

# FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

*“Sometimes it's hard to see the rainbow  
when there have been endless days of rain.”*

*Wheatfield with Crows by Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890)*

## MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear friends and supporters of FirstLight,

This Newsletter focuses on Mother's Day which takes place this year on Sunday, March 27th. I hope the articles and advice offered to Mums who have lost a child are helpful. It can be difficult to know what to say or do on Mother's Day to help a relative or friend who has lost a child or experienced a miscarriage. Below are some suggestions from counsellors Heidi Mc Bain and Annie Wright.

Acknowledge that Mother's Day is a very hard day for them – you could send a card letting them know that you are thinking of them. Accept your relative's or friend's grief for what it is – their reactions to their grief and Mother's Day will be individual.

If they want to talk and share the story of their child on Mother's Day, while you may feel awkward in these moments, it's better to let them talk. Ask your relative or friend if they would like to mark the day in a particular way, and offer to help them do so, if you can.

While there is a lot of societal pressure and expectation for bereaved Mums to feel a certain way, let your relative or friend open up about their experience in their own way – ask them how they are feeling, then listen to the answers they give. When in doubt about what to say, simply let them talk while you actively listen.

If you are planning on going somewhere with them, avoid places with other Mums and children which may be triggering. Consider, for example, going into nature where your friend may be more at ease. However, while you might have plenty of ideas of what to do on the day, do ask your bereaved friend what she would like to do. In other words, take direction from her.

As Annie Wright, Evergreen Counselling says 'At the end of the day, any acknowledgment or expression of love to someone who has experienced a loss is well-intended. You can better support your friend/family member/partner by directly acknowledging how hard Mother's Day may be for them ..and being open and receptive to what they need and want for support on that day.'

With best wishes to all,  
Yours sincerely,  
Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO, FirstLight

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**National  
24-Hour  
Helpline  
Number  
1800 391 391**

**FirstLight**  
Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

# A Mother's Chorus: Grieving a Child on Mother's Day



Recently the website What's Your Grief? reached out to their readers and asked for their help writing a post in anticipation of Mother's Day on March 27th. Specifically, they asked mothers grieving the death of a child to share one thing they want people to know about their grief on Mother's Day. They received comments and messages from close to one hundred different women.

Although their collective wisdom is the result of a diverse range of experiences, there is a synchronicity to their words that made us feel they belonged together in one cohesive whole. So, instead of presenting you with a choppy and disjointed list, What's Your Grief? Have taken many of the responses received and put them together in a letter. This letter is not written by one bereaved mother, but an entire chorus of mothers. Their words are not at all the same, but their message blends together to create a mournful, harmonious, and beautiful song.

**Dear Friend,**

*I miss my child every day. This grief of mine will never leave me, and honestly, why should it? I love my child more than I ever could have imagined, and yes, I do mean present tense "love". It is excruciating knowing that my child will never return to my arms. However, a mother's love for her child doesn't require physical presence; this can be proven by the fact that most mothers love their children well before they are even born. I will love my child forever, and therefore, I will grieve my child forever. This is just how it goes. I know it's difficult for some people to understand my ongoing grief, I guess because they want me to "get better" or return to "normal." However, I actually am normal. I'm just different now. I believe those who say they want to support me on difficult days like Mother's Day, but part of this is accepting me as a grieving mother who will always love her deceased child. Again, this is just how it goes.*

*My grief is like the weather. Somedays it's calm, quiet, maybe even a little sunny. Other days it's a devastating storm that makes me feel angry, exhausted, raw, and empty. I wake up in the morning and wonder – "Am I even alive at all? And if so, how am I supposed to make it through this day?" This is why, when you ask me how I feel about Mother's Day, all I can say is that it depends. Of course, I'm going to try my best to cope with the day, but while you're hoping that your Mother's Day picnic doesn't get spoiled by actual rain, I'll be praying that the grief storms stay at bay. Like many things in a grieving mother's life, Mother's Day is bittersweet to the nth degree. On the one hand, I feel immense joy because I was blessed with my child and I feel gratitude for every moment I was given with her. On the other hand, the pain of missing my child – my greatest happiness, my life's purpose, and my best friend – is intense. Bereaved mothers live with so many of these confusing contrasts. They are like undercurrents that tug at and toss about our hearts and minds.*

