

Eve's Story on processing the loss of a pregnancy

So there I was, finally pregnant after wanting it to happen for so long. My partner and I had recently heard the heartbeat so everything was 'in the bag' so to speak. I was worried about telling work and didn't know how they were going to react to news of me being pregnant. I was in a busy job, one they probably didn't have a replacement for before the end of the year. But anyway, it was great news and we were so happy. You can't help it, even when you first find out, knowing you are in your early phase of pregnancy, to make plans, start imagining and already form an attachment to what your future is going to be like.

I remember being so excited pulling into the carpark before our final scan for the first trimester, my partner had taken the afternoon off so he could be there to see the scan. And then there it was, some awkward silence, some deeper movements across my stomach with the ultrasound machine, followed by an 'I'm sorry...' there was no heartbeat anymore. We were both pretty devastated. We had had what the doctor called a missed miscarriage. My body hadn't registered that it had stopped growing, but there it was, no bigger than what they believe was about 9 weeks and there I was at the 12 week mark, thinking I had made it through all the morning sickness, body changes and keeping it quiet at work. I had already formulated my plan for telling work, I had already started dreaming about baby's room, I had even told some close family our pregnancy news.

I cried myself to sleep that night, and the following day I was booked into hospital to have an operation. It all happened so quickly and it wasn't where I wanted to be. I thought I would be going in to get our due date confirmed, hear the heartbeat and start the next phase of pregnancy and being a mum - not to have it all halted so quickly. I had a pretty miserable few days after that and tried to get over it. No one around us really knew what was happening apart from a few close friends and my parents. It was only my partner who consoled me when I woke up in the middle of the night crying. Even now thinking back to it all, still brings tears to my eyes - I don't think you really get over it. But how you deal with it does.

I went straight back to work, got busy, and our personal life was extremely busy too. My partner and I started getting shorter with each other, he was hurting too but we didn't know what to say to one another. We just wanted to get pregnant again but even the intimacy side didn't seem like normal. I figured we had done pretty well to just keep trucking along - while at work it was like nothing had happened at all. I went to the doctor as had a ton of questions about where to next from me, whether I was infertile, if there was something I could do to make sure I didn't miscarry again. To everyone at work I was still holding it together like nothing had happened, but behind the scenes I had turned into a bit of a nervous wreck - gutted by the loss of something we had never met, never held, but had made space for in our lives - and in the wardrobe with a few impulse baby buys as you do. So the doctor empathised, but then she asked how I was doing. Not the work side, not the getting on with things, but how 'I' was coping. Now this is where I thought I had it all together. And apparently I didn't. That simple question opened some sort of flood gate, and I realised I wasn't ok. I was barely holding things together. I was burning out at work, I was quick to get frustrated both at work and at home, didn't have the energy to exercise, didn't want to be around my friends and above all else, I wasn't allowing myself to grieve, and my partner and I hadn't grieved together and reconnected as a couple.

The doctor suggested I take some sick leave - time to think, time to stop. At first I couldn't think of where to put that in my busy life, and found myself pushing back against that idea. I went home that day adamant I was fine. But after I spent some time thinking about it and saying to myself that if I don't do something different, nothing is going to change, I got back in touch with the doctor to take up the offer of some leave. I also spoke to my manager and said told

him what had happened and he was only more than supportive for me to take some time. Taking this time was the best thing that I did. I didn't realise how close I was to breaking. During my leave, I started a journal, arranged a counselling session and talked to more people about what had happened. I also searched online for a small grieving and acceptance ceremony I could do to sort of mark the chapter and as a way to remember (I still have the tree we planted in an outdoor pot). I needed to acknowledge that this was a loss, it was devastating, and that even though I never got to hold them in my arms, it was no less gut wrenching to lose them.

Now looking back, I don't think I will truly forget or never ever get upset again when I tell people what happened, but I can better manage it now and how I think about the whole experience is different. I continued a few counselling sessions and that was a safe space for me to reflect, cry, talk and think about the future. I also found that picking up some grounding and mindfulness exercises did help me centre again when I was starting to get back trapped in the blame cycles or feeling helpless and overwhelmed. When I wasn't talking about it, wasn't allowing myself to accept it by trying to bury it away and 'get over it' – I wasn't able to move forward. I was trapping myself in that space. You need to forgive yourself, love yourself and give yourself time to reflect, grieve and remember. Now when I see the tree we planted blossom each year, its something nice and something I can remember about what we went through and reflect on that experience.

Asking for help, even accepting support you have been offered – and to admit that you might need it – is hard, especially for someone like me who doesn't like to be seen as weak or vulnerable. But its worth it. You only have one life, so being able to best cope with the experiences is worth the courage stepping up and saying you're not actually doing ok – you will have those experiences for a lifetime so coping with them the best you can is worth the hard challenge of change to invest in yourself. I also found that in sharing and confiding in others, there were so many people who had gone through similar experiences.