

# FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER

*I need a “handle with care” sticker for my heart,  
my emotions have been fragile since  
the day I said goodbye...  
A lifetime is an impossibly  
long time to wait  
to hold my child again.*

*Anonymous  
for Still Standing Magazine*

## BABY LOSS AWARENESS WEEK 9TH - 15TH OCTOBER 2023

*Baby Loss Awareness Week* began as an October remembrance day initiated by parents in the UK. The following year, the events expanded to include the very first ‘Wave of Light’ service, in which families light candles at the same time to honour the babies they had lost. Throughout the years, the campaign continued to grow and form into what we now know as *Baby Loss Awareness Week* which is a series of events, virtual and in-person, held annually from the 9th to 15th of October.

Now in its 21st year, *Baby Loss Awareness Week* is a time for everyone in the baby loss community and beyond to come together, remember much-loved and missed babies, and raise awareness of pregnancy and baby loss. It is also a time for individuals to share their experiences to help them feel that they are not alone.

There are many ways to get involved in *Baby Loss Awareness Week*:

### Break the Silence

Talk about pregnancy and baby loss and help ensure every bereaved family gets the support they need. You can also help raise awareness by wearing the Baby Loss Awareness ribbon pin badge. If you don't have a pin and would like to order one, visit <https://shop-babyloss-awareness.org.uk/>

### Take Part in Events

From Pink & Blue buildings and landmarks to ribbon remembrance events and hospital displays, find out what's on in your community and show your support. To find out more, you can visit <https://babyloss-awareness.org/events/>

### Share Your Story

Whether you're a bereaved parent, grandparent, sibling, or healthcare professional or are supporting someone through the loss of their own child, we welcome you to share your story. You can do this by contacting [administration@firstlight.ie](mailto:administration@firstlight.ie) or by visiting <https://babyloss-awareness.org/share-your-story/> to share your story on the Baby Loss Awareness website.

### Join the Global #WaveOfLight

Unite with bereaved families across the world by lighting a candle at 7 p.m. on the 15th of October in memory of every baby who has died. Post a photo of your candle with the hashtag #waveoflight and tag FirstLight to have your photo shared on our social media. To learn more about the Global Wave of Light, visit <https://babyloss-awareness.org/get-involved/#wave-of-light>.

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GRIEF

FirstLight

Supporting Suddenly Bereaved Parents & Families



## Introducing our new CEO



*Jennifer McCarthy Flynn*

## Introducing FirstLight's New CEO Jennifer McCarthy Flynn

**FirstLight is delighted to announce that Jennifer McCarthy Flynn has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer.**

Jennifer has worked in non-profit organisations in Ireland, Namibia and Canada, and as a senior manager for more than 25 years. This has included the non-clinical management of counselling services in An Cosán, Tallaght, as the manager of the Shanty Education & Training Centre, and as the Executive Director of Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS) in Vancouver, Canada, where services included the delivery of settlement counselling to vulnerable immigrant and refugee women and families.

Jennifer has predominantly worked in community development organisations supporting individuals, families and communities working to end poverty and inequality. These challenges have included the impact of personal and familial tragedy and grief, and Jennifer has had the privilege of working with people through group work, education and training, and direct therapeutic support. Jennifer is an associate member of IAHIP and works voluntarily in the F2 community-based counselling service in Dublin, where she has also completed training in trauma informed practice for organisations.

As Head of Policy at the National Women's Council (NWC), Jennifer represented NWC on several statutory committees including the National Steering Committee Second National Strategy for Women and Girls and the Dept of Finance Equality Budgeting Expert Advisory Group. Jennifer established and chaired the National Advisory Committee (NAC) on Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education (ESHTE) working with the Dept. of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science, and supported the development of the Women's Mental Health Network (WMHN) established by the National Women's Council (NWC) and St Patrick's Mental Health Services (SPMHS).

Jennifer was the NWC spokesperson at the Dept. of Finance Annual National Economic Dialogue and spoke at the Oireachtas Committee hearings including the Budgetary Oversight Committee and the Committee on Gender Equality. Jennifer has had the privilege of presenting at the UN Commission on the Status of Women with the Irish Permanent Mission to the UN twice, in 2019 for NWC on the Introduction of Gender Budgeting and in 2023 for the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (ICGBV) on Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence.

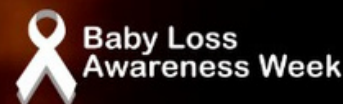
We are grateful to have Jennifer at the helm as we continue to develop and expand our service to better support suddenly bereaved parents and families who have experienced the death of their child.

# Wave of Light

15 October, 7pm

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

Share your #BLAW  
#WaveOfLight pictures on  
social media



October 15th each year marks *Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day*. On this day, we remember the precious lives that have been lost too soon, to pregnancy loss and infant death, and their parents and loved ones who love and miss them dearly. *Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day* serves to promote greater awareness of the experiences of individuals and families whose lives have been irrevocably changed by the death of their child and to highlight resources and supports available.

