

Babyloss
Bereavement
self help guide



Together through babyloss

Losing a baby is one of the worst things that can happen to someone. We are truly sorry that this happened to you.

While you will forever grieve your precious baby, the initial sting of grief, and the intensity and frequency of your initial emotions will of reduce and evolve over time.

While there is no time limit on grief, your feelings will change and you will not always feel the way you feel right now.

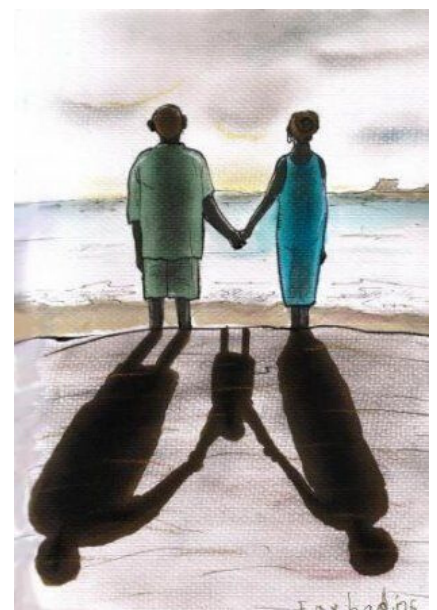
Everyone experiences grief differently. There is no right or wrong way to experience grief, yet there is no avoiding having to go through it.

This guide is to help you

- Navigate bereavement after the loss of your child
- Recognise your symptoms of grief
- Finding coping strategies that work for you
- Understand what grief, bereavement and mourning are
- Identify self care strategies and manage your time
- Find ways to remember your baby

These activities are designed to help you to celebrate the life of your beautiful child while you adjust to life without them.

It may be helpful to go through each section or strategy one at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed. However, take things at your own pace and check in on how you feel and have a rest if you need to.





What is grief?

Grief is the flipside of love. Our children are the people we love most in the world and their loss leaves a huge void in our lives. It can feel overwhelming and terrifying because we feel so deeply for our child and that love has no physical child to pour those emotions into.

Babyloss bereavement is nuanced as it robs us as parents of the future you had with your child, a child that many of us never got to meet or said goodbye to far too soon. It is against the natural order of things.

Many of the symptoms of grief are additionally heightened from the trauma of the experience, as well as hormones flying around.

Grief is painful. There is no way around it, under or over it, it is a journey that needs to be experienced and gone through. Everyone has different experiences of grief. This guidebook is designed to help you understand and connect to your own grief journey.



What does grief feel like?

Grief can manifest itself in lots of different ways, expected and unexpected. Two people can have the same bereavement but respond in completely different ways.

You will probably find that your partner will react to loss differently than you do. The partner who gave birth will also have the additions of hormones and recovering from birth.

This section outlines the different ways that grief can manifest, followed by a checklist to help you identify how your grief feels for you.

Different ways grief can manifest

Body pains



Grief can manifest itself in many ways including through your body. What happened to you is traumatic.

You could have numbness (arm numbness/aching is very common with babyloss mothers). This is because you held your beloved baby and had to give them away. While this pain does not feel normal, for babyloss mothers it is a fairly normal reaction.

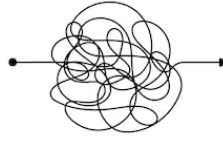
You may have migraines, headaches, neckaches or pain/tingling/pins and needles sensations.

Exhaustion



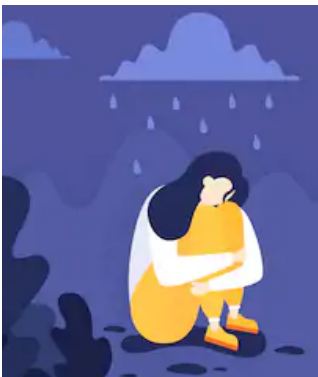
In the first six weeks it is likely you will experience physical exhaustion, with emotional exhaustion lifting a bit by month three.

Memory and concentration



At times you may feel like you are going mad, but memory loss is very common, often made worse by headaches, and nothing to be alarmed about.

You may have more small accidents during this time while your concentration is affected.



You may feel numb, have difficulty concentrating, have a loss of appetite, poor sleep etc. At points you may feel pure despair and an intense sadness, and feeling life is meaningless. This is natural.

Guilt is a common reaction to babyloss.

Please know that nothing you said, did, ate, read caused this. You are not to blame, it was not your fault.



Any fleeting negative thoughts you may have had about pregnancy did not cause your loss. You are deserving of sympathy and compassion. Please let people look after you.

Anger – this could be at the hospital, at the world, at yourself, at other people who get to be pregnant and take their babies home, at other people, at anything.

In the following section we cover symptoms of grief so that you can better understand how grief manifests for you. You may recognise the feelings, sensations, thoughts and behaviours below.

Symptoms of grief

Please tick the ones that apply to you

Feelings

- Bereft
- Emotionally numb
- Sad / Tearful
- Overwhelmed
- Helpless
- Feeling like life has no colour
- Worried
- Anxious
- Despair
- Anger
- Feeling overstimulated,
especially in public places
- Unwanted thoughts
- Hallucinations



Any other feelings?

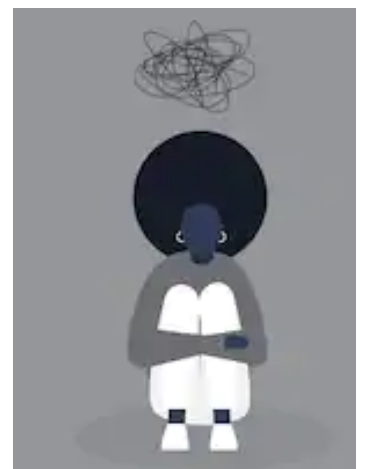
Physical Sensations

- Arm Numbness (particularly for mums)
- Headaches/Migraines
- Neck ache
- Tinglings
- Tired / Exhausted
- Loss of appetite
- Lacking energy
- Poor concentration
- Disturbed sleep pattern
- Exhaustion
- Memory Loss
- Other physical sensations (such as...)



