

Stillbirth Happens – let's talk Podcast

Puddle Jumping – Understanding siblings' experiences of stillbirth

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In this unique episode we hear from Jaime and Erin's children and learn about their experiences of stillbirth as siblings. Marissa (19 years old), Gracie (17 years old) and Quinn (13 years old) speak their own truth about what it is like to grow up as living children in a household touched by stillbirth. We also hear from Andrea Warnick, registered nurse and psychotherapist, about how to support children as they process death and how to keep a stillborn baby present in family life.

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Erin Bohn 0:03

Welcome to our podcast, *Stillbirth Happens - let's talk*. My name is Erin Bohn, and I'm a proud mother to three children. My daughter Gracie is 17 years old, my daughter Ryann would have been 15, and my son Quinn is now 13 years old.

Jaime Ascher 0:29

My name is Jamie Ascher, and I'm also a mother to three. My daughter Marissa is 20 years old. My son James was stillborn in 2010, and my son Zachary was stillborn in 2013. Erin and I met at a conference and have been friends ever since. Our shared identity as bereaved parents and our commitment to support other families whose lives are touched by stillbirth has bonded us forever.

Erin 1:00

Jamie and I are here to help you feel less alone. We are working to break the silence around stillbirth. As Jamie and I know, personally, stillbirth happens, let's talk.

Jaime 1:15

In this very special episode of *Stillbirth Happens*, we're joined by our own children. You'll hear first from my daughter Marissa, then from Erin's daughter Gracie, and finally, her son Quinn.

Erin 1:26

After that, we'll be joined by Andrea Warnick, a registered psychotherapist, nurse who will talk about how we can support living children in processing their grief after stillbirth and offer ideas for keeping a stillborn sibling present in family life.

Jaime 1:43

First, let me introduce you all to my daughter, Marissa.

Erin 1:47

It's so nice to finally meet you! Like, I feel like I know you, but I really don't.

Marissa 1:53

No, yeah, it's wonderful meeting you. It's awesome.

Erin 1:56

So where are you right now?

Marissa 1:59

I am in my apartment at university in Kelowna.

Erin 2:05

What are you taking?

Marissa 2:06

Um, nursing.

Erin 2:07

Nursing. And what kind of nurse do you want to be? Like, general nurse...

Marissa 2:11

Um, I'm not too sure yet.

Erin 2:14

Yeah.

Marissa 2:14

I don't know. Wherever the wind takes me.

Erin 2:18

I love it. What do you like to do for fun?

Marissa 2:22

Yeah, I like to just be active. I like to be outdoors for fun. I love going on hikes. And recently, I've been into running. My roommates and I are running a half marathon, so just training for that recently has been kind of fun.

Erin 2:39

So, we're here to talk about your brothers. How old were you when your mom was pregnant with James, and how old were you when your mom was pregnant with Zachary?

Marissa 2:50

So, I think I was about four when my mom was pregnant with James, and I think seven, I'm not 100% sure, but somewhere around there with Zachary.

Erin 3:00

Do you remember your mom being pregnant with both brothers?

Marissa 3:05

Um, I don't really remember James, per se, but I do remember Zachary. I think I actually came up with his name. I remember we were sitting out on our porch or on our back deck, and I was like, Zachary, that's the name.

Erin 3:19

Wow, this is something your mom has never told me!

Marissa 3:22

Really!

Jaime 3:24

Yeah, I don't think I've shared, Marissa named him.

Erin Bohn 3:28

Did you know you were having a boy with Zachary?

Jaime 3:31

Um, we did know we were having a boy, and we had talked about names, and she just wanted to be a part of the naming process. And Zachary happened to be one of the names I liked as well; I had never brought it up, but she did. And, yeah, no, she named him.

Erin 3:50

That is amazing. I love that. What do you remember about your mom being pregnant with Zachary?

Marissa 3:59

Yeah, I remember when she told me she was pregnant, 'cause as a kid, I often asked her, I was like, am I going to have another sibling? Or, like, am I going to have a sibling? Blah, blah, blah. And I remember, I think, I got, what is it called like when you have a first communion. But I remember that night, after they told me that she was pregnant with Zachary, and I think I, like exploded with happiness and started jumping all over the room.