To mark *Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day*, we are sharing personal stories and reflections from individuals who have experienced pregnancy loss and infant death. All of the following pieces have been taken from the online publication and email subscription *Still Standing Magazine*, which for over ten years has been breaking the silence on child loss and infertility by sharing stories from around the world of writers surviving the aftermath of this grief and loss. To find out more, please visit [www.stillstandingmag.com](http://www.stillstandingmag.com)

## What I Need by Anonymous

I have never been good at telling others what I need.

Losing my daughter complicated my ability to ask for help rather than sharpening it.

If I could have given myself one thing to get me through when I stopped answering the phone and hoped no one would stop by, it would have been a voice to tell those closest to me what I will need most to get me through the days and years ahead...

I need to say her name without bringing everyone to tears.

I need her life to be included in the count of children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

I need kindness on birthdays and understanding on holidays.

I need to stay in bed and a reason to get out of it.

I need to talk endlessly and to let the phone ring.

I need an extra hug and respect for my space.

I need someone to ask how I'm doing and want to know the real answer.

I need careful announcements of pregnancies, baby showers, and births; mine did not turn out as I had hoped.

I need a "handle with care" sticker for my heart; my emotions have been fragile since the day I said goodbye.

I need patience and reminders for my mind; part of it will always be somewhere else.

I need forgiveness for not being the friend, sister, daughter, and wife I used to be...

a lifetime is an impossibly long time to wait to hold my child again.

## When Hope Becomes The Enemy by Deze

As I write this, I am six weeks pregnant, and I haven't told a single soul. Not a doctor, not my husband, and not my parents. After losing three pregnancies over the last two years from miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy, this new pregnancy feels less like a blessing and more like a disappointment waiting to happen.

With the first two pregnancies, I was plenty positive. My first pregnancy was filled with joy, hope, and excitement. By this time point (6 weeks), I was already planning pregnancy announcements, researching names and filling Pinterest boards with inspirational pictures of my dream nursery.

You see, when you get pregnant, no matter how early, you start building a world that includes your baby. The mind naturally does this. You think about how your baby might look, when he or she will be born, how your family and friends will receive them, how you'll announce the news, and what room you will convert – each thought is a building block that makes up this new reality.

Losing a pregnancy is like an apocalypse to this world. All of those plans and aspirations come crashing down into a big pile of nothing. That's exactly what has happened to me three times now.

At my worst, I had spiralled down to a place where I questioned my worth and purpose. It was a dark place that I never wanted to return to as long as I lived. So, I've built walls to protect my heart. It was only recently that I realized what was on the other side of the wall that I built.

HOPE is on the other side of that wall.

Hope is what I'm protecting myself from.

Hope is a luxury I cannot afford.

She brings excitement.

She makes you plan.

She encourages you to daydream.

Three times she has taken me on a high-high, making the eventual crash of pregnancy loss that much more devastating and life-shattering.

Hope has let me down and embarrassed me.

She was supposed to materialize into a child as she did for everyone else, but instead, she teased me, then disappointed me.

Hope is a high I can't afford.

So I've chosen to become numb and to keep her out.

This fourth time around, there are no baby plans. I'm taking it one day at a time and avoiding any thoughts of "what might be."

It's a constant tug of war:

'Our parents will be so happy; I should fly home to surprise them.'

Don't think about it. You might lose the baby...

'I'll be pregnant during the holidays'

Don't think about that. It's too early to tell...

'I wonder when the morning sickness will start?'

Don't think about it. You might not make it till then.

Sometimes, hope will get the upper hand, and a daydream about my could-be baby will slip through. But, as quickly as the thought came, I chased it away and reprimanded myself for being so careless with my heart.

Sure, it's morbid, negative and unnatural. But what can you do when each repeated loss of life has made you a little less interested in living your own?

At times, I do get frustrated with this ongoing mental battle. Contrary to what it may seem, I don't want to be at war with hope.

I want to embrace the joy of pregnancy without obsessing over the "maybes." I desperately want to share pregnancy announcements and let my heart be warmed by the "congratulations."

What I wouldn't give to be blissfully ignorant about pregnancy loss and enjoy each week and milestone as they come along.

I want to be hopeful. I really, really do. But my sanity and my heart can't afford more disappointment.

So, for now, I've locked hope up and guarded her with fear because I don't know how else to protect my heart.



