

AN E-GUIDE

It Lasts for Always: Navigating Perinatal Grief with Love



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Table of Contents

Introduction	03
Chapter I: Understanding Perinatal Loss	04
Chapter II: Navigating with Love	05
Chapter III: Tips & Techniques	06
Chapter IV: Embracing the “ing”	08
Conclusion	09

INTRODUCTION

Hey, I'm your guide Jeanae.

Navigating grief after experiencing perinatal loss became a mission of mine as I embarked on my own family creation journey. I am a therapist by training, with specialties in perinatal mental health, sexuality, and grief & loss. The latter became more of a focus as I navigated my own intense grief. Since 2017, I have intensely focused on supporting loss parents as they pick up the pieces of their lives and themselves.

I'm a Momma of three (one living son and two twin daughters, deceased) who enjoys quiet, traveling to warm & beachy places, watching good movies, and settling down with a good audiobook and a hot chocolate!



Grief is a journey unique to who you are as a person, your type of loss, your support network in its wake, and how you make meaning moving forward. You loved so much that your heart, brain, body, and spirit remember. THAT is a beautiful thing.

A stylized, cursive signature of the name "Jeanae" in a dark brown color.

CHAPTER I

Understanding Perinatal Loss

Making Sense of the Unbelievable

Losing a baby during pregnancy or shortly after birth is a devastating experience that can shatter hopes, dreams, and expectations. In the midst of grief, it's essential to find sources of comfort, understanding, and hope. This e-book aims to provide compassionate insights, practical strategies, and heartfelt encouragement to help you navigate the aftermath of perinatal loss with resilience and grace.

So what is perinatal loss? Perinatal loss is defined as the death of a fetus or newborn during the perinatal period and includes miscarriage, stillbirth, and neonatal death. In much of the literature, this period is defined by 20 weeks gestation through 28 days after birth. For this e-book, I am including all losses from the moment the egg is fertilized, and a pregnancy is known, to the moment the loss is confirmed.

Why do I include the miscarriage period? I include it because miscarriage is often overlooked or dismissed as not a real or valid loss. It falls into the category of “disenfranchised loss,” meaning that it is sometimes not sufficiently recognized as something “worth” grieving about. Anyone who has experienced a miscarriage knows this is not true.

Regardless of the timing of your loss, please know that I know it matters. If it mattered to you, then it matters, period. No one has the right to tell you how you should feel, nor play some version of the grief Olympics when you are sharing something so vulnerable. Differences in experience absolutely exist depending on gestational age, but outside of that, the gravity of your grief is unique to you. No one else gets to say what it is or should be.

Feelings during this time run the gamut. Some days you may feel like you can't get out of bed. On other days, you may feel energized to start anew. The next day you may feel nothing at all or like you are watching your life on a screen. Anger, sadness, guilt, frustration, devastation, loneliness, hopelessness, numbness, motivation, resignation, hopefulness, avoidance are all commonly experienced. There's no one “right” way to feel. There's no one “right” way to move through this journey.

Know that this path is at times meandering: it has no particular direction or clear purpose while you're on it. Generally, you know you are moving towards healing, but much like a labyrinth, the path winds back on itself, often even when you think you're done.

CHAPTER II

Navigating with Love

Remembering the love

It's said that grief is just love with no place to go. It's the evidence of connection, investment, attachment, fondness, and meaning. Eventually, you will get to the point where you remember the love more than the pain of the loss, but until then, here's your gentle reminder to keep love at the forefront of your healing journey.



Groundwork

1. Find ways to remember the small joys of your journey (e.g., the moment you found out you were pregnant, your first ultrasound, your first fantasy about who your child would be, etc.).
2. Make room for the grief. When you need to cry, cry. When you need silence, rest in it. When you need to vent your anger and frustration, do so safely. Making room for your own grief, and requiring that your loved ones understand the importance of this too, is one of the most loving things you can do for yourself. They (grief & love) are not mutually exclusive.
3. Find a grounding practice. Go for a walk. Go for a run. Do yoga. Meditate. Dance. Attend a sound bath. Journal. Walk a labyrinth. Practice any or all of these things regularly for as long as you need to.



