

FIRSTLIGHT NEWSLETTER



National Grief Awareness Week

22nd - 28th January 2024

#BeGriefAware



What is National Grief Awareness Week?

National Grief Awareness Week will take place this year from Monday the 22nd until Sunday 28th of January.

It is an annual campaign run by the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) to encourage people to be more grief aware, to help normalise grief and encourage conversations about this typically uncomfortable subject.

This is the fourth year that the IHF is running a national grief awareness campaign. Originally hosted in November to coincide with the Good Grief Trust (UK) national campaign, this campaign will now take place in January — a time which can be difficult for many people, including those who are grieving.

In this newsletter, we will give details of the IHF online events planned for National Grief Awareness Week, and we will let you know about other ways you can get involved in the campaign, should you wish to. We will also share a list of resources which you may find helpful if you, or someone you know is experiencing grief.

Death is such a difficult thing for any of us to face. Despite it being widespread, grief is often misunderstood. The bereaved can be left feeling isolated, lonely and confused. Family and friends may be unsure how best support them. Learning more about grief can help someone before and during the grieving process and the people supporting them.

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FirstLight

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NATIONAL GRIEF AWARENESS WEEK ONLINE EVENTS



**Grief in the Workplace:
An Overview**

Thursday, January 25 | 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.

Irish Hospice Foundation

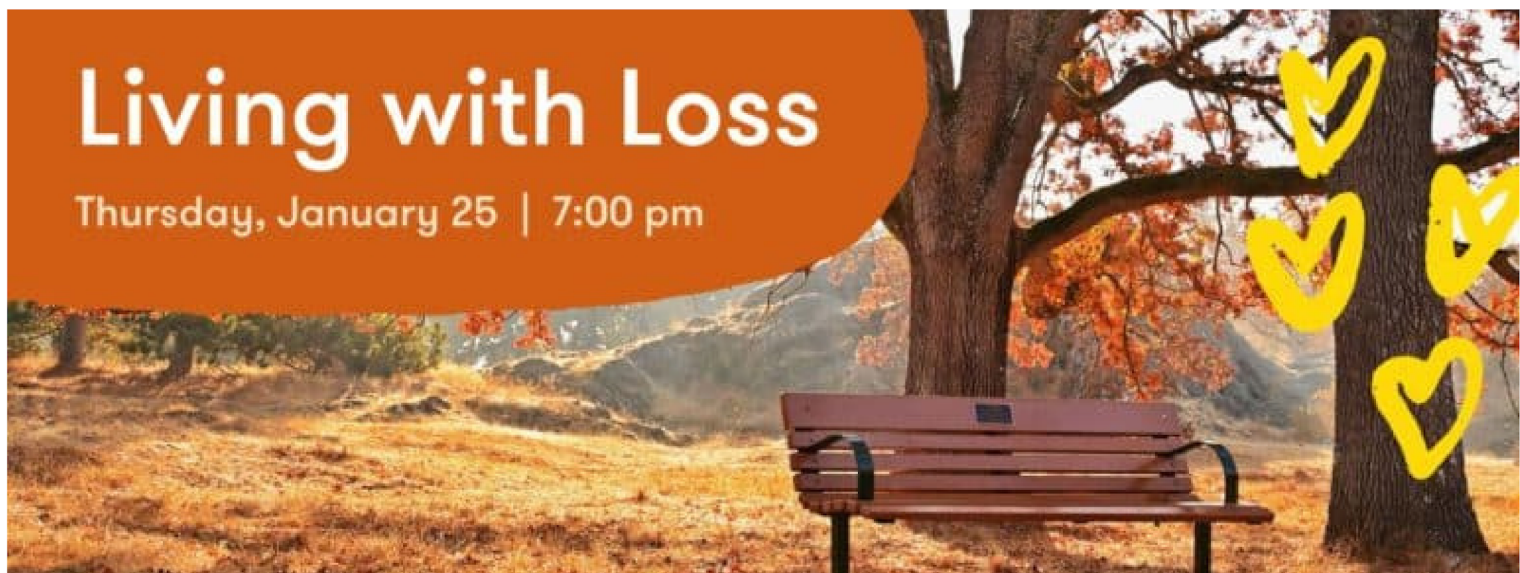
Lunch & Learn
Bereavement Series

Bereavement Networks Lunch & Learn on Grief in the Workplace

This is a free online webinar for employees and employers. Many people will be working at the time they experience a bereavement or a significant life loss and require a compassionate and caring response. Having an understanding of grief will help employees understand their own grieving experience but also be more aware of how to support others when grieving.

When: 12:30pm, January 25th, 2024

To register for this free event, visit www.hospicefoundation.ie



Living with Loss

Thursday, January 25 | 7:00 pm

Bereavement Networks Lunch & Learn on Grief in the Workplace

This event is for all. You may have experienced a bereavement this year or at an earlier time, or you may be concerned about a child or friend who is grieving and you wish to help. We will provide an online space to share some reflections on bereavement and to help people to find out about the supports available.

