Stanford MEDICINE
Children's Health
Family Guidance and Bereavement Program

Spring 2026
Issue 23

Connections

A Newsletter from the Family Guidance and Bereavement Program

Dear Families,

We are excited to share our Spring 2026 issue of Connections with you. This issue's theme honors an area of grief that our program has worked hard to address in recent years: pregnancy and infant loss.

This winter, we facilitated our program's fourth pregnancy loss support group. These groups have provided a space for bereaved moms to safely share their stories and build community with one another. We know that pregnancy loss, while incredibly common, is often considered a form of disenfranchised grief—grief that is often minimized or not acknowledged by others—and our program is proud to support this too-often overlooked population.

This issue highlights the Lambie Project, lovingly founded by the Caulfield family after the loss of their baby, Jack, in 2017. The Lambie Project comforts grieving families by offering something tangible to hold—a lambie made to reflect their baby's weight. You will also find a beautiful article written by a grieving mom who participated in one of our pregnancy loss support groups. We share an educational article on disenfranchised grief, as well as details about upcoming events, and more.

We would also like to take a moment to express our profound gratitude to the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health's Association of Auxiliaries, whose generous support these past 10 years has allowed us to support countless families in their grief.

In our grief, we often feel isolated, lost, or misunderstood. Please know that our program is here to support you. Our contact information is at the end of the newsletter and we would be happy to hear from you any time.

Wishing you healing and kindness,
The Family Guidance and Bereavement Team

Upcoming Events

Pregnancy Loss Support Group: Termination for Medical Reasons (TFMR)

Wednesdays, April 8-May 13
Time: 4:00-5:30pm
Location: Zoom

For individuals who have experienced the loss of a pregnancy through TFMR.

If you are interested in more information, or would like to register, please contact us.

Child Loss Support Group

Expected Start Date in May 2026

For parents who have experienced the loss of a child of any age.

If you are interested in more information, please email us.

Resource Corner

Organizations offering information and support to those grieving the loss of a baby before, during, or after birth:

- HAND of the Bay Area
- Return to Zero: HOPE
- Postpartum Support International

Books focused on navigating grief following a pregnancy loss or infant death:

- At a Loss: Finding Your Way After Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Infant Death
- The Miscarriage MAP Workbook: An Honest Guide to Navigating Pregnancy Loss, Working Through the Pain, and Moving Forward

Our Story

By Jessica Caulfield

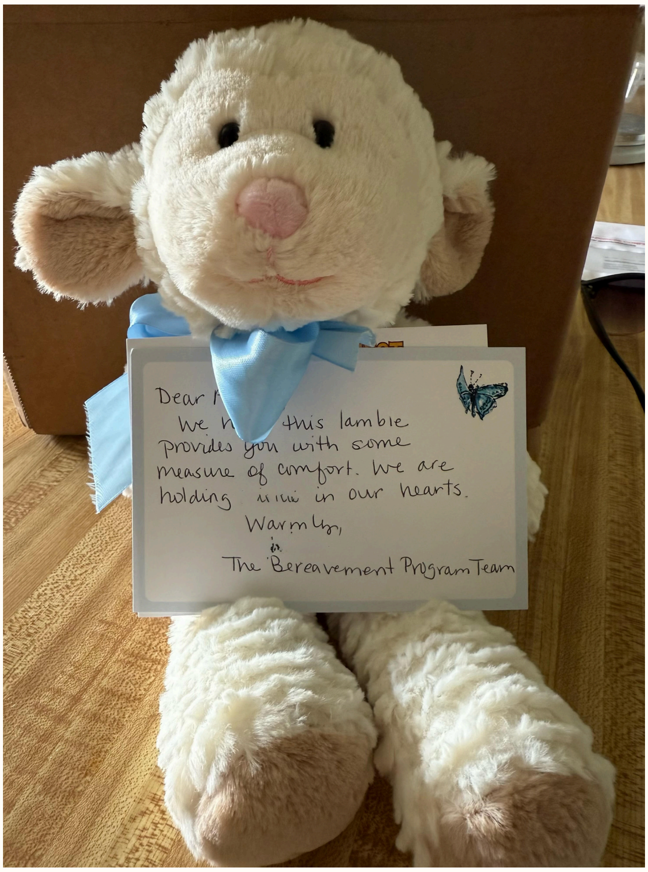
Our son Jack was born on August 4, 2017, and was diagnosed with Trisomy 18 just two days later. We were told he likely wouldn't survive long, but Jack fought for 105 incredible days. Thanks to the compassionate care at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford, we were given time as a family, moments I will treasure forever. Jack spent two weeks in the NICU before we brought him home to Monterey, where he was surrounded by love. Our care team ensured that we had the resources we needed, including in-home nursing support. They gave us the chance to simply be a family of four—even if just for a short while.

