

Book Review

Pregnancy and Parenting after Loss, Different Baby, Different Story (2021) by Joann O’Leary, Lynnnda Parker, Margaret M. Murphy, & Jane Warland. Roman & Littlefield. 212 pages. ISBN-10: 1538125323; ISBN-13: 978-1538125328

After I married, I could not wait to be pregnant. As each month went by, I did my own pregnancy test in the lab. I would cry, feeling a deep sadness and hoping maybe it would be positive next month. It was almost eight months before the test became positive. I embraced this pregnancy and cherished every minute of it. Many women have a strong desire to be a mother and I was one of them.

I didn’t have the greatest example of how a loving relationship works in a marriage. I don’t remember the word “love” used in our home. Thanks to a job babysitting for a wonderful, loving family of five children, however, I saw what I wanted my own family to be like: time for parents, time for each child, and lots of play. That’s what I fashioned my family after, promising to always let my children know how much they are loved. That is why I would cry at the microscope, waiting to be pregnant.

I never had a birth loss, but the desire to get pregnant was extremely important to me. I wanted to be the good, loving, attentive mother I never had. When I opened this beautiful book, I realized my loss was nothing like the experiences that O’Leary and her co-authors clearly explained about losing a baby. I don’t think anyone could understand how hard it might be unless they have experienced a loss. For many years, a miscarriage was generally dismissed with, “You can try again, and chances are good you’ll get pregnant.” But what if you don’t?

O’Leary and her co-authors take us on a journey with many scenarios: miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDs, IVF challenges, the father’s/partner’s feelings, how to go back to work after a loss, how to talk to your older children when there is a loss, and how family and friends can address sorrow and grief with bereaved parents. They even address the concept of breastfeeding and what came up for them when they lost the first baby without having had the breastfeeding experience. Also addressed is

parenting care, often in the form of being overprotective. The losses are attended to in a heartfelt, compassionate, understanding way, after years of research in the field with many bereaved parents.

With each chapter, the authors move through the trimesters, sharing vignettes from parents who have experienced losses. The parents' voices can be heard through the pages, where the authors highlight thoughts and ideas the parents may be experiencing and possible ways to receive support from understanding practitioners. There are resources at the back of the book, including a support group run by O'Leary and her colleagues: <https://starlegacyfoundation.org/>

She encourages group support whenever possible. We must acknowledge the loss when the time is right, be able to grieve at our own pace and then make the decision if we feel we can bring another baby into the world.

O'Leary and Warland's first book, *Meeting the Needs of Parents Pregnant and Parenting after Perinatal Loss* (2016, Routledge) was reviewed by Michael Trout, in *JOPPPAH* 32(4), 2018. That book was written for practitioners to help families grieve through their process and recognize their needs for healing. This book is written for parents who have had a loss and are thinking of having another baby. The heartfelt scenarios of various experiences can give parents strength from others who have achieved live births, even with many fears and concerns going through the process. The authors validate those fears, but with a beautiful sense of support that the next baby may have a different story. The book can offer parents insight into how difficult it is to bond for fear of losing another baby, yet how important it is for the baby to feel safe and wanted by encouraging the parents to engage in bonding.

Pregnancy and Parenting after Loss should be on any parents' bedside table who have experienced a loss, for hope that when they are ready, they can be supported through its pages. It is an empowering book that invites parents to work with a practitioner who understands their fears and allows them extra support. Facing one's apprehensions and fears is brave, as is the willingness to love one another and try again to bring another life into the world. The book should also be on the shelf of each friend and supporter of a parent who has lost a baby. Because each loss *is* a baby; the loss was a life starting that was not able to embody, or lost after the birth. With this book, these authors use the right language, compassion, and understanding of how a loss effects everyone involved.

~ Barbara C Decker
HypnoBirthing Childbirth Educator,
Pre- and Perinatal Educator,
and Certified Prenatal Bonding (BA) Facilitator