

BONDING WITH YOUR BABY AFTER LOSS

Losing a baby in pregnancy or infancy sometimes complicates your ability to bond with your subsequent baby. Grieving parents may not want to “get attached” out of fear that they’re going to lose this baby too. It’s hard to bond with a baby when you aren’t sure you believe that the baby will make it to birth, and if they do, you aren’t confident in how long you’ll get to keep them. A bereaved parent’s mindset when expecting again is not “when the baby is born” but rather “if the baby is born” and that can make it incredibly hard to want to celebrate the pregnancy and start bonding. Many parents avoid the bonding process to protect their own hearts. Renewed grief after the birth of your subsequent child can also make you feel like you aren’t ready to bond out of fear that you are betraying the baby you lost.

It’s complicated. It’s hard. It’s also normal.

Don’t worry if you aren’t ready to start the process, or if you don’t feel you’ve bonded enough. Fellow loss mom, and author of *Joy at the End of the Rainbow* (A Guide to Pregnancy After Loss), Amanda Ross-White wrote, “There is no single moment that you and your child are officially bonded.” Your actions may be helping you bond with your child without you even knowing or realizing it. Trying again is an act of love that forms a connection between you and your baby. Even the simple act of caring for your new baby helps. Bonding is a lifelong process and your connection will grow over time.

This article explores ways to bond with your baby born after loss. That attachment can start during pregnancy. You can try some of these ideas to help you begin a relationship with your new baby. You don’t need to do it all. Find what works for you, and what makes you feel comfortable, and start when you feel ready.

Ways to Bond During Pregnancy

You don’t have to wait until after the baby is born to start bonding with your baby. Many bereaved parents feel it’s important to start that relationship as soon as they find out about their subsequent pregnancy because they want to celebrate the pregnancy for as long as they can knowing that time is precious and not always unlimited. There are many ways you can start bonding with your baby during pregnancy.

Name Your Baby

Many bereaved parents choose to find out the sex of the baby so they can choose a name for the baby. Starting to call a baby by name helps give parents a sense of closeness and a feeling of a start of a relationship. Pregnant after loss parents have said starting to use the baby’s name helps them feel that the pregnancy is real. Even a nickname for the baby in utero helps create one of those first steps in creating a loving relationship with your child.

Take Bump Pictures

For some expecting parents, taking any type of maternity pictures is a big step. Doing anything that seems like celebrating the pregnancy also feels like you’re jinxing it. But go ahead and pull out that camera and take a selfie, or schedule a fancy maternity shoot. Documenting your pregnancy will help you bond with your new baby and will create beautiful memories for you to look back on when your baby is in your arms.

Read to Your Baby

During the second trimester, your baby will begin to hear sounds outside of the womb. By 18 weeks your baby's ears will start to hear some noises, and by 27-30 weeks your baby will hear and respond to noises. This is a great time to start reading to your baby – end the day with a bedtime story. It may feel silly to read to your stomach, but when the baby starts kicking and rolling in response, you'll feel your relationship starting to grow. You and your partner can take turns reading to your baby. Once the baby is born, watch for voice recognition in their eyes when you or your partner speak. It's an incredible feeling to see your baby look for your voice, a sound with which they're already familiar and from which they get a sense of comfort.

Play Music for or Sing to Your Baby

Likewise, after 5 months you can start playing music for your baby. Create a playlist of lullabies, or introduce your favorite artists to your child. You can also sing to your baby. Again, they'll let you know if they enjoy the music through kicks and pokes. There is also research suggesting your baby will recognize these songs once they're outside of the womb.

Rub Your Belly

The human touch is magic. It creates a feeling of comfort and warmth and sends a message of love to your baby. Go ahead and rub your belly to let your baby know you're there. Massage your abdomen to help calm you and your baby. You'll get to know where your baby is in your belly and get to know their movements better – all of which will help you get to know your child.

Learn Your Baby's Patterns of Movement

Later in pregnancy, your care provider may ask you to start observing your baby's movements and to start noticing patterns so you can assess your baby's health. But these moments where you're "counting kicks" or laying still feeling your baby move also help with your bond. Taking time out of your day – every day – to feel your baby move helps you feel closer. Pick the same time every day. Relax and try to enjoy your baby moving, swimming, somersaulting, and kicking you.

You can include your partner in this as well. One of you can tap a part of your belly and wait for baby to poke you back. It's a special connection to be able to communicate with your baby in this way.

Make Something or Buy Special Items for Your Unborn Child

Immersing yourself in a project to prepare for baby's arrival helps create time to focus on your unborn baby. Many parents like to create something for their baby, whether it be knitting a blanket, sewing a special pillow, or creating wall décor for the nursery. The possibilities are endless, and it will help you start to feel connected.

If you aren't crafty, you can always spend some time shopping for something special for your child. Picking out a coming home outfit or finding a stuffie that will become baby's favorite toy are ways to help you start to feel closer to your baby and give you a chance to start parenting the child.