



There is no pain like the pain of losing a child. For anyone facing this loss, *Holding onto Love After You've Lost a Baby* is for you. With relationship expert Gary Chapman and Candy McVicar, you'll learn how the five love languages can help you grieve well and pursue healing.

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# When Your World Comes Crashing Down

News of your precious baby or child's death has launched you into a terrifying unknown, and grief has parked its heavy load on your heart. You are dismayed, lost, and heartbroken.

Now you must learn to survive and carry on, but how?

**YOU WILL NEVER FORGET.** You will always remember the moment—that life-altering moment in time when you heard those stinging, dreaded words. “You better sit down . . . I am so sorry, your child didn't make it.” “There is no heartbeat.” “We just couldn't save your baby.” “Your child was in an accident . . . the injuries were too severe.” “We found your daughter, but I am so sorry, ma'am, she was murdered.”

You heard the words, but they didn't make sense, they simply didn't resonate. Did not compute. You looked at them in disbelief. Your brain searched for a way out of that surreal moment that seemed like a cruel trick. Your mind tried in that flash of time to escape the matrix, surely this was just a bad dream, you would wake up and everything would be okay. But your mind was not playing

tricks on you: this was real, this was your real life playing out.

And this was a life just ended. Just like that, the child was here one moment and then instantly, there was no life in the body. No more breath in the lungs, no more pulse. The line on the monitor was flat. You didn't know it yet, but at that moment a piece of you died. Your baby, your child would no longer share in this life with you. Your world just came crashing down on you.

"NO! NO!!!!" you screamed aloud. Or maybe it just felt like you had screamed. You screamed in your soul while a silent cry escaped your mouth. You felt weak in the knees; your heart was racing, and tears spilled from your body as the truth set in. Sobbing ensued and piercing pangs of pain surged deep within your heart.

Maybe you didn't hear the news from someone else and you were the one who discovered that they were dead. You went to wake them from their nap and found your baby was cold and unresponsive. You went to the bathroom with back pain and contractions and your baby delivered far too early to have survived.

You would think that somehow after years of hearing of tragic stories in the news, viewing shocking stories in social media, seeing countless people die in movies, and reading terrifying horror stories of people's peril in the history of humankind, you would at least be a little prepared to deal with death. But nothing can prepare a parent for the death of their precious child. All those stories were not your story. They were someone else's, and though it may have moved you to feel compassion toward them, it didn't really affect you and your personal world. You know that bad things can happen to people, but not like this. Not to you. Not to a good person like you. Not to *your* baby, *your* son, *your* daughter. But something terrible and very sad did indeed happen, and now you must figure out how to survive.

## HOW DO YOU “SURVIVE”?

What does “survive” mean? By definition it means to not die, to not disappear, to live through something and outlive someone else, to endure, to continue to exist, to carry on. When someone makes it through a horrible situation, they are called a survivor. Every parent who experiences the death of a baby or child can claim that title of “survivor” as they make passage through to the other side of the dark tunnel of grief to where there is light and hope again.

Once the (memorial) service is over, life around you can seem to speed on as normal, yet there is no return to life as it was in your home. As the reality sets in, the shock wears off and you will have to eventually find a new normal that incorporates your child who is very much alive in your mind and heart, while also very much absent in this physical world. You will need to learn how to live again and carry on in the land of the living. It may feel at times like the effects of grief could kill you because it hurts so badly, but the fact that you are reading this tells me you want to survive—and you will.

It's not uncommon to feel a need to escape, to want to disappear for a while. If it's a little trip to a distant land to get some rest and relaxation, then that kind of escape is good and can be very helpful. But if you run away thinking you can hide from and

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avoid dealing with the grief, it won't work. Grief will always find you and demand to be dealt with. Escaping for a day at a spa or to a decent movie is a perfectly healthy way to take a break from grief. Put it in a box on the shelf, and escape for a few hours. What isn't okay, though, is seeking relief through an often-harmful overabundance of spending, working, food, spirits, and drugs (prescription, over-the-counter, or otherwise).

