldn’t wait. I don’t say that seeing all the big bellies gave me hope or courage; it didn’t. They were they and I was me. They just moved me, that’s all. Pregnant women always move me, and these women were extra-special.

Mainly at the meeting, I felt just the way I felt when talking on the phone with Carol. Here they were, a whole roomful of them, people who wanted to talk about nothing else but their loss. Whether it was me talking, or they talking about my baby or theirs, it made no difference. There was that need to talk, and that need was being fulfilled. We talked about our families and friends’ reactions, we talked about autopsies and funerals, the big bellies talked about fears. I remember feeling the talk more superficial than I would have liked, but it didn’t occur to me then, that the topics I wanted to cover (e.g., anger and guilt-feelings) would come up at subsequent meetings. And, as in my phone conversation with Carol, my pain eased. I emerged from that meeting refreshed, regenerated, almost on a high—a relative high, that is. I got back my perspective. Time would pass. I’d get through this somehow. It was the beginning of control. Mainly the pain stopped throbbing. And that was sufficient.

I found myself look. T

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the closet as though the door er e just unlocked.

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interchangeable, as though that could help the dead baby and as though time didn't have to pass before she could have another, and for getting that maybe she can't have another). So it's very tempting to, and many parents do, simply ignore, or try to ignore, the tragedy. And many parents end up waiting at least a few weeks before coming to UNITE, and she has one mother who aided six pregnancies plus four healthy children.

We keep in close contact between meetings too. We call each other up and talk for hours especially during crises (e.g., pregnancy complications, births, and the anniversaries, meaning the anniversaries of the deaths). We visit each other in the hospital, and at home; we have formed individual friendships that will last all our lives. The group has been very supportive of my writing (mainly my Kerin-poems). We read them at meetings; things said at previous meetings have inspired many a poem, which I usually dedicate to the person involved in the exchange. I'll also never forget announcing my first ovulation to the group, and my pregnancy and that evening I brought five-week-old Brett. ("I usually can't bear to look at babies" member says, but some UNITE babies are different.)

We have a real support system going, and it's not a closed system, certainly not a clique. It has meant so much to us that we want to share it. For anyone who has lost a baby know this is no time to be alone.

Groups like UNITE exist throughout the country. There is variation in purpose, format, and frequency of meetings, and of course what happens at the meetings depends on the members. Most of the groups have names like UNITE, HELP, SHARE. They're actually acronyms, e.g., UNITE is really U.N.I.T.E., which stands for Understanding Neonates in Traumatic Experiences. But we just say UNITE. That's what we really mean.

THE GROUP HAS BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE

A new member recently asked me, "Why do you still come to the meetings after all... you have a new baby?" "No doubt she's as fearful about the rest of her own life. Will she always need the group? Will she always be as miserable as she is right now? No, I assured her, she probably not. And I gave her several reasons why I still go to the meetings. It's not that I'm miserable, I said. Quite the contrary. And it's not that I still have a lot of things to work out. At home later that night I put it all in the form of a poem, one of my list-poems #1. I wrote. I go to help the newcomers #2. I go in order not to forget #3. I go to be with Kerin. This is here I go with Kerin. This is that I do with Kerin. I can't take Kerin to the park or the zoo, so this is here I take Kerin. This is that I do with Kerin.



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