
Empty Arms

When your baby is no longer here, but the love remains

Grief can live in the space where someone was meant to be

After pregnancy or baby loss, the absence can be felt in ordinary places: an empty room, an unused blanket, a date on the calendar, a quiet car journey home, or simply in your arms. The world may look almost unchanged while your own world feels completely different.

The phrase 'empty arms' can describe more than physical absence. It can hold the instinct to protect, soothe, feed, carry and love a baby who is no longer physically present. It can also describe the future that had already begun to take shape in your mind.

People may try to make the loss smaller because they do not know what to say. You may hear reassurance about another pregnancy or pressure to focus on what you still have. But another child, another pregnancy or another chapter does not replace this baby or erase this experience.

Love does not become unreal because the future you expected was interrupted.

This stand-alone guide focuses on the lived experience of empty arms: the ache of absence, the body after loss, memory and continuing bonds, difficult days and triggers, partners and family, returning to life without leaving your baby behind, reflective pages, support, reading and a personal message from Maggie.

The physical feeling of absence

Grief is not only a thought. It can be experienced through the whole body. After pregnancy or baby loss, physical recovery may happen alongside a powerful instinctive sense that your baby should still be with you.

Some people describe aching arms, heaviness in the chest, restlessness, disrupted sleep, loss of appetite, exhaustion or a need to hold something close. Depending on the stage and circumstances of the loss, there may also be bleeding, pain, breast changes, milk production, hormonal changes or recovery from labour, surgery or other treatment.

When the body and reality feel out of step

It can be especially painful when the body continues to show signs of pregnancy or postpartum change after the baby has died. Physical symptoms can become reminders of the loss. Appropriate medical and maternity follow-up matters; emotional support should not replace physical healthcare.

The empty space at home

There may be clothes, a cot, scan photographs, gifts or plans waiting at home. There is no rule about when these should be moved. Some people need them put away quickly; others need them left exactly where they are. You can ask someone you trust to help, or make decisions gradually.

You are not required to clear away evidence of your baby's place in your life in order to heal.

Seek medical advice if you are worried about your physical recovery. Severe or worsening pain, very heavy bleeding, fever, fainting or feeling significantly unwell should be assessed urgently according to the advice given by your healthcare team.

The emotions inside empty arms

Yearning	A strong wish to hold, see or be physically close to your baby.
Numbness	Feeling disconnected or functioning automatically when the reality is too much to absorb.
Anger	At the unfairness, your body, healthcare, other people's assumptions or the life that continues around you.
Guilt	Searching for something you did, missed or could have changed, even when the loss was outside your control.
Jealousy	Pregnancy announcements, babies and family milestones may hurt. Pain does not make you a bad person.
Fear	Worry about fertility, another pregnancy, medical settings or whether you could survive another loss.

Triggers can be surprisingly ordinary

A supermarket aisle, a pram, a television advert, a baby's cry, a social-media announcement, a date or a question from a stranger can bring grief into the present without warning. You are allowed to leave, mute, decline, change plans or protect yourself from situations that feel too much.

Grief does not need to look consistent

You may laugh and then cry. You may manage work and collapse when you get home. You may want to talk about your baby one day and be unable to say their name the next. These shifts are not evidence that the loss matters less.

If grief becomes so overwhelming that you feel unable to keep yourself safe, seek urgent professional support. In the UK, contact NHS 111, your GP or urgent mental-health services; call 999 or attend A&E; in an immediate emergency.

Keeping a connection without being trapped in grief

Grief does not always require 'letting go'. Many bereavement approaches recognise continuing bonds: finding a way for the person who died to remain part of your inner life while you continue living.

Ways of remembering

You might keep photographs or scan images, make a memory box, write letters, choose jewellery, plant something, create artwork, mark a birthday or due date, donate in your baby's memory, keep a special blanket or simply say their name. You may choose none of these. There is no correct ritual.

When memory-making is complicated

Not everyone has photographs, keepsakes or time to prepare. A sudden or early loss may leave very little that can be physically held. Meaning can still be created later. A written memory of what you hoped for, a symbol, a piece of music or a private place can become part of remembrance.

Making room for life again

At first, enjoying something can feel disloyal. You may wonder how you can laugh, plan or look forward to anything when your baby is not here. Pleasure and grief are not opposites. Moments of life returning do not remove love.

Moving forward is not the same as moving away.

Try to think in small pieces of time. What would support the next hour? What would make tonight gentler? Who feels safe enough to be with? Recovery is often built from ordinary acts rather than one dramatic moment of acceptance.

Partners, siblings and the people around you

Two people can lose the same baby and experience the grief very differently. The person who was pregnant may also be recovering physically. A partner may feel helpless, overlooked or unsure whether their grief is legitimate. Neither person's response has to mirror the other's.

When coping styles clash

One person may need to talk; another may cope through work or practical tasks. One may want reminders visible; another may find them unbearable. Instead of interpreting difference as lack of love, try to describe what you need and ask what the other person needs.

Supporting children

Children often need clear, age-appropriate language and repeated opportunities to ask questions. Avoid euphemisms that may confuse them, such as saying the baby 'went to sleep'. Let them know that feelings can be different within the same family and that they did not cause what happened.

What friends and relatives can do

Use the baby's name if the parents use it. Remember significant dates. Offer specific practical help. Do not disappear because you are frightened of saying the wrong thing. Avoid comparisons and phrases that begin with 'at least'. Ask before sharing pregnancy or baby news if you know it may be difficult.

Words that can help

'I remember your baby.'

'You don't need to make this easier for me.'

'Would you like to talk about them today?'

'I can sit with you without trying to fix this.'

A page for what cannot easily be said

If my arms could speak, they would say...

What I miss about the future I imagined

Something I want people to understand about my grief

A memory, image, name or feeling I want to keep

On a difficult day, I can give myself permission to...

People or places I can turn to

Support, reading and a message from me

UK support

Sands supports people affected by pregnancy and baby loss, including stillbirth and neonatal death.

Miscarriage Association provides information and support following miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy and molar pregnancy.

Tommy's provides pregnancy and pregnancy-loss information and support.

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) offers specialist support when parents face difficult decisions after antenatal screening or diagnosis.

Books

Zoë Clark-Coates — *Saying Goodbye*. Written specifically around pregnancy and baby loss.

Megan Devine — *It's OK That You're Not OK*. A useful challenge to the idea that grief needs to be quickly fixed.

Julia Samuel — *Grief Works*. Explores how people live with and adapt to profound loss.

A note about support

Grief-informed counselling or psychotherapy can offer somewhere to speak freely about your baby and the loss without having to protect other people. Trauma-informed support may be particularly relevant where the loss involved frightening medical events, emergency treatment or distressing memories.

A message from me

Empty arms can carry so much. They can carry love, longing, anger, memories, plans and all the things you thought you would be doing now. Other people may not always see that weight, especially when life around you appears to have returned to normal.

You do not have to stop loving your baby in order to continue living. You can make room for grief and still make room for yourself. You can remember and rebuild. Your baby's place in your story does not depend on how long they were here or how many other people got to know them.

Maggie

Space to Breathe Therapy

This resource is for education and emotional support and is not a substitute for individual medical diagnosis, treatment or emergency care.