You must “endure” life here without them. This literally means you suffer and tolerate disagreeable things. You are bearing a hardship. You didn't choose this for yourself. You didn't want this to happen, and the fact it did happen to you is very much disagreeable. It's OKAY to NOT BE OKAY with it.

Parents are not supposed to outlive their children. The order of this is not how it should have been. Truth is, none of this is how it should have been. You know you can't fix or change it but your mind will try. In your daydreams and in your sleep dreaming, your brain will persevere with should-haves, could-haves, would-haves, what-ifs, and if-only thoughts. This is natural. It is trying to make sense of it, trying to figure out how to cope. It is trying to come to terms and accept the situation.

Notice in the definition of “survive” it says, “to continue to exist.”<sup>1</sup> Initially, in the new, raw stages of grief, it will feel and look to others as if you're merely existing. You have a pulse, but on the bad days people close to you would be hard-pressed to find it. Simple tasks will prove to be laborious. The thought of having to get ready to leave for work can make you have a sense of panic and dread. As you anticipate all the steps it will take to get from A to Z for the morning—get out of bed, shower, shave, dry hair, get dressed, make coffee and breakfast, and drive to work—you may just give up and fall back into bed. Your mind, soul, and

body are taxed to their limit. Grieving is hard work. It zaps all your energy and can put your drive in reverse or bring you to a standstill. In the grief world, we call this three steps forward and two steps back. You can make such good progress, only to find yourself seemingly back in the beginning stages of your grief.

### ONE STEP FORWARD . . .

The process of grieving is not linear as some would hope, but rather it is a cyclical movement toward healing and peace. Meaning you won't typically get through a stage of grief or emotional point and pass through it, never to return to it again. You will come back through that same cycle of emotions and experience similar feelings again. However, the next time you are likely to be a little stronger and better equipped to handle the previous situation.

For example, think of the first time you went grocery shopping after your baby died. It was all you could do to remember the few things on your list—bread, milk, cereal, fruit, eggs, toilet paper, and tissues. In a daze, as you aimlessly pushed your cart through the store, you accidentally went too close to the aisle with the baby items, noticed the diapers and started to cry. Then when you got to the checkout lane, a new mom pulled in behind you to check out in your same line. She had her new baby tucked in in the car seat in the shopping cart. You overhear the next person in line say, “Oh, how adorable! What a sweet baby. How old is she?” “A week old,” the mother replied. You felt like someone squeezed the air right out of your lungs as you panicked and nervously abandoned your cart, leaving the store in defeat without your groceries. I actually did this very thing a week after my baby

died. I came home and when I walked in the door empty-handed, my husband, surprised, asked, “What happened to the groceries?” I just fell into a heap in his arms and bawled.

The next time you went grocery shopping, you remembered to avoid the baby aisle. But as you passed it, your heart quickened, tears filled your eyes, and a lump developed in your throat. It was still a very emotional and difficult task, but you left the store with a bag of groceries and felt a small bit of encouragement in achieving this small victory. By the tenth time you entered the grocery store, you did your shopping without too much difficulty and didn't even cry.

Remember, though, this is a not a linear healing process. Fast-forward to a year later, you are back at the store, and you spot the cutest baby item on display and you totally fall apart and feel wrecked. You wonder to yourself how a year later you can be such a mess when you had made such good progress. Then it dawns on you: your baby would be a year old, and that day at the store, you feel like you are back at square one emotionally. You miss her like crazy and the deep hurt is still there.

Sometimes it can also go in reverse—you get worse before you get better. For example, this can be true in situations where close friends or family have a baby or child who is close in age to the little one you lost. You had anticipated the kids growing up together, sharing many experiences and making special memories over the years. Now the relationship is strained, and you are sad every time you see and hear about their child. It gets harder each time you interact with them, so you end up avoiding them at all costs. You start to get angry and have dark feelings of jealousy that make you feel bad about yourself. “Why can't I just accept and love their child? It's not like I want something to happen to their



child, but I just can't be around them without getting upset. They have theirs and I don't have mine. It's not fair."