Thoughts

- I wish I had them back with me
- I will miss them terribly
- What am I going to do now?
- If only I had a bit more time
- I wish I was dead*
- I wish I was with my baby*



*Please note it is perfectly normal to have these thoughts. It is not normal to act on them. If you feel suicidal please call 999 or go to your local A&E. Tell someone how you feel.

Other thoughts

Behaviour Patterns

Withdrawing from social contact

Repeatedly putting off practical arrangements

Not talking about the loss to anyone

Avoiding things relating to the loss

Reckless behaviour

Thinking that the worst thing is going to happen

Other behaviours

Stages of grief

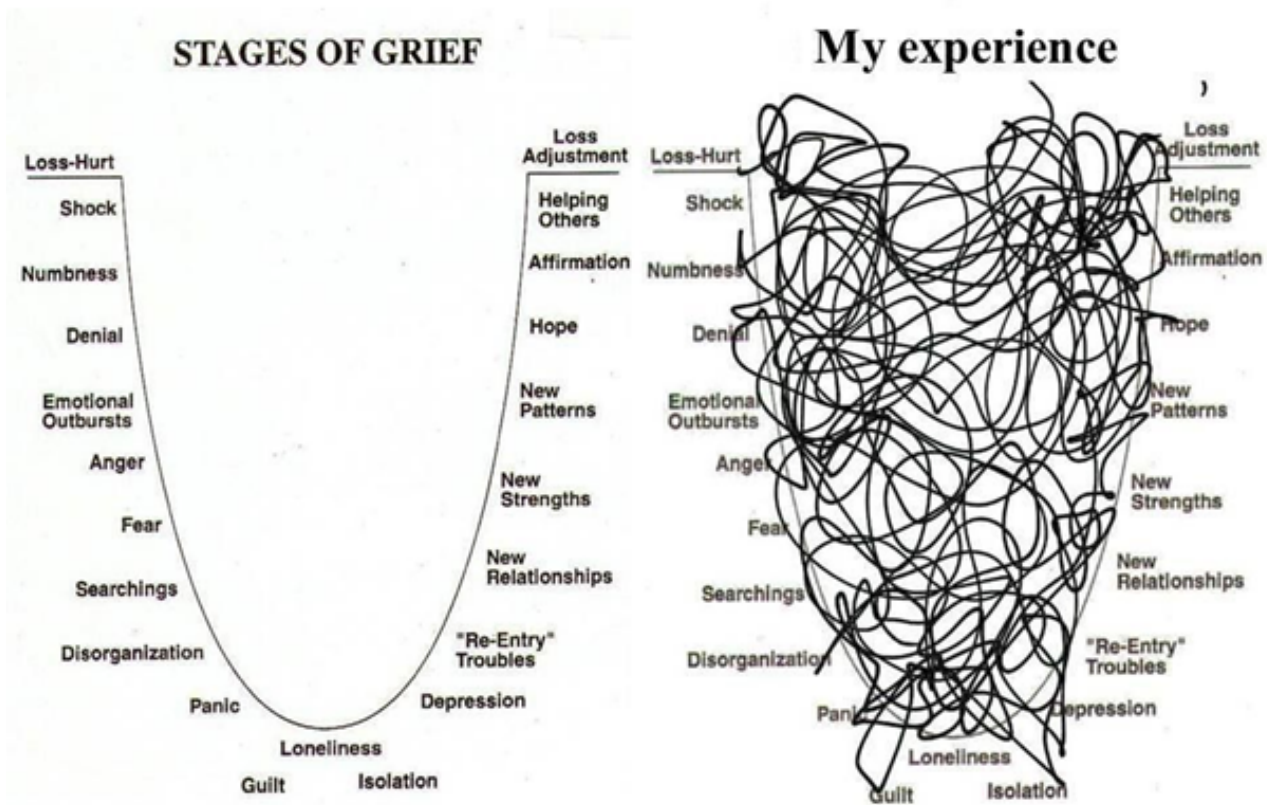
You may have heard of the five stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These are not linear stages that you will neatly go through, you may experience some but not others, feel some again and again or feel them all at once.

Grief is more like an upwards spiral than a staircase, you will often feel the same emotion, with different intensities. Sometimes you may feel like you are taking some steps back, but overall, you are taking steps up. You will not always feel like this.



Have you experienced any of these stages? What did they feel like and look like?

Harry's Mum and Dad @Harrysheroes1 posted this picture on twitter which captures the feelings of babyloss grief.



What makes babyloss grief so complex?

As mentioned, babyloss is against the order of nature. It robs you of the person you love most and it robs you of a future with them.

Giving birth to a child who had died, before or after birth, miscarrying a much wanted child is traumatic. It is something no one should have to endure.

Babyloss and death in the UK are taboo. Despite this happening to 1 in 4 people it is simply not spoken about or understood.

Life

Babyloss affects you in ways you never imagined. Along with the trauma of not taking your baby home, you have to see other people with their children. Everywhere.

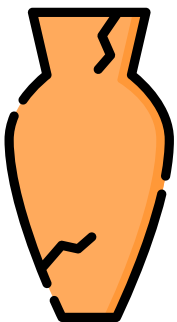
Instead of registering a birth you register a death. You have to explain how you feel and it takes energy to bite your tongue when people say something hurtful.

Going out in public places can leave you feeling anxious and on edge. You may feel unable to relax.

Previously pleasurable activities like going to the gym or a restaurant can feel overwhelming with stimulus.

Listening to music can make you feel sad because that was the music you listened to when you were pregnant.

It is all so overwhelming and draining.



Everyone gets on with their life while you are piecing yours back together. It can leave you feeling like a smashed vase that has been badly put back together. Going back to work traumatised is exhausting.

Trigger dates such as Christmas, Mothers Day/Fathers Day, significant dates etc can leave you feeling back to square one.

Thinking styles

Babyloss can cause the most rational person to behave in ways they did not previously.

Some people feel angry or guilty following babyloss. Grief is powerful. This combined with anger and any feelings of guilt can make you feel very low and vulnerable.

