

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER



Join us for the Global
Wave of Light

Saturday October 15, 7 pm

*Light a Candle in Memory of all Babies and Childrens' Lives
Gone too Soon*

MESSAGE FROM FIRSTLIGHT CEO

Dear friends and supporters of FirstLight,

I am writing this piece in FirstLight's beautifully revamped space within the Carmichael Centre. With generous funding support from Joe and Trish O'Reilly, Industrial & Farm Machinery (IFM) Limited and expert project management from Declan Mc Cann, Meegan Builders Limited. FirstLight's accommodation has been transformed. The cluttered office which awkwardly incorporated a single counselling room is now a calm and welcoming space that includes a bright reception area and two cosy counselling rooms. Elaine Masterson, psychotherapist and play therapist, who joined Team FirstLight in May as Clinical Services Manager sees her clients in one counselling room while Georgia Howard, FirstLight's Clinical Services Director sees hers in the second room.

In addition to expanding FirstLight's counselling space within the Carmichael Centre, we have substantially increased the number of outsourced therapists on FirstLight's Register; currently, there are 67 adult therapists and 22 play/adolescent therapists across 22 counties. We have been fortunate to date to secure the resources to allow us to expand the organisation's capacity. This is helping us support an unprecedented surge following Covid in family members seeking crisis intervention and professional counselling. Calls via our Help Line have also increased very substantially. The graph inside illustrates the increase in demand for our support services. And while the graph illustrates the rapid increase in the number of referrals to FirstLight over the last 8 and a half years, and especially this year, it does not make clear that in the case of many families, separate therapeutic support is provided to a number of individuals within the family, for example, the bereaved Mum, Dad, grandparent and surviving sibling.

A heartfelt thank you to all who have given generously to FirstLight to enable the continued provision of therapeutic services through these challenging times.

This edition has a special focus on the upcoming Baby Loss Awareness Week (October 9 to 15) Throughout the week bereaved parents, their families and friends are encouraged to unite with each other and others across the world to commemorate the lives of babies who died during pregnancy, at or soon after birth and in infancy. We invite you to join us at 7.00 pm on 15 October and light a candle/s in memory of the baby or babies you have lost. Please share photos of your candles on FirstLight's Facebook page and help create a wave of light that spreads across the globe!

With ward regards,

Fionnuala Sheehan, CEO, FirstLight

IN THIS ISSUE:

**FIRSTLIGHT
EXPANDS ITS
CLINICAL TEAM**

**FIRSTLIGHT
LAUNCHES
ONLINE REFERRAL
FORM**

**NATIONAL
MATERNITY
BEREAVEMENT
EXPERIENCE
SURVEY**

**LIGHT A CANDLE
IN MEMORY OF
ALL BABIES' AND
CHILDRENS'
LIVES GONE TOO
SOON**

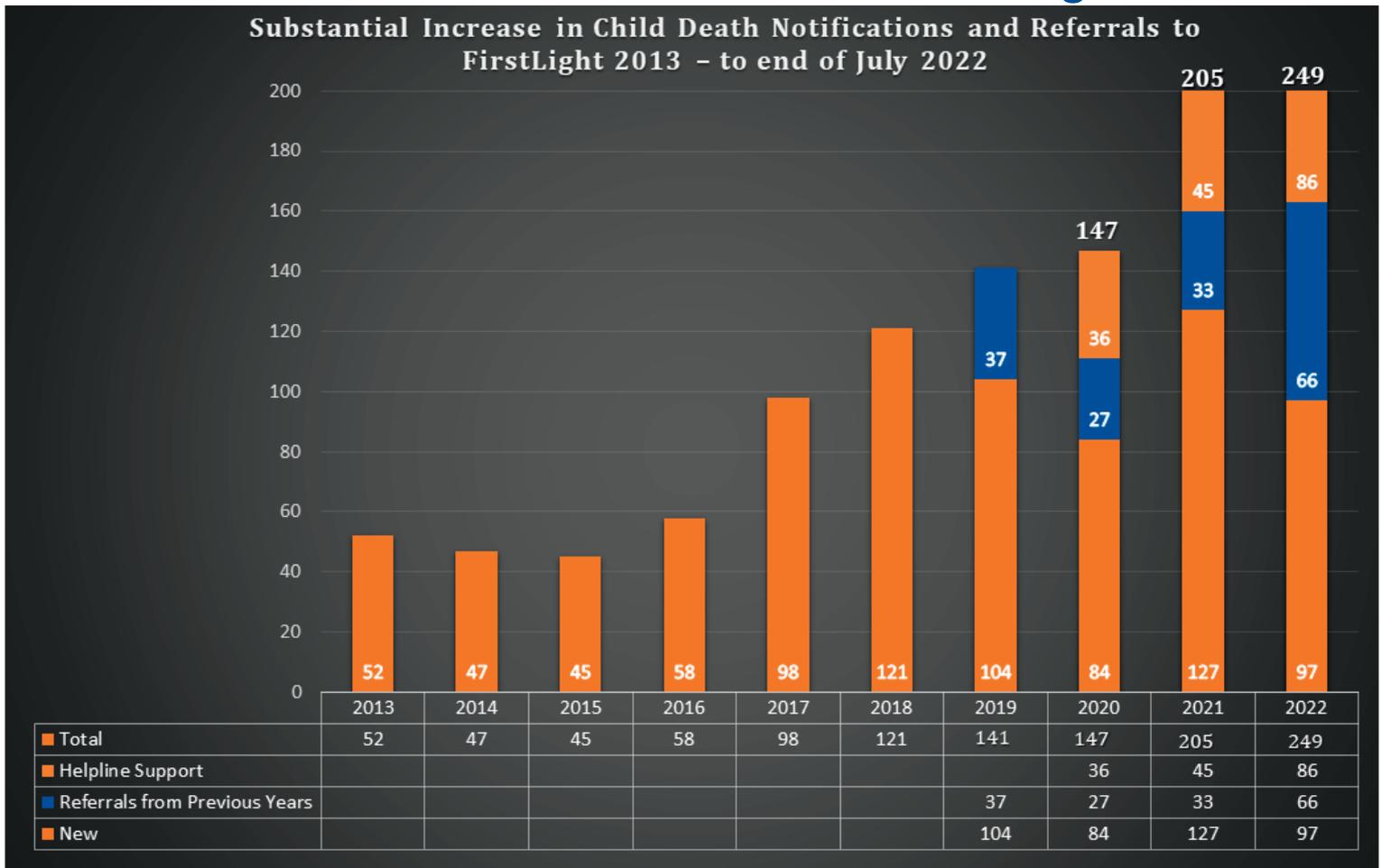
**COMFORTING
PARENTS AFTER
THE LOSS OF
THEIR BABY OR
CHILD**

**HOW TO COPE
WITH THE LOSS
OF A
GRANDCHILD OR
GREAT-
GRANDCHILD**

FirstLight

Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families

Substantial Increase in the Demand for FirstLight Services



FirstLight Expands its Clinical Team to Meet the Increasing Demand for its Services



FirstLight recently expanded the clinical services team and is delighted to welcome Elaine Masterson as our Clinical Services Manager. Elaine is an Accredited Psychotherapist, Play Therapist, and Supervisor with the I.A.P.T.P – Irish Association of Play Therapists & Psychotherapists, in addition, holds accreditation as a Psychotherapist with I.A.H.I.P – the Irish Association of Humanistic & Integrative Psychotherapy and the ICP – the Irish Council of Psychotherapy. Elaine works with children, adolescents, and adults therapeutically, and is also a clinical supervisor to other practicing psychotherapists.

Elaine has worked with children, teenagers, and adults since 2000. In 2011 Elaine opened Solas Psychotherapy Services offering psychotherapy, play therapy, and later professional supervision to other Psychotherapists and those in the helping and educational professions having earned a Post Graduate Diploma in Creative Supervision. Using a person-centered and empathetic approach for individuals, the work allows a person to feel heard and supported before moving into coping strategies and behavioural and emotional changes – this is a humanistic and integrative psychotherapeutic approach.

Elaine has worked across diverse sectors in community-based family services, residential services, and child protection, specialising in working with trauma and complicated loss with clients from TUSLA, CARI, and court GAL systems and FirstLight, Canteen along with private referrals since 2011.

FirstLight Launches Online Referral Form to Meet the Increased Demand for its Services



In our continued efforts to ensure we meet the increased demand for our services FirstLight recently launched a new online referral form via our website www.firstlight.ie. i.e. The new online referral takes just a few minutes to complete and is open for both suddenly bereaved parents and families and all frontline professionals.