Erin 4:27

And what an amazing memory that is to have, like on this journey of grief is so profoundly sad, but there's also some good, right? And there's some exciting memories that I'm so glad to have

to hang on to. Do you remember when you found out James died when he was stillborn? Do you remember any of that?

Marissa 4:51

Honestly, not much from James. All my memories are kind of Zachary in that.

Erin 4:56

So, Zachary, this part, I do know that your mom has shared with me you were able to meet Zachary.

Marissa 5:04

I was, yes. I went to the hospital.

Erin 5:08

Who were you with when you found out that Zachary had passed away?

Marissa 5:11

I was at my grandma's house because she was taking care of me. I didn't really know why at the time. But I don't know. I feel like, as a seven-year-old, I was very perceptive, and I kind of felt like something was off, because normally, like, my parents don't just drop me off and then don't say anything, and leave, and then my parents came back, and I immediately saw that my mom had a wristband on. And I was like, that was like, that doesn't look like a Playland wristband, that looks like a hospital wristband. And I immediately knew, because I feel like, at the time, I remembered James passing away, and what that looked like, even though I don't remember it now, I feel like when I was younger, I did, and I knew, and it was the same feeling. And I don't know if this is exactly what happened, but this is just what I remember, I remember like going into like a closet at my grandma's and just like sitting on the floor and just started crying because I knew, but no one had said anything. I just I knew, and the look on my mom's face too, so that was really sad. And I remember my mom coming over, and I think she just sat outside the closet, and we had a good cry together. And then I came out and gave her a hug. And then I think they went back to the hospital, and then my grandma and I went there and met them there.

Erin 6:26

Awe, I love that your mom and you had that time together. Do you remember going into the hospital room?

Marissa 6:37

I do, um, sort of. I think she was in a single room, and the nurse was just like finishing up something, and so like the curtain, and then she the nurse opened the curtain, and then there was my mom, and then she had a little, a little baby with her, and I remember that I got to hold him, so that was really special and really cool. I could tell my mom was really like, she was really sad, but I could tell that she really enjoyed seeing me and Zachary interact. And, yeah, it was cool.

Erin 7:11

And having that sibling moment together.

Marissa 7:14

Yeah, that was special.

Erin 7:17

Yeah. When you guys all got home, your mom has also shared that there was some play therapy that she had you in. Do you remember going to play therapy?

Marissa 7:31

I do. At the time, I didn't really know why I was going to play therapy. Well, I did because I kind of had anxiety as a kid. I think I had pretty severe anxiety. I didn't really know, didn't really know where that anxiety stemmed from. But now, as I'm older and reflecting, I'm like, okay, maybe it's like, attachment or issues or something like that, or not issues, but like I was just scared that people in my life were gonna be taken away without me being able to do anything or stuff was out of my control and I didn't know how to handle it. The play therapy did teach me a thing called heartstrings, and when I felt like sad or just, I missed my mom, or I felt like I didn't have any control over my life, I would pull my heart strings, and my mom would pull her heart strings, and then we would be connected. And that really stuck with me for a really long time, and I still think about it, and sometimes I still pull them. Sometimes.

Erin 8:33

Were you a part of the play therapy, Jamie?

Jaime 8:36

We always went in for the first like five minutes, and then left, and it was Marissa and her therapist, and we went back for the last five minutes, and sometimes my husband and I had a session ourselves with a therapist, but it was generally just her and her therapist. Yeah.

Erin 8:58

I love that. Do you ever talk about them?

Marissa 9:03

Yeah, as a kid in elementary school, I'll just kind of go chronologically. Our teachers would always have us fill out these, like, get to know me forms. And there was always the question that was like, do you have any siblings? And I often sat there sitting at my desk, staring at those words, because yes, I have siblings, but how do I explain to people in my class that they're not here on earth with me right now? So, I think at that point in my life, I didn't want to explain it to anybody. I didn't really want to talk about it to people. I was quite a shy kid, so I put no but it was like a punch to the heart every time. And then, kind of, I didn't. I just kind of avoided the topic in middle school and in high school. But of course, my friends knew, like I would tell all my close friends or people that I, you know, talk to more often, but I would say the majority of my class didn't know. And now that I'm kind of in university, you know, I tell people, and I recently got a

tattoo. It's of a dragonfly. It's for my brothers and for my mom. So, I get some questions that are like, oh, like, you have a really cute tattoo. Does it have a meaning? And then I'm kind of put in that same situation of, like, the whole elementary school thing, of, do I actually tell them the real meaning, or do I do the watered-down version of, like, oh, it's like a me and my mom thing, you know? And sometimes I deep dive into the fact that it's for my mom, but also for my brothers. And sometimes I just say, oh, thank you. Yeah, it's really cute. So...