You may feel like you could have done more, even though it is likely there was nothing more you could do. You may feel negatively about yourself, or even hate yourself, although you have done NOTHING to warrant this. You may feel you're your body has failed you even though it tried its best.

Triggers can be unexpected and come from nowhere (we go into more detail about triggers later). You may feel apprehensive about the future. It is helpful to recognise that these thoughts are unhelpful, as this will help you to manage grief better.

You might think that you could have done more or feel in some way responsible for what happened. It is also common to feel quite low and vulnerable at such times.

The situation might also remind you of other sad feelings, memories or past experiences. You may find that you think more negatively and apprehensively about yourself, the future and other people.



It is important that you recognise such unhelpful thoughts in order to cope more effectively.

Behavioural

It is likely, especially in the early days, that everything will remind you of your loss. It is not surprising if you do not want to go back to the same hospital.

It can trigger a change in the way you relate to other people. Things may be black and white because you do not have energy for shades of grey.

You are conserving energy because grief is exhausting. You may find that you get frustrated with other people's insensitivities, actual and imagined.

Avoiding a lot of activities, places or social contact can maintain your grief and low mood.

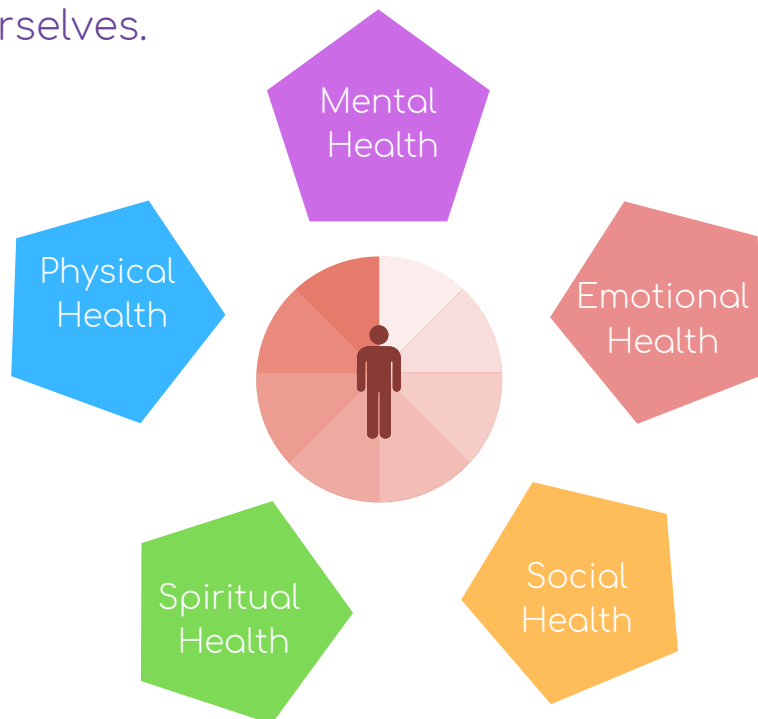
Our mourning section goes into more detail about things you can do to mark the memory of your baby, and our exercises will help you create a space for you to connect with your baby and your feelings about loss.

Grief is so powerful and exists because of your love for your baby.

Health and Wellbeing

We are holistic beings, and our health is more than just physical but our overall wellbeing. It can be useful to think about the different forms of health and check in on what we are doing with each. They all link into the other.

Grief can leave us not feeling ourselves, but by ensuring that we are addressing all aspects of our health, we can help to feel a bit more like ourselves.



[Physical](#) – grief is really hard on the body. Optimal physical health means different things to different people but generally involves having a good diet, hydrating ourselves, moderate use of alcohol, getting enough rest and sleep, as well as physical activity.

The key when grieving is to not push yourself. Treat yourself like you have been in intensive care. Your scars are on the inside. You would not expect someone who has been in an accident to be able to do everything and return to life immediately. Show the same kindness to yourself.

Emotional – feeling able to express your feelings and grief.

Emotional health deals with the heart. Being aware of upsetting emotions when they arise and giving them space and time to be felt and responded to. Reducing stress.

Checking your own self judgement and changing that critical inner voice into a compassionate one – would you refer to a friend as unkindly as you do to yourself? Treat yourself as you treat others and be a friend to yourself.



Social – spending time with friends and family who make you feel good, supported and safe. Connecting with others engaging with healthy relationships.

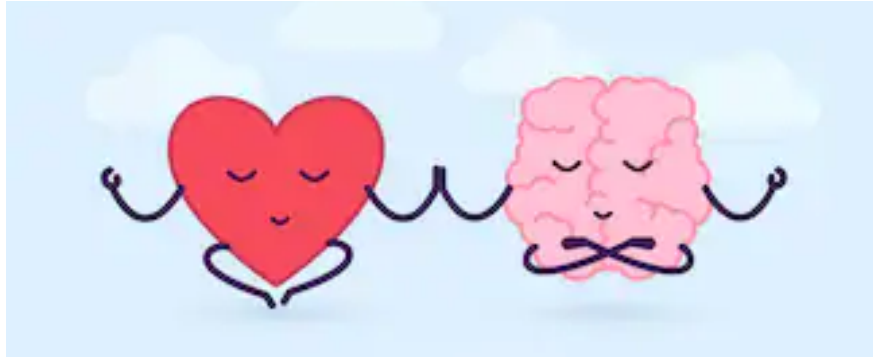


Mental – your psychological wellbeing, relates to matters of the head - the way you think, behave, feel and interact with others. Our emotional and social wellbeing are strongly linked to mental health.

Mental health is not just the absence of anxiety, depression or a cognitive illness, but relates to your ability to feel safe, build resilience and as far away as this sounds, to enjoy life, or at least enjoy elements of life.



Spiritual -which does not have to be religious but can relate to spending time with nature or connecting to something bigger than yourself. It could also be an introspective practice such as mindfulness, meditation or prayer.