If you or a family member, friend, patient, or client wish to contact FirstLight for support, please complete our Online Referral Form, and a member of our Clinical Services Team will contact you directly to discuss how best we can provide professional support. **To access the online referral form please visit www.firstlight.ie**

First National Survey asking Bereaved Parents about their Experiences of Maternity Bereavement Care in Ireland.



The *National Maternity Bereavement Experience Survey* will be the first national survey asking bereaved parents about their experiences of maternity bereavement care in Ireland.

The survey will invite parents who have been bereaved by a second-trimester miscarriage, a stillborn infant, or early neonatal death of a baby born alive but who dies within the first seven days of life. to share their experiences of care. The survey will gather bereaved parents' lived experiences of maternity bereavement care from antenatal diagnosis through to hospital admission, labour and birth, postnatal and bereavement care, and investigations and follow-up care. There is also a separate section for a partner or support person to complete as well as some free text boxes for any additional comments.

The findings of this national survey will provide valuable information on the standard of maternity bereavement services in Ireland, acknowledging what is working well and identifying areas where improvements are needed.

The survey will take place during September and October 2022 and for further details visit www.yourexperience.ie

Light a Candle in Memory of all Babies' and Childrens' Lives Gone too Soon



Join us for the global

Wave of Light

15 October, 7pm

Light a candle in memory of all babies' lives gone too soon. Join us 7pm local time.

Share your #WaveOfLight pictures

[f](https://www.facebook.com/babyloss-awareness.org) [i](https://www.instagram.com/babyloss-awareness.org) [t](https://www.twitter.com/babyloss-awareness.org)

[babyloss-awareness.org/get-involved/#wave-of-light](https://www.babyloss-awareness.org/get-involved/#wave-of-light)

 **Baby Loss Awareness Week**

The sudden loss of a child is one of the most unimaginable pains a family can experience. Every year across the globe, babies and children die suddenly, unexpectedly, and often without explanation. Since 1976, FirstLight has supported families through their darkest moments, helping them find the first flicker of hope...their FirstLight!

At 7 pm on Saturday, October 15, FirstLight is asking you to join us in supporting suddenly bereaved parents, families, and friends across the globe and light a candle in memory of all babies' and childrens' lives gone too soon

How Can You Join the Global Wave of Light?

To join the global 'Wave of Light', simply light a candle at 7 pm local time on October 15 and leave it burning for at least one hour. This can be done individually, in a group, at home, or in a communal space. Wherever you do this, you will be joining a global 'Wave of Light' in memory of all the babies and children who lit up our lives for such a short time.

How can I donate to the Global Wave of Light?

We would kindly ask, where possible, that when joining the Global Wave of Light, you consider making a €10 donation to FirstLight. To make the donation log onto the FirstLight website or Facebook page. Alternatively, you can host a Facebook fundraiser in aid of FirstLight. All proceeds will go directly towards counselling support for suddenly bereaved families across Ireland.

What are the origins of the Global Wave of Light

Starting back in 1988, United States President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the month of October "Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month". After years of developing awareness in the States, the United Kingdom adopted the same concept.

In 2002 the UK claimed October 15 as *Baby Loss Awareness Day* following recognition that a loss of an infant or child is traumatic to parents. While one day was successful, it was felt a week would do more to raise awareness. Hence, one day turned into *Baby Loss Awareness Week*, concluding on October 15 with the global "Wave of Light".

PLEASE POST A PHOTO OF YOUR CANDLE TO FACEBOOK, TWITTER, OR INSTAGRAM AND TAG USING #WAVEOFLIGHT

Comforting Parents After the Loss of Their Baby or Child



By Jennifer White of [VeryWellFamily.com](https://www.verywellfamily.com) and medically reviewed by Rahel Gurevich, RN

It is always difficult to find the words to comfort someone who is grieving, perhaps even more so when it involves the loss of a pregnancy, infant, or child. No one wants to think about it, but sadly, sometimes pregnancies miscarry and babies and children die. When this happens, the bereaved parents are at heightened risk of a variety of mental and physical health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and sleep problems.

Parents who lose a child need the support of their friends and loved ones. This support can come in many forms including offering a listening ear, connecting them with resources, providing a distraction, bringing meals, doing chores and errands, and just being there if and when they need you. Providing this extra support is not always an easy thing to do, but bereaved parents need family and good friends to lean on.

