

# The grief that goes with a living Cherub.

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As strange as that sounds, that is what happens. Coming to grips with the thought that the baby you carry may die within hours of birth is a nightmarish idea. That is what women who know they are carrying a CDH baby have to face. The 'pre-grieving' that occurs during pregnancy is something that each of us deals with in our own style. What is not discussed as much is the 'post-grieving' that occurs when that cherub lives. Let me explain:

You have 4 ½ months or maybe more, of preparing yourself. The baby that kicks inside you now will be born with massive hurdles to overcome. Not only do you have to prepare for birth, you have to prepare for a most abnormal 24hrs after birth, a scary, no one can tell me what is going to happen, unknown. You have to focus on that cherub getting through CDH from the time you find out. The fun of buying baby clothes evaporates, you get to tour the intensive care nursery, you can't let yourself think too long on the negative, it may not happen, but you do think of the worst every now & again.

Then it all happens, the cherub is here, the outside world stops for you as you hone in on the life that hangs by a thread. The stress of the few days after birth, surgery, recovery, drugs, lights 24hrs a day, the weird noises of intensive care, even the unrealistic constant temperature in a hospital, all take their toll. But you can't deal with this because there is one thing only that takes top priority, your baby.

Then you go home with your cherub. Now the demands of a new baby are upon you, but you haven't really prepared yourself for the mental & physical strain of this. Then the other half of your brain kicks in & says to you, 'what are you on about, your baby is alive, don't be so petty'. The tiredness sets in, you are feeling down, but that's not possible, your baby is alive. You have the priorities in order, life at the top, why aren't you floating every second of the day?

As enjoyable as they can be, the first few months of a baby's life is also an exhausting, tension filled (why are they crying now?), life changing learning curve. What normally takes us 7 odd months to prepare for, you have now done overnight. There has been no time to understand & come to terms with everything that has just gone on in your life.

We grieve because of loss. What have you lost? The joy of a problem free pregnancy, the innocence of thinking 'everything will be fine', those first moments straight after birth of holding & bonding with your newborn. Not being able to 'mother' your baby in the first few weeks of life, having a stranger tell you when & how often you can & can't do things with your baby. Never being alone with your baby for weeks, knowing others have more control over what happens to your baby than you do.

We know we are privileged to have this cherub, life is precious, but we are only human. You've just witnessed a life/death struggle that you had no control over, your

body has been through hormone party overload. You don't get to live the stereotype happy mum/family scenario.

The downward feelings don't happen straight away, in fact it takes months. You are too busy adapting to your new life, dealing with all the well wishers, maybe even still dealing with hospitals, Dr's & the system, getting the feeding & sleeping pattern worked out. It happens as you start to come out of this busy, all intense time that you may start to feel it.

See it for what it is. Talk with someone who understands. Often we relate grieving with the death of a person, but it can be just as valid to grieve over other losses, such as those first precious moments with your newborn. It goes without saying that the grieving talked about here is not on par with death, but important non the less to recognise the loss, have a cry, have a sigh, then plan for tomorrow.