Erin 10:49

You use your intuition really of whether you're going to share or not share. And there's really no rhyme or reason, not that you're not willing to share, but it also depends on who, and the trust.

Marissa 11:02

No, exactly. It definitely depends on who the person is, and then what kind of setting I'm in.

Erin 11:07

And you do what feels right. Can you go into detail of why you got the tattoo that you chose to get?

Marissa 11:15

Yeah, from the minute I can even remember my mom, dragonflies for her have been a sign of like resilience and hope, and it was our plan to get it together. But due to like certain circumstances, I just have mine before. So eventually she'll get one too, and we'll have them together. But it's to remind me every time I look at it, I just remember that my mom is this like, strong, powerful, resilient woman that like inspires me to be like that, and it also reminds me of my brothers and I have it in the spot, it's kind of on my bicep and if I give myself a hug, the dragonfly goes right on my heart, which I realized that after so it was just kind of like a little extra thing. But so, I, whenever I feel really sad, I just kind of do that, and I know that they're all there with me.

Erin 12:07

Okay, I know nobody can see us. We can see each other, and Jamie and I are just crying right now.

Jaime 12:15

This mama can't talk at the moment.

Erin 12:18

Oh, so I have heard about this plan of doing— is it going to be matching tattoos?

Jaime 12:25

Similar, mine's going to be a little bit different than hers, but yes, it'll be the same dragonfly.

Erin 12:29

Oh, I love it. Did you guys plan on, this is what we're going to do? Or how did it come about? How did you guys decide that let's do this? Let's go and get matching or similar tattoos...

Marissa 12:43

I think it was when I was either in grade 11 or grade 10, and I just go to my mom, and I'm like, we should get tattoos. And she's like, what? And I'm like, we should get dragonfly tattoos. She was like, well, we got to really think about it. And I'm like, yeah. And then I thought about it, and I was in grade 12, and I was like, I still want a dragonfly tattoo. First year, I still wanted a dragon like, first university, I still wanted a dragonfly tattoo. And I was like, you know what? It's second year university, I've wanted this tattoo for like, over three years. I'm just gonna get it. I don't know if my mom has a different story.

Jaime 13:17

Yeah, I mean, mom's been thinking for many years of getting one too, but has never, you know, jumped on it, and then the conversation started, like, like Marissa said, and it was always going to be - mine's going to be two dragonflies, actually - but the fact that that was something that she wanted and that we are going to do together just means a lot.

Erin 13:38

Do you have any memories or rituals that you or traditions that you have created to keep James and Zachary's memory alive in your home and have days that commemorate them. Do you have any of those at all?

Marissa 13:57

On their birthdays, we normally have dinner, what kind of we think they would want dinner to be at, like, each age they're at. I think one year we had mac and cheese and, like, chocolate cake, I don't know, so just to kind of match, and they mean to just think of activities, what they would have liked to do at that age. And just whenever we see something that's kind of age appropriate for one of them, we always just kind of tell each other, oh, like, I bet Zachary would be doing that right now or...

Erin 14:29

Right. Oh, that's fun. For your future, I don't know if you are thinking if you're wanting to have kids one day, but if you choose to have kids one day, do you think that having two brothers who are stillborn, do you think that that has weighed on your thought process? Or have you put any thoughts into this? I know you're super young, but have you thought about any of that?

Marissa 14:57

Yeah, I've actually thought about it a lot. I've voiced this to my mom before and in my head multiple times that I'm kind of scared to announce to anyone, really, even my mom, which I feel like at the time, I'll probably tell her, but just like the general public, or like even my friends, that I kind of have to wait until after 23 weeks because both of my brothers were stillborn, I think at 23 weeks. So, for me, I just have to get past 23 weeks, and then I'll be able to tell people. And this

is just me right now, but I've thought about that for a while. I think since, since Zachary died, honestly. From the time that I could even comprehend of having children, I just have to wait that time, because I just don't want to get hurt, like I was hurt when I was younger, and I don't want to get too attached, if you know what I mean. And I know that sounds kind of sad, but I think it might be like a coping thing.