There Is No "Perfect" Thing to Say

Free yourself from the pressure of saying just the right thing. Instead, simply start by saying you love them, want to support them in whatever way they need, and will stand by their side as they grieve. Ultimately, supporting grieving parents is not about having all the right words, but being a listening ear, acknowledging their loss and pain, and finding ways to serve their needs during the months and years that follow the loss. You definitely should have an understanding of their beliefs before you offer what might be "typical" phrases intended to bring comfort. For some, these phrases may come off as being trite or painful. So, use caution when using these phrases:

- "At least you have/can have other children."
- "I know exactly how you feel."
- "It was God's will," "It was meant to be," or "It's for the best."
- "You'll feel better in time."
- "Your baby is in heaven/in a better place now."

Talking About Their Grief

While you certainly want to follow their lead on whether and when to talk about their loss, you don't want to avoid conversation about it, either. It's understandable to be reluctant to mention the pregnancy or baby or child's name for fear of "reminding" them of their pain. However, the truth is that their grief is always there.

Consider this quote from a speech given by Elizabeth Edwards a prominent political mother who lost her 16-year-old son Wade in a tragic car accident.

"If you know someone who has lost a child or lost anybody who's important to them, and you're afraid to mention them because you think you might make them sad by reminding them that they died, they didn't forget they died. You're not reminding them. What you're reminding them of is that you remember that they lived, and that's a great, great gift."

As you interact with the parents over time, you might get a sense from them what sort of boundaries they need when talking about their lost child. However, don't begin by avoiding the conversation. Consider the fact that as you acknowledge their loss you may not be relieving their pain, but it is possible that you will be supporting them in their own grief work. Also, if you're unsure, you can always ask them if and when they want to discuss their loss.

Suggestions for Offering Support to Suddenly Bereaved Parents



Your best bet is often simply just speaking from the heart and listening to your instincts. That said, here are some ideas of ways you can offer support verbally and through your actions.

Offer Your Time

Ask if there are any daily responsibilities or tasks that need to be done that might currently be overwhelming. Consider making a meal for the family or coordinating a list of friends and families who can do the same. Offer to help meet the needs of other children in the family or family pets. Offer to make phone calls on behalf of the family.

Check-In

Give them permission to be silent. You can even say something like, "I'll call tomorrow to check in on you. If you don't feel like talking, just let it go to voicemail." If you are truly willing, assure them that they can call at any time of day or night if they need anything.

In the months following the loss, be aware that certain milestones, anniversaries, and holidays may be difficult. Holidays like Mother's Day and Father's Day might be particularly difficult. Let them know that you're thinking about them on these days.

Help With the Funeral

Let them know how you might be able to assist the family as they make funeral arrangements. You can offer to help organize any part of the event that they feel comfortable delegating to you.

Be Available to Talk

Listen to their grief and assure them that you are happy to listen or talk about whatever they need to share.

Remember Their Child

Perhaps one of the most supportive things you can do is to help keep the child's memory alive well after the immediate loss. In the months and years that follow the loss of a child, many parents feel alone in their grief as the rest of the world moves on.

Consider small ways of showing the parents that you remember their child. If the parents experienced miscarriage or stillbirth and named the baby, don't hesitate to say the baby's name when you talk about them as a way to show that you remember and celebrate them even though you were never able to meet them.

On the anniversary of the child's birthday and the date of their death, consider doing something to acknowledge and celebrate them. If you're unsure, ask the parents how they wish to celebrate their child.

A Word From Verywell and FirstLight

The death of a child is a tragic time for a family. Offering your support and compassion is the best thing you can do to ease their burden. Having friends or loved ones to count on can make a big difference in how well someone copes through their journey with grief.

How to Cope With the Loss of a Grandchild or Great-Grandchild



By Dr. Alejandra Vasquez, JD, CT a Certified Grief Counselor

When a grandchild or great-grandchild dies, it's not just their life you grieve but also all the hopes and dreams for their future. While the devastation will last for weeks or months following their death, the pain of losing them may last a lifetime.

As you navigate through your grieving journey these tips may help relieve stress and pain.