### **We Look 'Perfect' - What They Don't Know by Kristy Maggs, written for her son Henry**

As I sit on the sand and tears fall behind my sunglasses, they don't know.  
 The mother sitting under the blue shade tent with her baby, she doesn't know –  
 she doesn't know we have a blue shade tent just like that which remains unused as we had planned to do the same with you.  
 The father running across the sand with his toddler chasing him, he doesn't know –  
 he doesn't know we'd pictured this moment in our minds with you.  
 The grandmother holding her grandchild's hand as they walk along to find the perfect place to sit their belongings, she doesn't know –  
 she doesn't know that we had thought we would do this with you.  
 The Dad holding his baby in the water letting the waves splash lightly on their faces, holding his baby so closely, ever so carefully and smiling, he doesn't know –she doesn't know we have a blue shade tent just like that which remains unused as we had planned to do the same with you.  
 The father running across the sand with his toddler chasing him, he doesn't know –  
 he doesn't know we'd pictured this moment in our minds with you.  
 The grandmother holding her grandchild's hand as they walk along to find the perfect place to sit their belongings, she doesn't know –  
 she doesn't know that we had thought we would do this with you.  
 The Dad holding his baby in the water letting the waves splash lightly on their faces, holding his baby so closely, ever so carefully and smiling, he doesn't know –  
 they don't know we scattered your ashes in that very spot, in the water; they don't know that's where I broke down as the last of your ashes fell from the urn.  
 The parents sitting in the sun watching their children build sand castles, they don't know –  
 They don't know that's where your Dad and I stood in that sunny spot on the sand, releasing butterflies in your honour, one by one, as the butterflies flew from my finger into the air and away.  
 They don't know, none of them know, they can't see the tears and grief behind my sunglasses.  
 As I sit on the same beach as them, they can't see our empty arms, our broken hearts, our pain, our hurt.  
 They don't know; all they see is a childless couple on the beach; some of them maybe even look and envy us as we walk onto the sand together.  
 Some of them may think we are 'lucky' to have the freedom to be doing 'what we want.'  
 Some of them may think we are 'carefree', they don't know; they don't know we would give anything to be them, to be that family with you here.  
 You never know, I don't, we don't, they don't what someone else's circumstances are.  
 You never know who is hurting, if they have lost a child too, if they had trouble conceiving –  
 if they know the exact same grief and pain that you do.  
 When I see these families I will always wish that was us with you Henry.  
 They may wish they were us.  
 If only they knew, but they don't.

# Parents Who Lost A Child Share The Most Helpful Things People Did For Them



From practical support to emotional comfort, here are some impactful ways to help a grieving parent. The original article was written by Caroline Bologna and was published by the HuffPost. Caroline spoke to bereaved parents about the aftermath of their losses and asked them to share the actually helpful things others did for them. Of course, no two losses or grieving individuals are the same, but these approaches might help make a difference for someone in your life.

## Sharing Memories

One of the simplest but most powerful ways to support grieving parents is to watch old videos or look through photos of their child with them. Ask them to share their memories, and tell your own stories about their child as well.

Karen Wallace Bartelt, who lost her son, Randy in 2018 said, “I just loved hearing stories about him and was so grateful for every card, email or text. There were lots of things I didn’t know — probably because he didn’t want me to at the time, lots of hilarious and fun stories.”

Don’t be afraid to talk to a grieving parent about their child and mention them by name. This offers validation that their child actually lived and has not been forgotten. If you didn’t know their child personally, ask questions about them.

## Helping With Logistics

“On a practical level, I found that during the first few months, offers of help with cooking, shopping, paying bills, dealing with paperwork, phone calls, and so on, were extraordinarily helpful,” said Katja Faber, whose son Alex was killed in 2014. Remember there are everyday logistics you can assist with. Try to jump in with offers and specifics rather than asking the broad question “What can I do to help?”

“Remember that we don’t want to turn the grieving family into caregivers and hosts,” suggested Joanne Cacciatore, whose daughter Cheyenne died as an infant. “When you bring a meal, text them to let you know that you’re on the way and offer to leave it at the door. That way they don’t feel like they need to entertain you.”

## Letting Them Cry

“I had a couple of good friends who just allowed me to cry with them, let me break down and just cry,” Lehman Riley said of the period after his daughter Lizzy died in 2020. “I understand that it’s hard to watch someone in so much pain that as a friend you feel utterly helpless,” Faber said. “Trying to minimize the level of suffering of a grieving parent by attempting to cheer them up is often experienced as hurtful. Try to hold a grieving parent’s heart with compassion even if it means you sit quietly with them as they cry.”

### Giving Permission To Skip Things

“One friend, a few weeks after Noah died, told me something when I feeling pressure to go to a social event,” recalled Erica Landis, whose toddler son, Noah, died in a pool accident in 2010. She said, “You get a pass for the rest of your life. That’s how hard this must be. And for anyone that doesn’t understand, too bad.”

