



How empathy impacted my loss & grief

Tennille (& Mark) Welsh

In 2011 our world was shattered when our first son, Oscar was stillborn. I was just about to start maternity leave and we were excitedly preparing for a baby shower that coming weekend when we received the devastating news that there was no foetal heartbeat. Our families instantly rallied around us and provided practical support, as well as assisting us to create memories of Oscar while we had the difficult task of saying hello and goodbye at the same time. Nothing was going to bring our son back, but for my husband in particular, knowing that the people closest to us had also suffered a broken heart and were grieving with us, not just for us, made him feel supported and shared the heavy load.

We held a 'party' with our immediate families for Oscar several days after his birth where we decided to release balloons. My sister kindly contacted our wider circle of friends, including work colleagues and extended family and told them of our intention to release balloons. Shortly after the service and throughout the afternoon text messages and emails with pictures from our friends and family releasing blue balloons started arriving. There were balloons from all over the world, the students I taught had bunches of balloons which they released during recess, some released balloons in the middle of the night, others at beaches, and some had been personalised with messages and cards.

No words were needed - seeing the pictures of the balloons was a gift from friends and family that no words could match. One of my biggest fears after having Oscar was what would I say to people and how could I possibly 'go back' into society without my baby? Knowing that people cared enough to give up their lunch break, arrange a bunch of balloons and take a few minutes to think of my baby meant so much and really helped to break the ice when I did reconnect with people again. It was a great conversation starter and I must have looked at those photos at least daily in the months that followed.



A simple photograph reminded us that we had friends and family walking this grief path with us and was a wonderful visual reminder when our journey seemed lonely and isolating. The empathy did not need to be voiced. Our need was not for lots of people to be physically close as our grief occupied such a large space initially, however the photographs allowed our friends and family to share in the birth of our baby and shed tears alongside us, creating beautiful memories at the same time. The saying a picture tells a thousand words is very true for grieving parents.

Tennille Welsh shared this story with My Grief Assist as part of World Story Telling Day which is commemorated in March each year. She is a civil celebrant and school teacher and loves spending time with her family, playing outdoors with her two young boys and their menagerie of animals.