



Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD

Perinatal loss. The experience is sadly familiar. Family members, friends, me. Though the term used then was “miscarriage” and the emotional support more than lacking. The sense then was that it wasn’t a real person anyway and the pregnancy wasn’t viable so let it go and move on. Give it time, you’ll get pregnant again. For many of us getting pregnant again either didn’t happen or ended up in another loss. I know one woman who endured seven miscarriages before turning to donor eggs. Two friends went with adoption. I didn’t have children.

**In today's culture**, there's far more sensitivity to the pregnancy experience, viable or not. I know a professional photographer who donates her time to go to the hospital and take photos when there's a stillbirth, or a sudden death, etc. She captures the family, and yes, they are a family, and yes, the infant was in fact a real person in the parents' hearts and minds. Yet, even with research that highlights parents' increased anxiety and risk of attachment issues with the pregnancy that follows a perinatal loss, there is often little understanding that bereaved families may need different care in their subsequent pregnancies.

**Joann O'Leary and Jane Warland** set out to change that as they explore the lived experience of pregnancy and parenting after a perinatal loss in their new book, *Meeting the Needs of Parents Pregnant and Parenting After Perinatal Loss*.

**Meeting the Needs of Parents Pregnant and Parenting After Perinatal Loss** offers a supportive framework that integrates continuing bonds and attachment theories to support prenatal parenting at each stage of pregnancy. Giving insight into how a parent's world view of a pregnancy may have changed following a loss, readers are provided with tools to assist parents as they explore pregnancy (conception, gestation, labor and birth) once again.

**The authors discuss** multiple perspectives starting with the Parenting Experience of Loss. Yes, the moment a couple learns they are pregnant the relationship with the wee one begins. There's the anticipation and at times fear, the joy and at times confusion. It's all about the emotions and the preparations. The authors note that in all of this, parents don't anticipate their baby dying during the pregnancy or in the newborn period. How, they ask, does one recover from such a profound loss? (pg. 1). And then, extending the experience, how do parents make sense of being a parent to a baby no longer physically present when pregnant with a new baby? Touching and touchy subjects to consider.

**The authors note that** "the resolution of

parental grief involves a reorganization of the survivor's sense of self to find a new normal and transformation of the inner representation of the dead child in the parents' social world" (pg. 3). Working with parents who are pregnant after a previous loss involves uniquely different tasks such as working with fear (of another loss), working through avoidance (not wanting to attach to the new baby), moving past not wanting to let go of their grief (feeling loyal to the first baby), and grieving the loss as a parent (as a self) (pg. 10). O'Leary and Warland have created a relationship-focused attachment-based intervention (discussed in this book) to address how to gently guide parents at each gestational stage of pregnancy.

**These stages include** the following: smooth phase (preconception); break-up phase (disequilibrium); sorting-out phase (12-24 weeks gestation); inwardizing phase (24-32 weeks gestation); expansion phase (32 weeks-birth), and preparation for labor and birth. Each phase is discussed in detail including helpful interventions for professionals working with these families (recommendations for practice), parental features (behavioral and emotional states), vignettes from parents reflecting on their own experiences, case studies and up-to-date research findings.

**Other chapters deal with** loss in a multi-fetal pregnancy, fetal reduction in multi-fetal pregnancies, heart-break choices, education support groups, bereaved parents raising children, the children themselves—what's it like living with the loss of a twin in utero, what's it like living in the shadow of a sibling who died before you were born?, fathers and holistic health care for bereaved parents. Every conceivable experience with perinatal loss is included in this well written, well thought-out book.

**Written for** professionals, students and interested persons (those mainly in health and social welfare), this book explores what's currently known about supporting bereaved families encountering the challenges of a subsequent pregnancy and how to integrate a relationship-focused attachment-based intervention.