When: 7:00 pm, January 25th, 2024

To register for this free event, visit www.hospicefoundation.ie

PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL GRIEF AWARENESS WEEK



There are many ways to be involved in National Grief Awareness Week

TELL

Tell people you know, including family, friends, colleagues, your community, about the campaign.

EMAIL

Email your colleagues/networks with a link to the details of the campaign:

www.hospicefoundation.ie/our-supports-services/bereavement-loss-hub/national-grief-awareness-week

ORGANISE

Organise a showing of the IHF's lunchtime webinar or evening webinar for your colleagues, service users or community.

HOST

Host a stand displaying the campaign poster and bereavement information in your workplace (email bereavementdevelopment@hospicefoundation.ie for hardcopy of our resources).

SHARE

Share the campaign on your social medias using #NGAW #NGAW2024 #BeGriefAware and don't forget to tag the Irish Hospice Foundation:

Facebook: @IrishHospiceFoundation

Instagram: @irishhospicefoundation

X (Twitter): @IrishHospice

LinkedIn: @Irish Hospice Foundation

WATCH

Watch the IHF's three-minute informational video about grief and share the video link with your friends and family. The video can be found at the same link as above.

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT RESOURCES



The Irish Hospice Foundation's website provides a wealth of resources related to coping with bereavement and loss. These range from lists of support services with contact details, to events, books and podcasts. Please visit www.hospicefoundation.ie/our-supports-services/beravement-loss-hub for more details.

It's important to understand that grief is a normal part of experiencing loss. Everyone grieves differently, and most people experiencing grief won't require more than general support and information. For those who require additional support, resources are available:

You can call the Irish Hospice Foundation's Bereavement Support Line on 1800 80 70 77, Monday to Friday from 10am to 1pm.

- If you've been bereaved through a hospice or palliative care death, it's likely a bereavement support service will be available in the hospice. Contact the local hospice or palliative care team.
- If you've been bereaved through an acute hospital, the hospital may provide bereavement support. Contact the hospital social work department or chaplaincy service.
- Your general practitioner may also be a good support to you and be aware of other local supports.
- For bereaved families who have experienced the death of their child aged <0 to 18 years old, FirstLight provides free crisis intervention and free professional counselling services nationwide. Please visit www.firstlight.ie to submit a referral.
- For bereaved families who have experienced the death of their child of any age, Anam Cara provide peer support for both parents and children and maintain online bereavement support forums. For more information, visit www.anamcara.ie.
- For resourced for bereaved parents of an infant visit www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie.
- For children and young people who have lost someone close to them, visit www.barnardos.ie or www.childhoodbereavement.ie.
- If you have been bereaved through suicide, you can contact Pieta by visiting www.pieta.ie or by calling their 24-hour crisis helpline on 1800 247 247.
- If you feel you need immediate support, call The Samaritans' 24-hour free phone line at 116 123.
- For practical information including what to do following a death, money matters, and counselling, visit www.citizensinformation.ie/en/death

If you need to speak to a professional, these organisations will be able to provide you with the names of qualified therapists who specialise in issues of loss and grief:

- **The Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP):** www.iacp.ie or 01 2303536.
- **The Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP):** www.iahip.ie or 01 2841665.
- **The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI):** www.psychologicalsociety.ie or 01 4720105.

Other organisations which you may find helpful:

HUGG is a suicide support group whose mission is to offer hope and healing by providing information, telephone support and local peer support groups led by volunteers with lived experience. Visit www.hugg.ie.

Bereaved.ie offers advice and information for bereaved people, those supporting them and professionals working with them. It is an initiative of Irish Hospice Foundation.

Bethany Bereavement Support is a voluntary community and parish based service, which aims to support bereaved adults through the grieving process. Visit www.bethany.ie.

Féileacáin is a not for profit organisation that provides support to anyone affected by the death of a baby during or after pregnancy. Visit www.feileacain.ie.

A Little Lifetime Foundation provides information and support to bereaved parents and families and works with health care professionals to develop good practices in the area of infant death. Visit www.alittlelifetime.ie.

Rainbows is a free, voluntary service for children and young people experiencing loss following bereavement and parental separation. Visit www.rainbowsireland.ie.

Widow.ie gives the bereaved a place to speak through online forums, so they are not alone. Many out there are going through a similar loss and can share experiences and offer or receive mutual support.

Grief and loss are some of the most challenging experiences we can go through. You may experience grief and a wide range of emotions that come and go over time. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to feel, but if you find you are struggling to cope, you don't have to go it alone. You can reach out for support using the resources mentioned above.



PERSONAL STORIES OF BEREAVEMENT



To mark National Grief Awareness Week, in addition to sharing resources, we also wanted to personal stories and reflections from individuals who have experienced grief and loss.

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

Kubler-Ross And The “Five Stages Of Grief” by Amanda Ross-White

Grieving is hard work. It is exhausting, both mentally and physically. People who are depressed and grieving often have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning, and find themselves going back to bed, or at least to the couch, early in the evening. When you do sleep, it can be restless and hard to catch quality sleep, meaning you wake up just as exhausted as you were the night before.