Erin 15:59

Yeah, your mom and I understand that completely. On the flip side of it. How has your brother's deaths influenced you on how you deal with the grief and how you deal with loss and sadness? Do you see any of the positives that have come out from your brother's stories?

Marissa 16:24

It, it has definitely influenced me as a person and my beliefs and my coping mechanisms, and basically kind of shaped me to who I am today. It kind of gave me a push into the healthcare field, and like thinking of wanting to be a nurse, just because I've seen what my mom has gone through at the hospital, and it just kind of made me want to help people through tough times. And it's also given me many different coping strategies, like, I mean what I learned in therapy with the heartstrings and just also kind of living every day for the moment, because life is a beautiful gift, and live every day with a positive outlook, because everything can change in an instant. So that's kind of how it's influenced me in that way.

Erin 17:22

Yeah, the whole of life happening to you at such a young age, it breaks my heart that you and my kids and other people who have had profound loss in their childhood, how much it made you probably grow up a lot faster. On the flip side of that, talking to you, what a gift. And I think your brothers would be so incredibly proud of you, because you are a phenomenal young woman who is going to be an incredible nurse one day.

Marissa 17:59

Awe, thank you.

Jaime 18:04

Thanks so much to Marissa for sharing her experience with us. I think it's time to meet Gracie.

Gracie 18:11

My name is Gracie. I'm 17. I'm in grade 11. I competitive swim. I hang out with my friends, and that's about it.

Jaime 18:19

So good to see you and talk to you today. Thanks so much for being here with us.

Gracie 18:25

Ya, no problem.

Jaime 18:26

We're here today because we want to hear about your experience. How old were you when your sister Ryann was born still?

Gracie 18:33

I was two and a half.

Jaime 18:35

Okay, and so do you remember when you first understood that Ryann had died?

Gracie 18:41

Well, I didn't think I remembered any of it from when I was like two, and I don't think I really started understanding until probably kindergarten or grade one. It's always been, like, talked about lots at home, and so, like, with my friends at school and stuff, I would talk about it a lot, and then I don't know it just then it just started making more sense I think as I got older, and the more I, like, talked about it and stuff.

Jaime 19:03

Yeah. So how do you talk about it with with your friends? And what does that look like for you? And maybe it's changed over the years. And so, you can share with us sort of different stages.

Gracie 19:14

Yeah, when I was younger, I just kind of was like, yeah, like, I have a brother and a sister and like, I'm the oldest and stuff. And I think now I don't like mention it as often as like I used to when I was younger.

Jaime 19:27

And what was it like for you as a little kid knowing that you had a sister who had passed away.

Gracie 19:33

I don't know, I was just so like, normal for me, like, I didn't, like, feel any different from anybody else, like it was still sad, but like, it was just like, that's just how I've been used to like everything. 'Cause before she was stillborn, I didn't remember anything, really, 'cause I was so young.

Jaime 19:51

Right. And do you remember? Because 13 months after Ryann was born, your brother was was born. I know that you were young, very little, but your sister didn't come home, and your brother did. Is there any memory of that at all?

Gracie 20:09

So, I don't actually remember this happening, but so when my sister was stillborn, I stayed the night at my one of my mom's, like, family friend's house, and my dad came and picked me up, and he was like, k, we're gonna go see your mom. And then a year later, when Quinn was born, then he was like, we're gonna go see your baby brother. And in my head, I thought that if the

baby was born, then my mom had died, but if the year before, when the baby had died, then my mom was still alive. So, I don't remember anything of that, and that's just like what my mom has always told me, but so I guess in my little, like two-year-old head, that's just how I thought of it.

Jaime 20:50

That's how you comprehended. Wow. That's very powerful. So, remembering back when, and you said it was sort of kindergarten grade one-ish, where you sort of have memories of you realizing everything. Is there anything that your mom or family did that helps, do you think? Or Ryann's just always been part of your family?

Gracie 21:11

Yeah, I think Ryann's just, like, always been a part of our family. And I even, like, would draw her, like, in family photos and stuff like that. Like we would like to have to, like, draw our family, like, stick man and stuff like that. And I would draw Ryann, like, in the sky with wings. And it was just like, it's what I did.