1. Breathe

Whether your grandchild lived near or far away, you can feel the pain of their loss on different levels. The loss of a grandchild represents a void in a grandparent's life that no one else can ever fill. You're left having to pick up the pieces trying to make sense of their untimely death while at the same time helping your own child through their loss. For the first few days following their death, remember just to breathe.

2. Get support

You are experiencing much pain and sorrow over your grandchild's death and your child is also mourning an even more significant loss to them - the death of their child. Many times a grandparent's grief is often overlooked. You may be suffering through grief without the acknowledgment or support of others. Find your own support group to help support you during this difficult time.

3. Acknowledge Grief

When you ignore the emotional pain of your loss and bury your grief, you're only prolonging its effect. The feelings and emotions that come with a devastating loss don't simply go away on their own. The more you wait to acknowledge your suffering, the more complicated your recovery will be. Allow yourself to grieve your loss and to accept the pain that's a part of your suffering.

4. Allow Grieving

Accepting their loss can remind yourself of how much it hurts that they've died. So you may consider blocking your feelings to avoid having to feel anything. Part of the natural grieving process allows for a feeling of numbness after such a significant loss. The stages of the grieving process will naturally unfold if you allow them to take place.

5. Self-care

When taking care of others, it may seem nearly impossible to find the time for some self-care. You'll want to be distracted with other things like taking care of your child's family. Busying yourself by taking on these responsibilities might make you feel as if you're useful and supportive. Carve out some time for a little self-care to avoid an emotional breakdown when least expected.

6. Read and Learn

For some, reading books on grief and how others have survived this type of loss helps them cope with their own experiences. You may find comfort in reading books on grief to help you sort through your thoughts and emotions.

7. Tears

The loss of your grandchild may be one of those times where you feel that you're the glue that needs to keep everything together. Releasing your tears is not only therapeutic for you, but it helps in the healing process of grief. Tears are not only cleansing, but after a good cry, you may gain a different perspective surrounding the death.

8. Competition

It's normal and natural to want to be there and support your child as they deal with this tremendous loss. Some parents don't know how to help their child who is grieving, so they end up taking on more responsibility than needed.

Examples:

- Stepping in to make the funeral arrangements
- Paying for the funeral
- Ordering the family flowers

Although you may only be trying to be helpful, take care that you aren't subconsciously trying to make up for your losses by going overboard and overstepping boundaries.

9. Finding Meaning

When someone you love dies, you may search for a deeper meaning to explain their loss. You may find yourself contemplating the meaning of life and death, and whether there's anything more to this life here on earth. Finding hope and peace after the loss of your grandchild will help you get through the many rough days and nights ahead.

10. Campaign

The tragedy of having lost your grandchild will never leave you and will make you wonder why something so senseless had to happen. For grandparents who have lost their grandchildren to avoidable tragedies or accidents, it helps to lend a voice to try and prevent the same thing from happening to others. Consider lending your voice and experience toward the prevention of certain tragedies that have personally affected you and your family.

11. Understand Grief

Because each relationship with a grandchild is unique, every grandparent's grief experience will be different. While some grandparents can express their pain through tears and verbal communication, others may internalize their grief without verbalizing their emotions. Remind yourself that everyone grieves differently. If it seems like some may care more than others, realise that they may be expressing their grief when no one's around. A strong family support system is imperative during this painful time in life.

12. Be Patient

Limit your expectations and be patient with yourself. Constant mourning, sadness, and grief, if not acknowledged, can cause strain on your physical and mental well-being. By getting away and letting yourself recharge, you benefit not only yourself but also those who depend on you. Consider going out to lunch with a friend once a week.

13. Keeping their Memory Alive

There are many different ideas to honour your grandchild after they've passed. Some people will make teddy bears and pillows out of clothing left behind. Others may choose to start a yearly event or tradition held in remembrance. Honouring the memory of your grandchild can aid in the grieving process and establish a legacy inspired by the person's remarkable life.

14. Let Hope Lead

Where there's light, there's hope. While you may feel the pain will never end, seek comfort in knowing that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Have patience and know that emotions will improve with time. Learning to appreciate every moment of every day. In time, your life will develop new meaning.

National 24-Hour Helpline Number 1800 391 391

Carmichael Centre, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

Phone: 01-8732711: Website: www.firstlight.ie: Charity No. CHY7716

If you have a newsletter query or a story for inclusion in the newsletter please email info@firstlight.ie