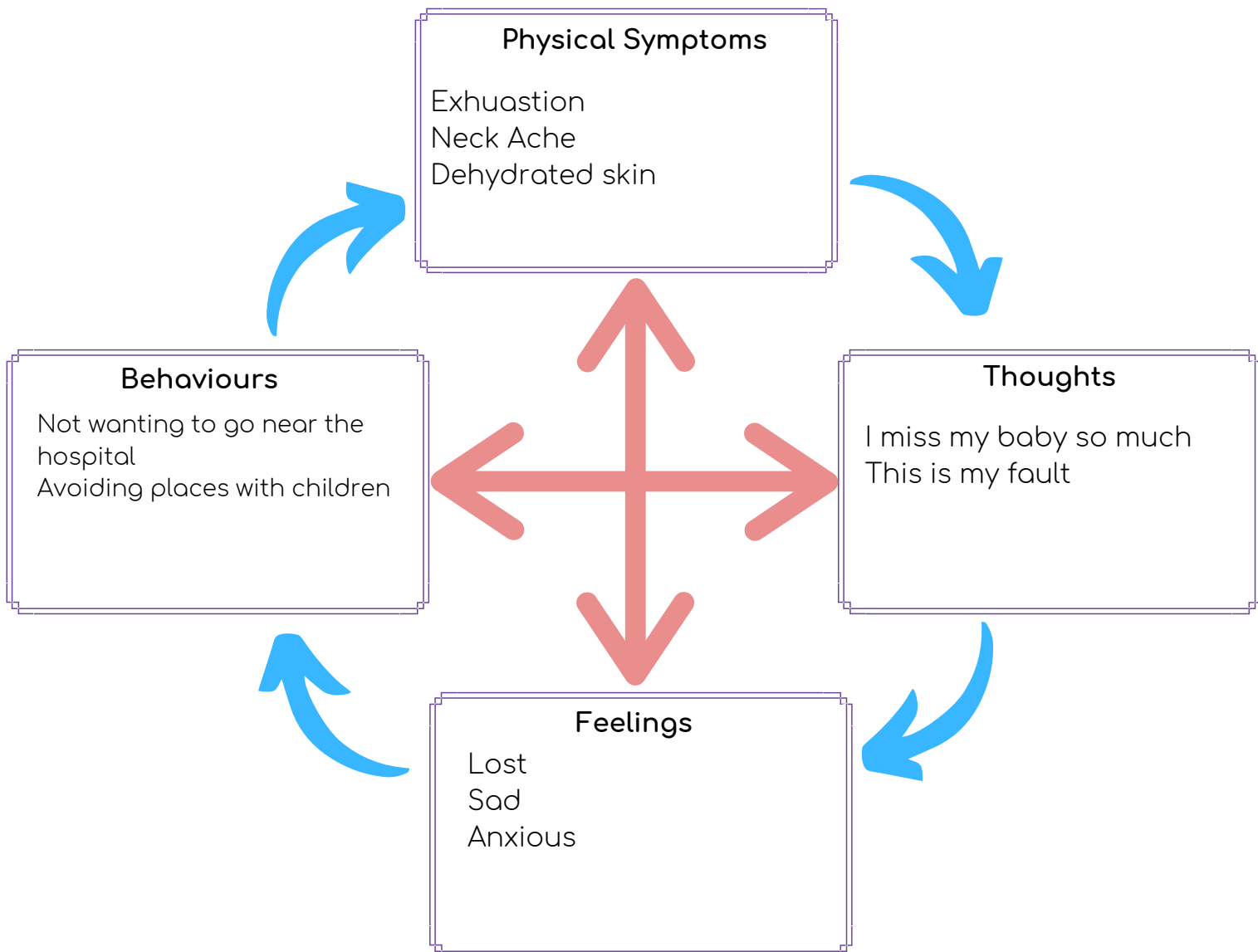
Often many of these activities can be combined, such as meeting with a friend and going for a walk in a park, which would probably address all different aspects of health.

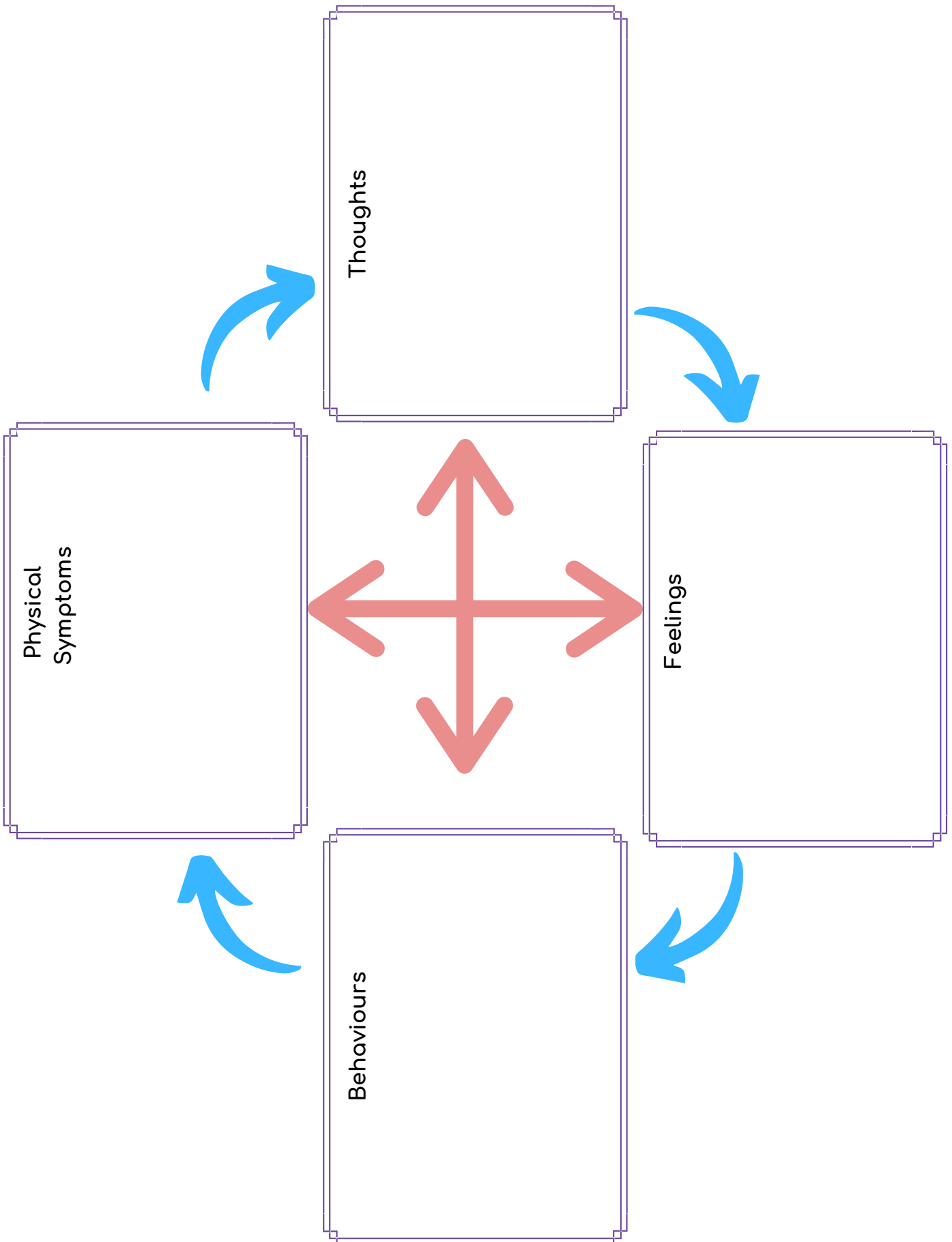
What could you do to improve your health?

