

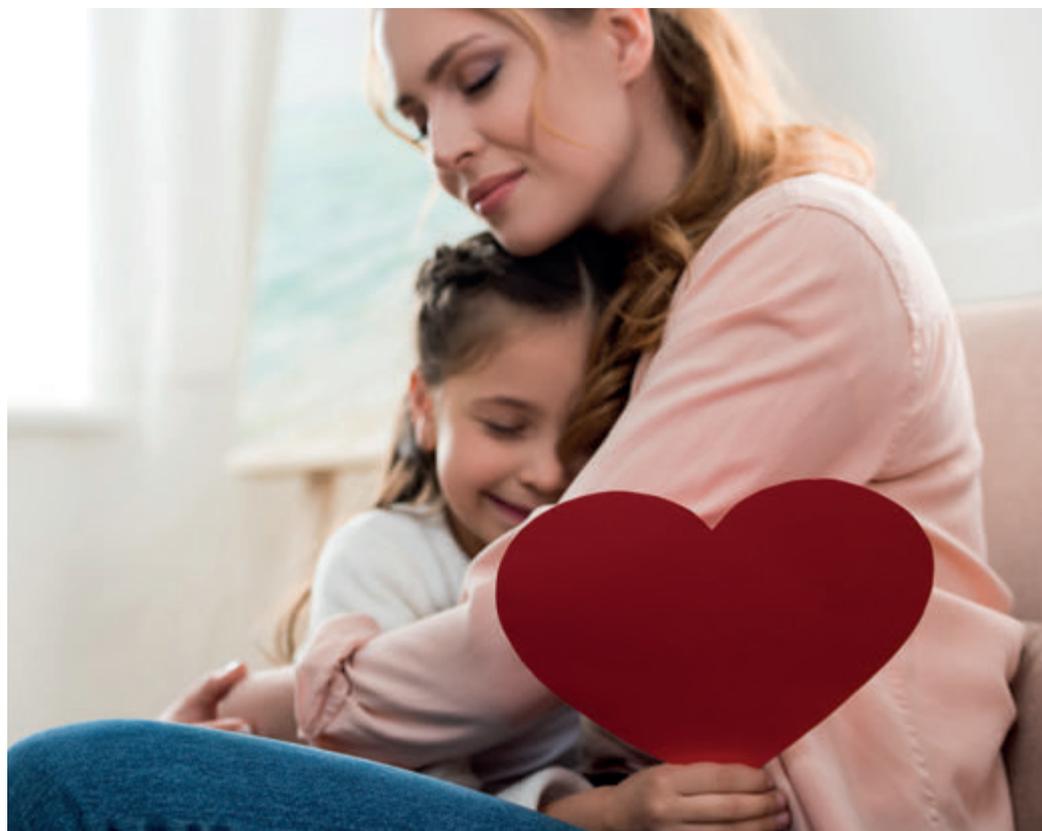
How to Celebrate Mother's Day after Losing a Baby

By Petra Boynton

Mother's Day is supposed to be a time for happy families and honouring all that mums do. But it can be a bittersweet time if you've lost a baby recently or in the past. Grief can leave you feeling isolated and lonely, and you may feel you have to hide this from others, particularly if your friends or relatives have been awkward or unsympathetic about your loss(es). Perhaps you're under pressure to keep up a 'perfect mum' persona that leaves no room for feelings of anger or frustration about your loss. Or you may simply be unsure how to mark the day.

At a time of year where you're expected to be around children and celebrate motherhood you may struggle if you are missing a baby you lost, or are navigating family gatherings where you might feel envious of those who have children. You may want to take pride in being a mum while still find it difficult to adjust to not having a particular baby (or babies) with you.

While it's not often talked about, it isn't unusual for mums or their wider families to find Mother's Day a tricky time –



particularly if it's your first anniversary following bereavement. Your partner may feel the same way, but say nothing – particularly on a day that's supposed to be about the person who carried their

babies. Similarly, young children may not be so aware of your losses but can still be affected by grief; while older children may be struggling but unsure how to ask for help. Everyone in the family may have different ways of coping and managing their emotions and reactions and this can be tricky especially if what one family member wants to do conflicts with someone else's needs.

There is no straightforward journey through the grieving process and there's no set time by which you'll feel better. Instead there will always be good and bad days. This can mean Mother's Day can either become a powerful time for remembrance, or a trigger for distress. You have permission to mark the day in whatever way you wish – it's worth noting that you may not end up managing Mother's Day in the way you anticipated.

It's absolutely fine to tell others how you are doing, how

you wish to treat Mother's Day and how you'd like them to support you. This may include asking them not to make a big deal of the day or to join in celebrations that honour the memory of the baby (or babies) that aren't with you. It's your day, so you get to define, change and mark it in whatever way works best for you.

Support groups are a good place to connect with other people who have experienced losses. In the run up to Mother's Day and during the day itself, making use of online forums, groups on Facebook, charity helplines or email advice services can be very reassuring if you need support.

Petra Boynton is the author of *Coping With Pregnancy Loss*, published by Routledge, RRP £11.99. Get 20% off the book with the code CWL20! Other sources of support can be found at www.copingwithpregnancyloss.com/support

Establishing New Traditions after Loss

You may want to pick a meaningful place to visit like a walk in peaceful surroundings, a beautiful beach, or somewhere you feel happy.

Not everyone wants to celebrate after loss. That might mean doing very little to mark Mother's Day; you may want to spend the time quietly or on a retreat with other parents who've experienced similar loss.

Alternatively, your preferred Mother's Day treat might be something that's focussed on your living children or those of other relatives or friends, whilst still remembering any babies not with you.

Meaningful dates can be good times to make memorials – these could include planting a tree, creating a memory box or scrap book, or joining an online memorial page.

If your baby has a grave to visit, spending some time there on Mother's Day either alone or with family members can feel important and meaningful. You may want to take flowers or other mementoes.

You might ask for donations to a baby loss charity, made in the name of all your children or that of the baby (or babies) you've lost.