

Ask Your Therapist

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Invisible Losses

It is well documented that a very high percentage of couples divorce after the death of their child. Whether it is the blaming, the mourning, the isolation or other factors, couples do not easily withstand the death of a child. But what about miscarriages, still births and abortions, either spontaneous or induced?

One of the hardest things people find to give up is a dream: the hope or wish for something better in the future. A pregnancy, whether planned or not, welcomed or not, is a dream machine. It is common practice not to reveal a pregnancy until the third month because so many pregnancies never make it to that time and the parent(s) want to avoid the emotional roller coaster of Good News/Bad News. So they keep the process private and therefore the grief is also private, or invisible.

I have spoken to many parents who have had a stillborn child or one who lived a very short time (hours or days) and heard their dilemma about what to say when asked "How many children do you have?" Do they say "We have one so far" or do they say "We have one who is 3 and one who died at birth"?

There are books written about coping with a miscarriage, a spontaneous abortion or a stillborn child but I have never seen a book on how to cope with an induced abortion. For so many women who chose to end a pregnancy because it was right for them at that time, there are still emotional and psychological after effects of that decision later in their life. I have counseled many women who have had abortions: some recent and some decades ago. Within the intake process I ask about past traumas of all sorts and I include both abortions and being adopted as potentially traumatic.

I have heard many women tell me about their abortion experiences. And almost every woman describes the isolation and loneliness of their decision. "I didn't even tell my best friend!"; "I would never tell my mother!" or "He told me never to mention it again" are common things I hear.

I have always said that "It is in the details of our silence that we hide our shame." When we cannot say what happened to us, we cannot be authentic. When we cannot be authentic we lose track of who we really are and play the part of who we think we are or want to be. In this way our invisible losses can change the course of our lives unless we make them visible and deal with them emotionally. Some people choose to do that in the safety of a therapist's office. Others deal with it in their own ways. What is important is to do something healing.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to www.krishnabai.com where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.