Understanding your grief

Have a look at the example below and if you feel like it, fill in what you are feeling in the blank template.

In the back of the booklet we have a number of blank pages so that you can record how you feel over the coming weeks. If you need to add more just print more off.





What is mourning?

Grief is the internal feeling and thoughts related to a death and mourning is the outward expression of this grief, sorrow, loss, and most importantly, love.

Mourning is essential to healing, and it also enables us to have ownership over the way we celebrate our children's lives.

Babyloss changes us forever. While grief is what you think and feel after a loss, mourning is the active expression of grief. Mourning allows us to heal as we are getting that pain out and transforming it into something that helps us remember our child.

You have so much love for your baby, and it is heartbreaking that you have no physical child to pour that love for them into. Mourning gives us a space to transform that love into actions for your child. Mourning is an opportunity to be creative.

There are lots of different ways to mourn. The below gives ideas as to what some other babyloss parents have done, but you will find your own rituals



Remembering your baby

Below are the different ways that parents remember their child. You will think of your own celebrations and rituals to connect and remember them.

You may feel overwhelmed considering all these options in one go, if you start to feel weird take a break and have a rest.

Create a memory box

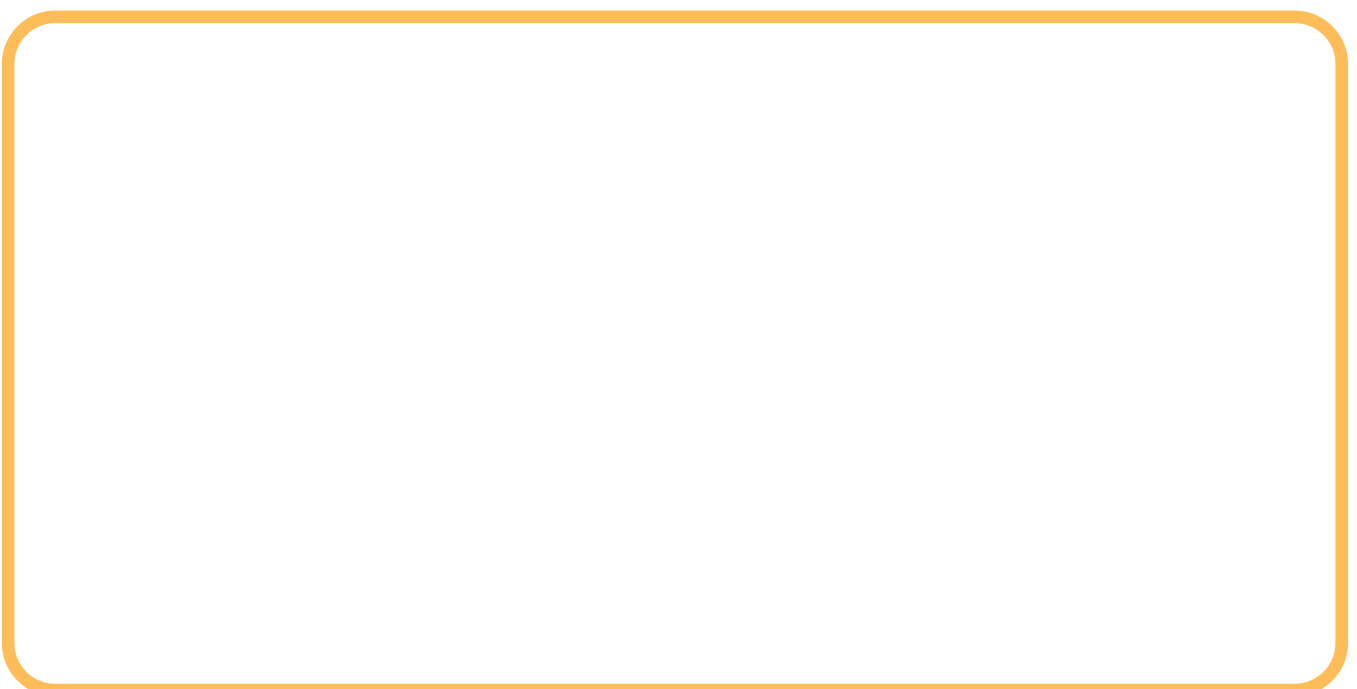
This could contain items you may want to keep forever but not necessarily have out. What items would you put in your memory box?



Have a space in your home or garden that memorialises your baby. This could be special plants, photos in a nice frame etc. What kind of space could you create to remember and connect with your baby?



Some parents have an animal or symbol that they associate with their baby. Do you have an animal or symbol for your baby? How do you think you could dot this around your house or carry with you?



Wear special jewellery or carry something symbolic with you so that you can feel instantly connected to your baby when you look or feel it. What could you wear or design?