When Jack passed away on November 16, 2017, our world was shattered. But even in our deepest grief, we were held by the Family Guidance and Bereavement Program at Stanford Medicine Children's Health.

The emotional and practical support they provided was a lifeline. Out of that space of pain, something unexpected began to grow. I created a stuffed lamb, made to match Jack's weight and length. Holding that lamb filled a part of the emptiness I felt in my arms. It brought comfort to me, to my husband Sean, and to our son Ari. Ari named him Lambie, and soon Lambie became a cherished member of our family—someone we could hold, take to events, include in pictures, and talk about freely.

Around what would have been Jack's first birthday, we started The Lambie Project with the help of the Family Guidance and Bereavement team. We wanted other families, walking this same heartbreaking road, to feel the comfort we did. Each Lambie is handmade and personalized to reflect a baby's weight—something tangible to hold on to when your arms feel unbearably empty. Thanks to generous donations, these Lambies are offered to bereaved families through the hospital's bereavement program completely free of charge.

In October 2019, we welcomed our rainbow baby, Olive. She and Ari talk about Jack often and carry Lambie around with pride, sharing with others what he means to our family. Jack is forever part of our story, and he's included in every family photo. I've since become a Certified Grief Educator, focusing on pregnancy and infant loss, and now lead a support group for military families in Yokosuka, Japan. My grief has transformed into purpose, and now passion. I walk beside others in their loss, just as others once walked beside me.



Dear [illegible]
We h [illegible] this lambie
provides you with some
measure of comfort. We are
holding [redacted] in our hearts.
Warmly,
The Bereavement Program Team

Finding Connection After Loss

By Maya's Mom

When I first considered joining the Bereavement Program's Pregnancy Loss Support Group, I was hesitant. I wasn't sure I was ready to share the deep, raw reality of losing my daughter with people I didn't know. Grieving someone the world never met can feel especially isolating—there are no stories others remember, no photos to point to, just love that has nowhere obvious to land.

I remember that first session clearly—the way the tears simply wouldn't stop. But in that vulnerability, something unexpected happened. I found a bond with these women that I couldn't share even with my closest friends.

Hearing each person's story was very heartbreaking. As one of the moms aptly put it, these sessions were a mental workout. It took a lot from us to show up and relive moments we were still struggling to live past. And yet, over time, we began to look forward to that exhaustion each week—because it meant we didn't have to carry it alone. As I looked around, I realized I was in a room with women who had all gone through the absolute worst thing a mother can experience. In those early days, it felt like there was no "positive future" in sight.

In that space, our facilitators met us exactly where we were—naming emotions we were afraid to say out loud and sitting with feelings that felt daunting to process on my own. Outside that room, life just...kept going. I learned how to carry my grief quietly through ordinary days, even when moments of hope felt complicated by guilt or fear.

When the formal sessions ended, many of us stayed connected. A few months later, we gathered in person for a small potluck—real hugs, real food, real conversation. Around that time, I picked up embroidery as a grounding practice. I had first turned to it to honor my own loss, something to do with my hands when words fell short. Eventually, I felt drawn to create a piece for each of the mothers in our group, recognizing that all of us had been through such a difficult year.