Eventually, this relationship could grow distant until they are no longer in your life—that is, unless you determine to work through all those feelings, and you communicate honestly with your friend about the emotional challenge you are having. If they are a loving and patient friend, and you do the work of getting stronger and more at peace with the situation, you might actually find their child to be quite special in your life, and truly enjoy being around them. Even though it can be bittersweet at times, you are happier with them in your life than without them.

Additional definitions of "survivor" include: someone overcoming a traumatic experience, and "a person with great powers of endurance . . . somebody who shows a great will to live or a great determination to overcome difficulties".<sup>2</sup>

## FEAR AND ANXIETY: THE EVIL TWINS

What exactly must a survivor overcome? The biggest hurdles are fear and anxiety, which can easily stop parents in their tracks when trying to make headway. Fear and anxiety often go hand in hand like two shady-looking strangers that you notice creeping around outside your house. They always seem to be lurking close by. It can feel like they follow you as closely as your own shadow in the early days and months of sorrowing. After experiencing a loss, you feel so vulnerable, and questions plague your mind of what other terrible things could also happen. You wonder how you can make it without your child. Fear and anxiety seem to whisper of more ill fate and doom. Don't entertain them. You must choose to give them walking papers. Put up a "No Trespassing" sign. If

you should find that you can't manage in healthy ways in your grieving because their voices grow too strong, then it's time to get some help with a counselor, pastor, or doctor who can provide assistance.

Painful emotions can be alleviated and healed through expressing your feelings. Some excellent ways to do this are to: share them with a trusted loved one/friend, talk about them to God, meditate, breathe deeply, journal, exercise, find a creative outlet, turn on some soothing music, adopt an animal in need of a home that will bring comfort and life into your world, go and serve someone else in need, and open your life up to others.

Deep sorrow can feel like a long, dark night that shows no promise of a dawn. There's a thick low fog covering the surface of your heart and the sun can't seem to break through. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."<sup>3</sup> Joy comes in all shapes and sizes and looks different to everyone, but it will

attempt to shine into your life each day. It is that ray of sun that pierces the dark cloud covering your heart. Don't miss it. It can be a butterfly, or a bird that lands close to you and you know it is there just for you. It can be the smile of a kind person who did a sweet gesture to lighten your load.

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It can be simple text or letter with a few words of encouragement right when you needed to hear just those words. It can be the rainbow above, the white snowflakes on your eyelashes, the dolphin that jumps out of the water and you are sure it is smiling at you.

Just be open to the ways it will come to you. These joy blessings can come in disguise, so watch out for them.

No matter how short or long a time your baby or child lived, they mattered. Your child was significant and made an impact. What made him so special? That he was yours? Yes, that is one thing indeed that made him special. How would you complete this sentence? “My baby or child was special to me because\_\_\_\_\_.”

It’s the love you shared with each other that is most special. The greatest concern for bereaved parents is that their child will be forgotten—that soon, no one will care enough to remember. For the miscarried or stillborn baby, it’s that no one even got to know the baby. So to others it seems the child never existed. Sadly, some people will forget and some will move on, and that is a hard fact to come to terms with. BUT your baby or child’s story isn’t over because you aren’t finished here on earth yet, and the child lives on through you. Your tears are not wasted; nor do we believe that your hurt is wasted. Something good, something worth surviving for is in your future. That “something” is connected in a special way to your baby or child. It may begin with you sharing your story, or with you helping someone else as a way to honor your child’s memory. Do what you can in your life to preserve their memory by sharing with others the love you have for your child.

There is a saying that “time heals all wounds,” but don’t buy it for a second. Time doesn’t heal! It certainly takes time to learn healthy ways to cope and to take steps that bring forward motion in life. But time didn’t do it for you. YOU do it step-by-step, one choice at a time. Be proud of yourself and celebrate the small victories. Though it may be three steps forward and two steps back in the early stages of grief, it is still progress.

## YOUR TURN

- Can you recall any “joy blessings” that have come to you recently?
- What are some small victories you have achieved?

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