*I am the mother of a child who is not alive. Perhaps a child who you've never met. You can't ask me about their school year, or how they're liking piano lessons, or whether they've chosen a major in college. In my mind, I've imagined my child doing all these things. People don't realize that I grieve each of my child's milestones, knowing they didn't get the opportunity to experience these special days. Most people don't know how to validate my child's place in the world or my ongoing role as my child's mother.*

This is a difficult concept for others to grasp. Heck, sometimes even I grapple with the answers to questions like "Do you have children?" and "How many?." I know many bereaved mothers, like me, long for these questions to have straightforward answers. Sadly, mothers who have experienced the death of their only child may even wonder whether they get to call themselves a mother at all in broader society. So, in addition to the pain of grief, these mothers have to cope with a sense of being left out, forgotten, and ignored. Can you imagine how that might feel?

I think it must be like being stabbed through the heart and when you turn to others for help they say "What blood?" "What knife?" Then, for mothers who have surviving children, there is this gem of a comment – "Don't forget, you're lucky to have other children." Please let me assure you, a mother does not forget any of her children. This mother loves each and every one of her unique and special children in unique and special ways, but one of her children has died and so her love for this child looks a little untraditional. Mothers do not have a finite amount of love to be shifted, divided, and spread around depending on the number of children they have on this Earth. So please be careful with your comments, because it's difficult enough for grieving mothers who often feel torn between feeling joy and happiness for their living children and grief for the child who has died.

All that said, you asked me what it's like to grieve a child on Mother's Day, so here's what I have to say: This day will forever be hard for me. I live with an emptiness that no one can fill; so I may be sad, I may be unsociable, and I may need to take a break to be by myself in a quiet place. Whatever shape my grief takes on this day, please allow me to feel the way I feel and please follow my lead. Beyond that, acknowledge me as a mother. It makes me feel forgotten and as though my child has been forgotten when people act as though my child never existed. Also, I can sense that people feel uncomfortable talking about my child and I constantly feel like the elephant in the room, but it doesn't have to be this way. Honestly, I find it really comforting when someone talks about my child. I love hearing their name spoken out loud! I love hearing stories about them. Maybe you know a story I've never heard, or maybe I've heard it a hundred times before, but it really doesn't matter to me. Your acknowledgment alone is one of the greatest Mother's Day gifts you could give me.

I guess while I'm offering my two cents, I also have something to say to my fellow bereaved mothers. No one has it all figured out, but I've learned a few lessons along the way. If you're worried about Mother's Day, you're not alone. Try not to get overwhelmed or wrapped up in anxiety. You may actually find that the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself. You may want to plan a whole day of activities just to stay busy, or you may feel like doing nothing at all. There is no "right" way to handle Mother's Day – but do try to plan ahead a little. You may want to reach out to others who are struggling with the day and, if you can, it always helps to face the day with people who love and support you. Whatever you do, believe you will make it through the day. With time, the grief storms will grow smaller and less frequent and you will find a little more balance and room to breathe. Believe you will be okay and have hope that in the future you will find yourself in a place where you can grieve and celebrate on Mother's Day all at the same time.