The embroidery is titled **Śaṃsāra**, an Indian concept for the circle of life—the idea that the spirit doesn't simply end but continues in a different form. The tree in the piece holds both loss and life: bare branches to acknowledge grief, and blooming ones to remind us that beauty can still exist alongside it. I stitched the roots at the top, as if they are planted in heaven—a reminder that our connection to our babies isn't buried, but present, and rooted somewhere we can't see, yet can always feel.

Each flower represents one of the five mothers in our group, chosen intentionally. The hibiscus for B, reflecting her home and the way she finds words for the things we're all feeling. A rose for C, honoring her daughter and the fierce devotion she continues to carry. A sunflower for M, reflecting the warmth and quiet light she brings to others. Lantana for K—a resilient, enduring bloom that mirrors her strength and the work she is building in memory of her baby. Each flower was inspired by plants growing in my own garden, a reminder that life continues to grow, even after deep loss.

I'm incredibly grateful to have been part of this community—and to still be connected to it.

When Grief is Invisible:
Understanding Disenfranchised Grief After Pregnancy and Infant Loss

By Ellen Zemarkowitz, LCSW

> *"None of my friends met my baby. It is like he is just a concept to other people. I feel like I am the only one with a grip on him."*
>
> *"Family keeps telling me I can just get pregnant again ... as if it's that easy, as if another baby would make up for the one that I lost."*
>
> *"My boss told me I was upset just because of my hormones, that I'd get over it soon."*
>
> *– Quotes From Grieving Parents*

Sadly, we hear comments like these often. Grieving parents grappling with the devastating loss of a baby, while also having to contend with unhelpful, insensitive, or misguided comments from others. Over time, moments like these—or encounters where there is a telling silence, a judgmental statement, or the conspicuous lack of comforting kindness—can lead to the experience of something called disenfranchised grief.

What is Disenfranchised Grief?

Researchers define this as "the grief that people experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Doka, 1989). Grief can become disenfranchised when "the relationship is not recognized, the loss is not recognized, or the griever is not recognized."

What are some ways parents experience disenfranchised grief after pregnancy and infant loss?

- When others minimize or dismiss the depth of the relationship between parents and baby, sometimes basing this on the gestational age of the baby.
- Experiencing the feeling that only you maintain a bond with your baby, while others do not share a connection.
- Lack of support or interest in talking about your baby or celebrating the precious place they hold.
- Encouragement to put dreams and memories behind you and "move on."
- Expectations that you will only be sad for a brief period before returning to your former self.
- Denial of the complex range of emotions one experiences and denial of the reality that grieving is a lifelong process.
- When others attribute mother's distress to "hormones" or other factors minimizing the experience of grief.
- Failure of others to recognize father's/partner's grief, focusing solely on the birthing parent; failing to recognize siblings' grief.

Situations like these are not only hurtful, but also harmful. It is damaging to the grieving person to be told (either explicitly or implicitly) that their feelings are too big, are too complicated, or should be put away by now. Such messages are isolating, and they can contribute to prolonged or complicated grief. And importantly, we know that the opposite is true. We know that healthy grieving occurs when we give bereaved parents abundant time, attention, and space to share their thoughts and feelings—when we honor their child and celebrate their continued bond.

If you are feeling isolated and think you might be experiencing disenfranchised grief, we encourage you to be in touch with us. We are here, and we would love to hear from you.

WAVES OF GRIEF

You'll find that grief comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was and is no more. And all you can do is float. You find some pieces of the wreckage and you hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float. Stay alive.

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come farther apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything…and the wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is life.

Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come farther apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas, or landing at O'Hare. You can see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.

The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. And other waves will come. And you'll survive them too. If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of loves. And lots of shipwrecks.

This piece about grief was originally posted here.

DONATIONS

All of our services are funded by the philanthropic support of the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health's Association of Auxiliaries. If you would like to make a gift, please donate here.

CONTACT US

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If you would like to contribute an article, photos, or a poem to an upcoming newsletter, please reach out to us by email.

The Family Guidance and Bereavement team at our program's 2025 Family Memory-Making Day