Take the memory of your baby with you when you go to places you wish they could have been with you. For example writing their name in the sand at the beach, or carving their name on a tree in a forest. Is there anywhere you would like to take the memory of your baby?

Have a special meal or party in memory of your baby. This could be on significant dates. What would you have at your baby's special party?

Are there any other ideas that you have to remember your baby?



Coping

How have you been coping so far?

What have you been doing so far to cope?

Are these strategies helpful in the long term?

Is it possible that they might be prolonging your grief? For example, keeping yourself so busy that you distract and do not have to think about your loss?

How have you coped with difficulties in the past? What did you do to help you through these situations?

What are you doing to support you with your grief that is going well? What makes you feel even slightly better in a way that is most healthy to you?

What coping strategies and support do you have available to you? Could you be making better use of these? Earlier we mentioned different forms of health, would you find it helpful to do more of these activities?



Social support - speaking to people; family, friends, relatives, colleagues, etc.



Mental support – speaking to a professional (you can find more information on our Where to Find Support page)



Physical support – going for walks, doing exercise, getting out and about



Emotional support – talking to family and friends, spending time with people who will just let you be and listen



'Spiritual' support – spending time in nature. Going to forests, walks in parks, going to your place of worship if you are religious.



Being confident in your own ability to cope, even though at times it may not feel like it



Problem solving - being able to work out solutions to problems.



Self-awareness - knowing how grief affects you; your body, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.



Looking after yourself - making sure that you have some time to yourself. For example going for walks, having a relaxing bath, etc.

Triggers

In respect to babyloss, a trigger is something that unexpectedly takes you back to the experience of losing your child.

It could be related to a sight, smell or sound. It could be related to an anniversary, mothers/fathers day, or someone telling you that they are pregnant.



It could be something obvious, such as going back to hospital for results, or something that takes you by surprise.

Triggers can feel very powerful and leave you feeling emotionally wiped out. Triggers can be quite traumatic, literally taking you back to the moment of your loss, but they can also be comforting.

For example, one babyloss Mum told us that, after her son's stillbirth she kept on wanting to see films with a specific actor in. It was only during a trailer when this actor was on a huge screen she realised that he looked like what she thought her son would look like as an actor.

While there were tears, for this Mum this experience was deeply comforting. It may be that you see an animal that is the animal you associate with your baby.

Often though, triggers can make you feel worse. It can leave you feeling overwhelmed, anxious and sad, or any other emotion. Quite often triggers come completely out of the blue.

Do you have any triggers and if so what are they?



What happens when you are triggered?



What do you do to cope with the triggers?



Are there any nice triggers that remind you of your baby?



A trigger warning is a notice that content or images you see may cause you to feel triggered. In regards to babyloss, you may come across images and text regarding other peoples loss that could leave you feeling worse.

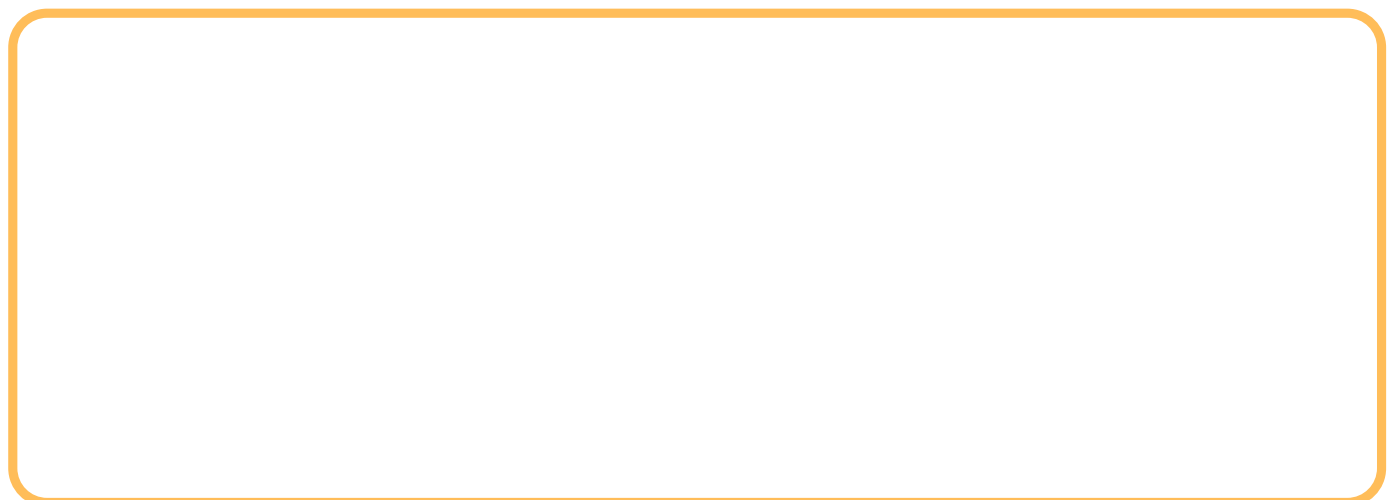
Often social media accounts and other websites can have these images that may leave you feeling affected. If this happens stop looking at these accounts and mute/block them if you need to.

On twitter you can block certain keywords that will keep your twitter feed clear of content that may trigger you. It is ok to mute accounts on other social media if someone is posting pictures of them with their babies they got to take home. Do what is right for you.

Sometimes we have friends and family members that, while well meaning, just leave us feeling worse. It is ok to avoid these people! Do what you need to do to limit your triggers, and understand what you can do to look after yourself if you do feel triggered.

Obviously we cannot control when and where triggers happen, but in some circumstances, especially online and face to face with certain people, we can minimise the likelihood of encountering some triggers.

What do you think you could do to minimise triggers?

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thick orange border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

Self care

After all that talk of triggers it is important to focus on self care and doing the things that help you to feel better. Grief, especially babyloss grief, can leave you feeling isolated.



You may feel like you do not have the energy to engage with other people, or may feel like you are unable to feel joy. You will not feel this way forever.

