



Between two Eternities

*The Evening Skies,
The Roaring Seas,
The Splitting Sun,
The Clearest Moon,
The Wildest Wind
The Softest Rain
Connects me to you....
Forever*

Ron Smith-Murphy



**Returning to work following
the death of your baby**



Returning to work after the death of a baby is one of the first challenges many parents have to confront. Some family and friends may suggest or insist that you “are better off to go back” or “you’re better off being occupied.” Below are some observations made by parents over the years about the task of going back to work.

Dads

Dads usually return to work very soon after their baby dies, for many dads they do not have a choice but to do so. This can leave dads feeling excluded from the opportunity to grieve. Dads are often expected to ‘take up’ where you ‘left off’ at work and this can be a huge burden at this time. If you hold a position of responsibility this can also present pressures that are more difficult to manage right now. One dad said that he used to take brief breaks, sit in his car and shout out loud and often shed a quiet tear and then return to the ‘what was expected of him’ role.

Many dads find that friends and colleagues will approach them and ask “how’s your wife (partner) doing?” Rarely are they asked, “how are you doing?”

Some dads find they need to get back to work and almost absorb themselves in it. This can cause some resentment between couples. Mothers often feel that dad’s are forgetting their baby or coping much better than they can. If possible, talk about this to each other.

Mothers

Home can be a constant reminder that your baby has died. Your husband or partner has probably gone back to work and you may be feeling isolated. Days can become torturously long and empty. When a baby is stillborn or dies after birth, mothers can face a huge emotional dilemma about returning to work. “Should I take my maternity leave or not?” From our experience listening to parents over the years we would suggest that you do take your maternity leave. First of all you have given birth and your body needs time to heal but more importantly you are also grieving. Many mothers feel under pressure to return to work before they are ready. Financial obligation or work responsibilities may add pressure to your considerations. Family, friends and colleagues may put pressure on you to return, suggesting “it would be good for you” or “it will take your mind off things.” As you may

already know-that's rubbish. Going back to work before you are ready can put unbearable pressure on any parent. Parents have often said that when they returned to work it was like making a silent statement that "I'm okay now or I'm over it."

Very often, you are expected to carry on with the responsibilities that you did before your baby died and this may be difficult as many parents find that their concentration or tolerance levels may not be as good as they were prior to their baby's death.

Some employers are very understanding and this can make a huge difference, others sadly have no idea what you are going through or want to.

It can also be difficult if one of your colleagues was pregnant at the same time. Their joy will be to share details and photos of their baby while you may find you are not able at this time to engage in either.

One of the suggestions that we have found to be helpful to parents both dads and mothers is to drop in to meet your colleagues before you are due to return to work officially. This takes the edge off your return date and breaks the ice when meeting your colleagues both for them and for you.

If you are returning to work the following may be useful to remember-

- Grieving takes time. Being some where else at this time is just geography. We tend to take grief where ever we go. It might just be put on hold or avoided.
- People around us tend to expect bereaved parents to be 'over' their loss unrealistically soon. People may avoid you or mention of your baby. They may think you are feeling so 'down' that you need cheering up.
- Expect that friends and colleagues may not know what to say, may say the wrong thing or may avoid you completely or talking about your baby.
- Expect to have days when work feels completely irrelevant and pointless. This is very normal.
- If you deal with the 'general public' you may expect yourself to be able to handle their enquiries/complaints as well as you did previously but

this may not necessarily be the case.

- If you have an understanding employer perhaps you could arrange flexible periods, which may ease the transition back to the workplace.
- If at all possible, communications between the employer and employee are so important at this time so that the needs of both can be heard and appreciated.
- If you are a health care professional it may also be difficult to be around new born babies.
- If you are a teacher or work with other children this can bring added pressures. Children will remember you were going to have a baby and will want to know about him or her. Children don't have inhibitions about asking questions and you need to be ready for that. The trials and tribulations or dealing with children can also be a challenge at this time.

What helps ~

Find out what support service is available at work. Your employer may have a bereavement policy in place or offer a counselling service.

If it's possible for you to discuss some of the difficulties with your Manager; talk to him/her about your concerns, discuss what you would like others to be told about your experience and how you would like (or not like) them to acknowledge your experience.

Try not to take on any extra work or responsibilities.

If you would like to talk to us about any issues to do with going back to work or if you are finding it really hard being back at work please give us a call on 01 872 6996.



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