One of the hardest things to do when grieving is to devote enough time to the work of grief. And it is work. Many employers only grant a few days off for grieving a family member, something that is woefully inadequate. But it can be hard holding down a full time job and work through your grief as well.

The temptation is there to put it off, to throw yourself back into your life and avoid the uncomfortable feelings that grief brings. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross was one of the first researchers to take a serious look at grief, and she described it as a five-stage process. However, grief isn't a linear process, and we can find ourselves repeating stages, moving from one to the next, and back again, as our circumstances allow.

Kubler-Ross described the first stage as denial and isolation. This can be asking for second opinions (or third, or fourth) from medical staff. It can be the way I felt disconnected from myself during the first few days after my boys died. It was as if it was happening to someone else. Pretending this isn't really happening can be a way to shield yourself from painful emotions. It can be the way you simply don't want to go out, don't want to see others, don't want to have to explain where your baby has gone.

The second stage is anger. This can be directed inward, at yourself, or outward at others. You can even feel angry at your baby. You might be angry at the doctor for making a mistake, even if no mistakes were made. You might be angry at yourself for not recognising 'signs' your baby was in distress, even if those signs were all in your head. You can be angry at your partner too, for not grieving in the same way you are, or for not being supportive enough of your concerns. You can be angry at other pregnant women, for having healthy babies that you may feel they don't deserve.

The third stage is called bargaining. This is where we try to take our loss and regain control over our world. We might make promises to ourselves, to God or some other 'higher power' that this time will be different. "If I have a healthy baby, I promise I will..." This can often be done to hide guilty feelings about things that happened in your last pregnancy. If you've felt guilty over the loss of your baby, it can be hard to let those feelings of guilt go. Forgiving yourself is an important step to feeling better.

The fourth stage, and for many of us, the one that has the longest impact, is depression. Depression is more than sadness. It hurts. This is where you can't get out of bed and get little pleasure out of life. There is nothing that can be said or done to cheer you up. Depression has been described as a black dog that follows you around, as a cloud, or a filter that leaves the whole world grey.

The final stage is acceptance. Acceptance is not the same thing as happiness. It is the point where you have incorporated the death of your baby into your life. Where it becomes a part of you and who you are. Thinking about your baby will still be sad, but not painful in the same way as it was during the earlier stages.

New pain can bring up old grief. A friend once told me about how he couldn't cope when his dog died. It left him with a deep and mystifying depression. As a minister, he was used to being the one to hold it together at funerals, to be the one who could step in and take charge, but here he was, almost paralysed for months by the death of a dog, who admittedly had been sick for some time. Finally, his wife helped him realise the obvious. He wasn't just grieving his dog, but all the other friends who had died. He hadn't allowed himself to grieve before because he was busy keeping busy. When his dog died, no one looked to him for answers, no one expected him to perform the funeral or to help wrap up the estate. He was free to grieve, and so he did. And it hurt.

Keep working on your grief. It can and will come back to you when you least expect it. Devote the time you need to doing 'grief work'. You'll still see reoccurrences of grief throughout your life. We all do. It is part of the cycle of our lives. But postponing the hard work of grief will only make things harder later on.

Amanda Ross-White is the proud mother of four beautiful children, including her twin boys Nate and Sam, who were stillborn in 2007. You can read more of her work at www.joyattheendoftherainbow.com

We Don't Need Your Platitudes, Just Your Company by Merryn Lane

The worst thing anyone ever said to me after I lost my baby was: "But look at the beautiful child you already have – is this not a time to be really grateful for her?"

Those who are going through the stages of such intense and raw grief cannot stop people from sharing their 'two cents worth' – but we can educate them on the raw realities and truth that surrounds such a traumatic event. Perhaps they will begin to understand that we don't need their platitudes, we just need their company.

I don't think these people realise the enormity that encapsulates the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or neonatal deaths. It's not a stomach ache that disappears entirely over time. We will forever look at our friends with children who were pregnant at the same time as us and think 'my child would be doing that now'... 'my child would be the same age as him/her.'

The stomach aches forever, returning through pursed lips and a lingering breath held for an extra heartbeat. We will forever have a hole in our hearts, yet still be guilty by existing Motherhood feelings, to give entirely to the needs of our little people who we are already blessed to have and hold. Not wanting them to gain a scar from an event that has turned our souls upside down. We will forever be chasing time. Time for personal healing, time for relationship healing, time for our children, time for family, time to cook, time to clean.

I guess we are all ignorant in some way, to the many paths, roadblocks, and detours that life has in store for each one of us. I guess we never really know the full extent of pain that other people live with or the weight in which such events can have on people. Just because someone carries it all so well... doesn't mean it isn't heavy.

Merryn Lane is a wife, mother to 2, and someone swimming through the deep end of grief after losing her son, Paxton, at 24 weeks gestation, after a traumatic labour and birth. For more of Merryn's work, visit www.littlelala.org

Submit Referrals @ www.firstlight.ie

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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