Going back to the different forms of health, are there any of the following activities that you could incorporate into your day to make you feel better?

Socialising – with people and in places that give you energy



Hobbies and interests - these could be old hobbies, new ones and if you wanted ones that could help with mourning such as pottery or something creative so you can create something for your child, or for yourself.





Exercise – the gym may feel overwhelming, but going to a class at a different time, or a new class could help you feel better.

Pilates is a quiet exercise that still helps you to tone up without the full on loud stimulation of a more active class. Yoga could help provide exercise and stillness.

You don't have to go out for these, there are lots of free classes on youtube.

Exercise does not have to be strenuous, taking a gentle walk is fine! For women, speak to your health practitioner about when it is safe to resume exercise other than walking. Usually this is 6 - 8 weeks after birth.

Bedtimes and naps – regularly scheduling in these can give you structure and rest. If you are able to take day naps between 2-3pm is a good time as it normally will not interfere with sleeping later on.



Time for yourself – relaxation time between activities, and rest time just for you.

Spend time in nature – spending time in nature has been shown to improve mood.



Treat yourself – something like watching your favourite film, watching football while drinking your favourite drink or putting a face mask on, buying yourself something nice or eating some tasty food.

Time with your grief - Schedule in 15 minutes each day where you can be by yourself to just think about your baby, and how you feel. Make sure you are somewhere quiet where you can feel safe and uninterrupted.



Journaling - Writing down what is in your head onto paper or a screen can feel like a weight off your shoulders. It can help you unwind and de-stress. You can write as much or as little as you like.



Creating space like this for yourself for 5 minutes three times a week may help you feel more grounded and less overwhelmed.

We have more information regarding journaling in our app



Eat well and drink water - There is a 'weird' feeling that accompanies every bereaved person, especially those that have lost children. Not eating properly/skipping or delaying meals can make you feel worse.

Having a drink in your bag and some snacks when you are away from home that you can munch on if you start to feel a bit odd may help. Cooking something you find delicious will help you feel better. Eating nutritious meals will help you to feel better in yourself.

Sugary foods or drinks with caffeine in close to bedtime may stop you from getting to sleep.

Your skin will get dehydrated from crying and hormonal changes, water will help replenish your skin and make you feel physically and mentally better.

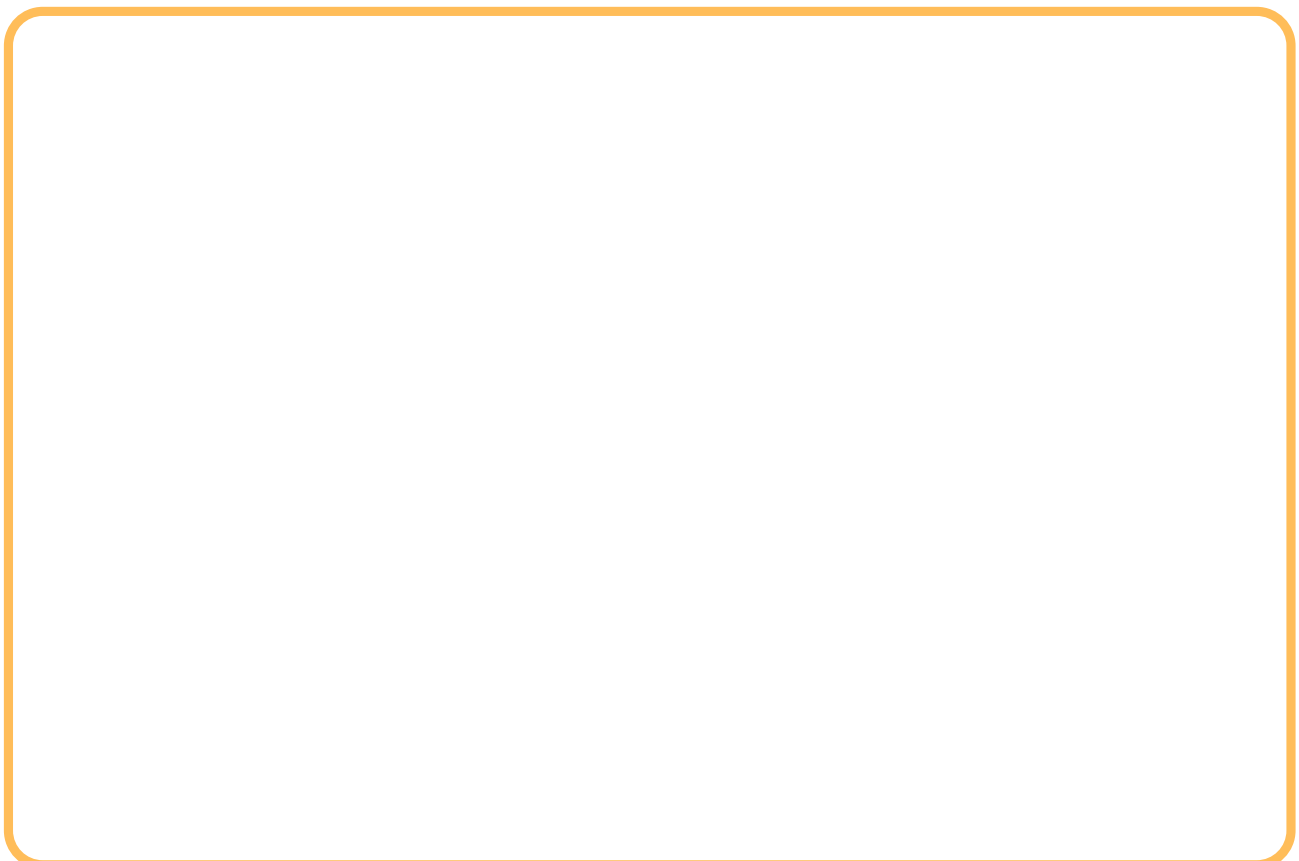
Listen to meditation/guided breathing tracks - There are lots of free relaxation and mindfulness tracks online. Listening to these can help you feel focussed on the now, and help reduce stress.