CHAPTER III

Tips and Techniques



Get Honest

Telling the truth is always the best place to start. Being honest with others is important, but in this case, being honest with YOURSELF is the first thing you need to do. Be honest about where you are emotionally, what you feel like doing and don't feel like doing, who you want to be around and who you don't, and what you actually need for your own peace of mind. How others feel about your truth is less important than you honoring yourself by telling it.



Locate Support

There are many different forms of support available for those in the wake of perinatal loss. Look into support groups (both virtual and in-person), individual therapy with a person specializing in perinatal mental health & loss, online forums, and loss retreats. You may have to try a few things to find the right fit for your needs. The point is to actually try. Do not isolate even though you may want to.



Create Your Scripts

In the immediate aftermath of your loss, your brain may feel a bit scrambled. There will be times when you feel like you know exactly what to say, and other times when you're at a loss for words. Sometimes you'll honestly say something you might regret later. Come up with a few scripts for the top 3 situations you encounter. Common questions: "is this your first?", "How many kids do you have?", "can you come to my baby shower?", "I'm having a party, do you want to come?", and "how are you?".

CHAPTER III CONTINUED

People May Say Things that Feel Hurtful

Guess what? Despite the fact that humans have been born and dying forever, people still have a hard time talking about grief. Death specifically makes people uncomfortable. The death of a baby and loss of a pregnancy often leave people speechless. In the absence of knowing what to say or what they think is the “right” thing to say, it’s not uncommon for a person to blurt out something that feels really insensitive. More often than not, they mean no harm. The thing to always keep in mind is impact over intent. Remember to stay honest about how something lands on you, and revisit the scripts section above to come up with a few quick responses you can use in a pinch.

Turned Upside Down

There may be times when you feel like there is a version of you that existed before your loss, and a very different version of you that exists after your loss. Your world has been forever changed, and even deeper than that, your worldview has been forever shifted. Though many of us know that perinatal loss is a possibility (ability) for anyone, we don’t often consider the probability (likelihood) of it happening to us. The realization of the loss can be earth-shattering and result in feeling like your world is turned upside down. Right is left. Up is down. Nothing makes sense, and nothing can be trusted. It’s important to remember that it’s normal to feel unsettled and unsure at this point. You’re having a normal reaction to a challenging experience.

Bridgework

You do not have to decide on this now, but if you have capacity, start thinking about what you’d like to do to honor your llo (lost little one). Do you want to volunteer? Do you want to work towards policy change? Do you want to create something in your llo’s honor to support others? This could be a one-time thing or an ongoing investment. The purpose is to transmute some of the pain into growth and help, while also honoring the memory.



CHAPTER IV

Embracing the “ing”

Healing is active and ongoing; rarely finished

It is crucial to remember that healing is not linear (i.e., you don't go through steps 1, 2, and 3), and is rarely finished. There will likely not come a day when you feel nothing about your loss, or it's like nothing happened. I'll be honest, there may be a time when you hope for this. When the pain of the loss feels so great that you may wish to just be “over it” or for it to be erased from your memory.

How you handle those thoughts is entirely up to you, AND I encourage you not to process that feeling alone. As time passes, the pain will change. You will likely find yourself trying out many different ways of interpreting what happened, and deciding how to incorporate it into your life moving forward. That is healthy.

Sometimes this will feel easy and sad memories will not feel as close to the surface. Other times they may roll over you like unrelenting waves. The important thing for you to remember is that it's a process. Moving through your healing is active and ongoing.

It will require work that doesn't look one particular way. The “ing” may be daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly.

I encourage you to ask yourself what kind of work you're open to doing. Below is a short list of options.

Support groups?
Ritual practices?
Therapy?
Bibliotherapy?
Art?
You choose.



CONCLUSION

The Love Lasts for Always

Your experience matters... No matter how early your loss or how short the life of your little one. No one can tell you how to feel or when is the right time to be done with grieving. Your little one existed. They became real and that, “lasts for always”.. They can’t become “unreal” unless YOU choose to forget them.

If you are looking for more in-depth and independent support while navigating your life after loss, check out the Black Angel Mom Guided Journal and the Little Feet, Big Footprints Card Deck available on the website. They are both great companions to therapy with a trained professional.

As you navigate the aftermath of perinatal loss, remember that you are not alone. Your journey of grief is uniquely yours, but there is hope, healing, and support available to you. May this e-book serve as a source of comfort, validation, and inspiration as you embrace love, honor loss, and navigate the path forward with compassion and resilience.



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