**Let's take care of each other, M**

**For those who have lost a child, Mother's Day can be a very painful holiday. Give yourself permission to feel sadness and grief, and find ways to honour your child's memory during this very challenging time. So what's a Mum to do?**

- **Tip 1: Be gentle with yourself:** You may feel anger, sadness, guilt, or a range of other emotions because your child died before you. These emotions are very common with grief—don't try to suppress them.
- **Tip 2: Seek out emotional support:** Seeking support is a sign of courage, not weakness. Everyone grieves in their own time and their own way.
- **Tip 3: Be patient with yourself:** Talk openly with trusted family and friends about your child and encourage them to talk openly with you too—hearing your child's name mentioned can be helpful. Plant a flower or tree with a marker that bears your child's name.
- **Tip 4: Create your own memorial/Light a Candle:** You can be creative and put your energy into doing something in memory of your child.
- **Tip 5:** Give yourself permission to grieve, talk, and journal.
- **Tip 6:** Talk about your feelings with your spouse and encourage them to express to you how they are feeling.



Ben was my fifth child born in October 1986, and he died three days later. It had been a very traumatic birth for both of us. I was so relieved it was all over. In those days, the nurses would take the babies into the nursery overnight to let the mothers have a night's sleep. On Saturday night, I wheeled Ben down to the nursery in his crib as I had done the previous nights. Sadly, that was the last time I saw Ben alive.

At about 3:30 am, I was woken by a nurse and brought down to the ICU. Ben was on a life support machine; he had stopped breathing. The doctor said there was no hope for him as they didn't know how long he had stopped breathing and if there was any brain damage. The Doctors and Nurses in the ICU were terrific. They did everything humanly possible to try and save him. But it was all in vain. They were genuinely upset when he died. I left the hospital for home later that evening, feeling my world had fallen apart and I was living my worst nightmare.

I had never heard of the Irish Sudden Infant Death Association (ISIDA) after Ben died. However, years later, I was doing a course, and part of it was to talk about some turmoil that happened in your life. One of the tutors suggested I speak about Ben. She knew about the ISIDA, so I contacted them, and they sent me all the information I needed for the talk. That was the only contact I had with them.

**What advice would you give parents who might have recently lost a child suddenly or who might be struggling with their grief?**

I would say talk to your family and friends and go for counseling. Speak about the baby using their name even if they lived for a short time; don't be afraid to do that. The grief will consume you, and you feel just like giving up but don't, please look for help. It's out there to help rid you of that horrible feeling of desperation and let the tears flow whenever you feel like it. There is no set time limit as to when you will feel better. But believe me, you will. All this will pass.

**How did you become involved with FirstLight, and could you tell us a bit about your role as a volunteer in the FirstLight head office?**

I had two more children after Ben. I was also working. So I hadn't got the time to do anything else but being a volunteer was always at the back of my mind. I've always wanted to do something for Ben. So when I retired in 2020. I went for it. I contacted Andrew Mernagh, the General manager in FirstLight, by email. I had some conversations with Andrew, and he was willing to take me on board. I'm delighted he did.

The FirstLight office has a soothing feeling about it. The staff are very friendly and professional in a caring way. I think it's wonderful that the clients can avail themselves of the free counselling. I'm sure the FirstLight team has helped so many people from going over the edge and guided them on the road to normality. I work for 10 hours a week over two days, where I support both the Clinical Director and General Manager across various areas. If my 10 hours can be of any service to the FirstLight team, I am more than happy to do it.



THE LORD MAYOR'S  
*Charity Ball*

SATURDAY APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup> 2022  
THE ROUND ROOM AT THE MANSION HOUSE

Tickets on sale now at €125.00pp

TICKETS INCLUDE:

A DRINKS RECEPTION ON ARRIVAL | FOUR COURSE GALA DINNER  
ENTERTAINMENT FROM THE CAMEMBERT QUARTET | DJ AND DANCING UNTIL LATE  
WITH NORAH CASEY AS OUR MC

Lord Mayor Alison Gilliland will host the Lord Mayor's Charity Ball on Saturday 30th April, 2022 at 7pm in the Round Room of the Mansion House. FirstLight is delighted to have been nominated as one of three charities for the Ball. The other two charities are Aoibheas and Ruhama. FirstLight has been nominated by Larry and Nora Murrin, proprietors of The Round Room at the Mansion House and FIRE Restaurant. Their son Larry died in 1990 from SIDS and following his death, they received support from ISIDA and our founder Eimear Berry.