Create - Is there something creative that you could do for yourself? Drawing, colouring in books, gardening etc

Your environment – sometimes the environment we are in can impact our mood, as well as how comfortable we feel and our ability to get to sleep and relax.

Are there any practical steps you or your support network could take to make your environment feel nicer?

We cover a lot of points above. What will you be doing to self care?



Managing your time

When filling in the diary, factor in all the things you have to do like attending appointments, cooking, housework, food shopping etc. Then you can see how much time you have free and can plan all the other activities you want to do.

Be kind to yourself and pace yourself, and as mentioned factor in relaxation time.

If you find watching Judge Rinder at the same time every day relaxing, schedule that in!

If you do not manage to do everything on your timetable that is fine, and if you decide to cancel some activities so you can relax more that is fine too.

Suggestions	What you would like to do
See a friend Relax Watch a film Tidy the house Hobby time Read Walk the dog	

Now try to complete a plan for a week. You don't have to fill in every space - this can be quite difficult. You could start by just adding in one or two new activities for each day.

Once you have filled in your diary, all you have to do is try to follow your plan each day.

Don't worry if unexpected things come up and you cannot stick to it exactly. In fact, it is very unlikely that things will go exactly as you planned. It is also fine to be flexible and replace some activities with new ones.

Leave out some tasks altogether if you don't have time for them. Try to be relaxed if this happens.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

Protecting your self care

Family and friends

Many people around you may want to help, but simply do not understand how to. Their loving intent to support you may result in them saying something stupid and insensitive.

The best thing to do is to kindly tell them what they said was upsetting and why and point them in the direction of our guides.

They are grieving too, and while their grief will not compare to yours, it may mean that they say something unthinking in an attempt to offer comfort, not realising that the comfort they attempt to offer themselves comes at the expense of you.

Then there will be others who completely drop off the face of the planet. These people are not worth your precious energy right now.

Only spend time with people that will help you to feel better. You do not owe anyone anything, especially if they make you feel worse or hurried in your grief.

You may find it useful to divide your friends and family under emotional support and practical support.

The practical supporters are those people that would move mountains for you, but may not necessarily make you feel better with their words!

These are task people and so activities like cleaning the house, getting medication, picking up shopping, taking the dog for a walk, cooking etc are the ways they could help you. The practical supporters will make you feel better with their actions.

Emotional supporters are those that make you feel better with their words. They will be the ones that make you feel more comforted with their presence, that give you the space to mourn and grieve without interrupting you, that say the right things and let you be.

Who are your

Practical supporters

Emotional supporters

In between there will be those individuals, some of whom will be unexpected who will just listen and give you the space to grieve.

Find those friends who will just let you be, who will give you the space to grieve, but will also check in, give you a hug, watch some trash tv, ask you about your baby. People will come through to you in all kinds of ways.

Let the people who make you feel better spend time with you

Saying no

As mentioned earlier, only spend time with people that make you feel better.

People may misguidedly think that by letting you decide where you want to meet, or that by meeting in a public place that you decide they are making things easy for you, when in actuality it is making you feel worse.

Feel free to say no to meeting, or even say to them 'I am exhausted right now and making a decision about where to go is tiring me. Can you please pick somewhere that is not far for me to travel to, where there will be no children or mothers with prams, that will be quiet'.

The last thing you need to do is go somewhere with lots of parents and babies, or somewhere very noisy. Spend time and go to places that give you energy, not deplete you.

Be kind and gentle to yourself

You will not always feel the way you feel right now.

There is nothing you can do to speed through these feelings though. You did not deserve to lose your baby. Your baby would not want to see you being unkind to yourself. Give yourself space and permission to take a break when you need it.

When to worry



It is completely normal to feel like you do not want to get out of bed, to have no appetite and to feel like you have no energy to shower.

It is normal to feel depressed after losing your child. However, grief is different to depression. Depression is an illness, grief is a reaction to a loss.

When this depression stops becoming normal is when you are not getting out of bed, not showering, refusing to eat - then you need to speak to your GP or call your partners GP. Depression can be treated. If you feel like you might harm yourself please contact 999, or go to A&E. Call an ambulance or get someone to take you to A&E.

If you feel like you need support right now but do not want to go to A&E please call the Samaritans on 116 123, or call your GP's out of hours number (usually when you call your GP you will automatically be redirected to the out of hours service).

Mind have online resources to help you if you are feeling suicidal right now <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/suicidal-feelings/helping-yourself-now/>

Do not feel you cannot ask for help, it is there if you need it, and people want to help you.

Take as long as you need off work

You may feel returning to work will give you structure and help transition back to your old life.

As you become less exhausted work will give you more structure to your time and it may feel good to use your brain in a different way.

However, please make sure that you give yourself as much time as you need off work, and only return because you want to, not because other people are pressuring you into returning.

Returning to work in November or December can make it very hard around other peoples Christmas excitement.

You can also ask to transition back to work at your own pace through a phased return to work, building up your days until you feel ready to return full time.

Be as kind to yourself as possible and put you first.

While the stress of babyloss ins incomparable, you should not be having to deal with the stress of work, and giving yourself a break from this stress will help you to heal. Do what feels best for you, at your own pace, but do not feel rushed by anyone else.

We hope that you found some of the ideas in this guide helpful. You can use the techniques for as long as they are helpful to you. Some people will find some ideas resonate with them better than others.

You may find some ideas or suggestions unhelpful, but returning to them after a few weeks and then trying them out for a little while to see if they start working for you could also give them a chance to work.

If you feel like your mood or situation has not changed please speak to your GP who may be able to suggest alternatives. Nova Foundation CIC is a social enterprise that provides trauma informed comfort and support to babyloss parents. We provide a range of online resources and signposting so that no parent walks the path of babyloss alone.

Other resources we have online include

- Birth plan for babyloss
- Guide for newly bereaved parents
- Trauma info sheet
- Guide for parents pregnant after a loss
- Birth plans for parents pregnant after a loss
- Support booklet for friends and family

Our 'where to find support' webpage signposts to organisations who may be able to help, if you feel like you may need additional support.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Morning							
Morning							
Lunch							
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Afternoon							
Dinner							
Evening							
Bedtime							

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