### Just Being There For Support

“After Randy died, my sister came over after the funeral every single day for a month,” Bartelt said. “She didn’t put pressure on me to find something for her to do. All she did was come over and sit in the house. It was a comfort because I knew if I needed something, she was going to be right there — somebody to talk to or run to the store or help with something. She was just there without any expectations.”

Sometimes just being there and not saying anything at all is all the grieving person needs from you.

“My dogs never tried to change how I felt,” Cacciatore recalled. “They never tried to cheer me up. They never told me to stop crying. They just showed up and sat with me.”

### Continuing To Check In, Especially Around Milestones

“I have one friend who never forgets Eric’s birthday or the anniversary of his death. Even when decades have passed — maybe more importantly then — remembering the life of the child I carried and raised is the most loving thing anyone can do,” Casey Mulligan Walsh, whose son died in a car crash in 1999, said. “All these years later, I can still feel the wave of gratitude, of knowing I hadn’t been forgotten, that Eric hadn’t been forgotten.”

Although bereaved parents can learn to live with the pain of child loss, this type of grief never ends. Even as the months turn into years, continue to check in on those who are living without their children.

### Connecting Them With Other Bereaved Parents

“None of my friends had lost children, so I felt very isolated in my loss,” said Kimberly Schlau, whose daughters Kelli and Jessica died in 2007. “I remember when a woman called and told me her story — Finally finding someone who not only knew the feeling of losing a child but also in similar circumstances made me feel less alone in my loss.”

Reading the words of fellow grieving parents through books can also offer comfort and support to those going through the unimaginable.

### Listening

“It’s so simple, but when people gathered and just listened, that really helped us cope,” said Dolores Cruz, whose son Eric died in a car accident in 2017. “What felt good for me was to talk about my son, to let me tell you how wonderful he was, how much I miss him.”

Refrain from telling a grieving parent to be strong or tell them they’re going to be OK in the future. Instead, meet grieving parents in this moment of their pain and let them express how they are feeling now. Offer a hug and lend them your ear.

Angela Miller, whose toddler son Noah died 15 years ago, said, “My child died. I don’t need advice. All I need is for you to gently close your mouth, open wide your heart, and walk with me until I can see in colour again.”





## Grandparents' Grief is Unique

On Sunday 1st of October, we celebrated *Grandparents Day*. The bond between grandparents and their grandchildren is a special one, and when a grandchild dies, the loss can be devastating and unbearable. Not only do grandparents grieve for their grandchild, but they also feel the pain of their own child who too is suffering the tragic loss. The content for this article has been taken from the website *Red Nose Grief and Loss* which provides a space for grieving individuals to share their personal stories and experiences of bereavement. For this piece, we are share excerpts of stories written by grieving grandparents, which were originally published on *Red Nose Grief and Loss*.

The death of a beloved grandchild is one of the hardest things a grandparent ever has to face. Your natural hopes and dreams for the future have been shattered and you have been faced with an almost unbearable tragedy. Grandparents expect that they will love and enjoy their grandchildren: the natural order is that they will die before their own children – and certainly before their grandchildren.

When a baby or child dies it has an impact on the whole family. There is often a lot of attention on the grieving parents, who are the primary grievers and grandparents may find themselves forgotten at times.

When a grandchild dies, grandparents experience a dual sorrow. They cry for their lost grandchild and they also cry for the terrible grief they see their own child having to bear. This pain is something you cannot take away. This can be difficult to accept because as a parent you expect (and desperately want) to be able to take away your child's pain. Therefore, you have two tasks. The first is to work through your own grief and the other is to feel helpful to your bereaved child. There may be two parts, but you actually deal with them at the same time.

Marilyn's twin grandchild, conceived by IVF, died at 36 weeks gestation. She speaks of the simultaneous experience of grieving the death of one child while celebrating the birth of another and how the mixed emotions were overwhelming and confusing.

*"I couldn't do anything. I felt useless and helpless. I didn't know how to comfort my daughter and felt I couldn't say what she wanted or needed. My heart was breaking because I couldn't do anything. I'd go home and cry. I couldn't stop her crying and I was crying. I realised I needed support too."* - Marilyn

*My grief, unique to me, but oh how unfortunately common I used to think about the legacy I was leaving my grandchildren when I died, what would they remember about me? I never thought I would have to remember them.*

*The hopelessness, the frustration, the rage I felt, that not one but two of my grandchildren had died before I got to know them and just as important, before they got to know me. How unfair of life to cause my beloved daughter and son-in-law so much hurt after the expectation of so much joy, terminating in heartbreak.*

*What could I do, what could I say, no words could heal the pain, but I needed to show somehow that I too grieved for and loved those my daughter and son-in-law had buried. Every year is another year I might get to see them again in a better place, this I have to believe.'* - Margaret, bereaved Nanna of Jake and Jonathan.

**Submit Referrals @ [www.firstlight.ie](http://www.firstlight.ie)**

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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)