The Lord Mayor's Ball first took place in 1715 and ran annually until 1928. It has been renewed on a number of occasions throughout the years, most recently in 2013 by Lord Mayor Naoise Ó Muirí who hosted the Ball in aid of three charities and it has been held annually since then up until 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ball had to be canceled in 2021, so FirstLight is delighted to be a part of the 2022 Ball.

The evening is kindly sponsored by Conference & Events Venue. All of the proceeds from the Ball will go directly to the charities who will each receive a third. This includes ticket sale proceeds, as well as all money raised from the auction and raffle taking place on the night.

FirstLight is appealing to our network of families and supporters for assistance in this area. We are currently gathering high-end, luxury raffle and auction items for the Ball. If you, a family member, or friend have connections to individuals, businesses, or organisations that may be willing to contribute prizes we would be so grateful. Some suggestions would be a fine dining experience for two at a high-end restaurant, a weekend stay at a luxury hotel, or an all-expenses-paid package at a local spa. Further experiential prizes such as tickets to sporting events, concerts, a music festival, or backstage passes are also very popular. Artwork by a well-regarded Irish artist, artisanal jewellery, or vintage and rare bottles of wine would be other proposals.

The Ball is an excellent opportunity to raise much-needed funds that will be used to provide support for suddenly bereaved families. If you or a loved one is in a position to provide support in this way FirstLight would greatly appreciate it.

**Tickets for the Ball are €125 per person and if you would like to get in touch in relation to purchasing a ticket or make a donation of prizes please contact Andrew Mernagh on 01-8732711 or email [andrew@firstlight.ie](mailto:andrew@firstlight.ie)**



On Sunday, June 5th, the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon takes place for the first time in three years, returning to the streets of Dublin. Celebrating 40 years of *Women Making Magic*, the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon 2022 will be a hybrid event for the first time, with both physical and virtual versions taking place.

Reunion Squared is an exciting new addition to this year's Vhi Women's Mini Marathon, taking place over Race Weekend in Merrion Square Park and featuring lots of exciting and entertaining attractions!

And in another first, the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon will also host the Dublin 10k Championships - any participants who are registered with Dublin athletics clubs and have a valid AAI registration number can also enter to compete.

**Here's everything you need to know:**

- Entries are now open for the physical event, and entries for the virtual event will open after Easter.
- Everyone who enters the event will receive a special 40th-anniversary medal and Vhi finisher t-shirt.
- Everyone will also receive a 20% discount for Intersport Elverys.
- Everyone who enters before Monday, April 18th will also be automatically entered into a draw to win a holiday for two to Lake Garda, thanks to Topflight.

To register visit: [www.vhiwomensminimarathon.ie](http://www.vhiwomensminimarathon.ie)

## Mile in Memory Walk, Father's Day June 21st 2022

FirstLight is delighted to announce the return of the physical as distinct from virtual *Mile in Memory Walk* for the first time in three years on Father's Day June 15th.

In the May issue of the FirstLight newsletter, we will have interviews with our Ambassador Úna Crawford O'Brien and with Mary Kelly who has hosted the Kerry Mile in Memory Walk at Rossbeigh Beach for over 10 years.

The 2022 *Mile in Memory Walk* will again acknowledge the father's role within the family following the sudden loss of his child. By scheduling the *Mile in Memory Walk* on Father's Day, we hope to encourage families to come together and, as well as support each other, provide an opportunity for bereaved Dads to reflect on their loss in the comfort and with the support of their family and friends.



Interview with FirstLight Ambassador Una Crawford O'Brien in our next newsletter

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If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email [info@firstlight.ie](mailto:info@firstlight.ie)