Jaime 21:29

And so, do you remember any ways in which you expressed your feelings when you were little?

Gracie 21:33

I do remember feeling very like, confused. And one of the ways my mom, like, helped me out with that was she had, like, art therapy. So, she would, like, just give me a canvas and some paint, and like, I would just paint. And so, I don't, like remember anymore, like doing them, but when I was younger, I would be able to, like, point out and be like, I remember doing that one, and I was like, I was really happy doing that one, or I was really angry doing that one. And I think that helped.

Jaime 22:00

Absolutely. As you've gotten older, has the way you think about Ryann or her place in your life changed?

Gracie 22:09

Not really, like I still think of her every day and like, I still think of her as my sister. I just don't like talk about her as often, but I don't think much has like, changed.

Jaime 22:19

Do you ever go visit Ryann at her grave?

Gracie 22:23

Yeah, I did today, actually.

Jaime 22:24

Did you?

Gracie 22:25

Yeah, one of my friends had an appointment, so we dropped her off there, and then we were driving around. I was like, let's just go to, like, the cemetery. I haven't been there for a while. So, we walked off, and I cleaned off her grave because there was a bunch of snow on it.

Jaime 22:38

That's beautiful. And that's beautiful that you and your friends, your friends, went with you today too to see her?

Gracie 22:44

Yeah, they did.

Jaime 22:45

Have you shared her there with them before?

Gracie 22:49

Yeah, I have. We've been friends since for quite a few years. So...

Jaime 22:53

Yeah? Beautiful. And so, do you talk about Ryann with your friends?

Gracie 22:58

Um, sometimes it's come up, but I'm usually, like, a lot closer friends with them when I bring it up now.

Jaime 23:04

Mhmm. We talked to my daughter the other day, and that's, I think that's the similar response as she gave to Erin, was the closer the friends, the more that she spoke about them. So that's very similar. How does your family keep Ryann's memory alive?

Gracie 23:19

Well, every year on her birthday, we make angel food cake, and my brother and I will like help decorate the cake. On October 15, my mom lights a candle for her.

Jaime 23:30

Yeah. Tell us about the cake. Can you think about one of the cakes one year that you can describe for us, share with us?

Gracie 23:38

Last year, I made it by myself, and I took the sprinkles, and they were like bigger, so I made like flowers out of it, and I covered her cake with flowers.

Jaime 23:49

Oh, that's beautiful. What a beautiful tradition you have. Some people who experience stillbirth wonder how to talk to their other children about it. What do you think is important for parents or siblings to know?

Gracie 24:05

I would say, don't lie about it. Like, it's a really heavy topic, and it's really hard for somebody, like, so young to understand it, but I think if you, like, lie, then it doesn't as they grow up, like their thought of it, it's isn't the truth really. And then I think when they really find out, then it's just more confusing, in a way. So, I feel like it's better to, like, talk about it often, but be, like, truthful with it, even though it's hard.

Jaime 24:35

Do you think you maybe had to grow up faster or in a different way, or understanding complexities of things differently?

Gracie 24:43

I would say, like, in some ways, yes, but I also, like, didn't grow up much more different than any other kids in my grade. It's just that, like, death was less awkward to talk about it, because if we ever had any questions growing up, like, we could just ask my mom. So, I think when I was younger, like, I had a better understanding of it than other kids in my grade, in a way. But I don't think I grew up any faster than them.

Jaime 25:10

Well, your answer right there, just shows me that your insight is far greater than even many adults. Death is awkward, and stillbirth death is even more awkward for people to talk about, so the fact that you and I are sitting here today having a conversation, and for us it's normal, is pretty remarkable. So, thank you for just being so open and honest. It's a breath of fresh air to speak with you. Something came to mind when we were talking and just the dynamic with your siblings, because you're in a family where you were born first, you're the first born, and then Ryann was stillborn, and then Quinn came. Do the two of you speak of Ryann, or are there dynamics in play that have happened anytime over the years that you can think of where the three of you are in some sort of interaction?

Gracie 26:11

Yeah, when me and my brother were younger, we didn't have to share a room because there was only two other bedrooms, but we used to fight over which room Ryann would have to sleep in. And Quinn used to always be like, no, like she would sleep in my room because, like, we're closer in age. And then as we got older, it was like no, like Ryann would be in your room, because you guys are both girls. So, we would, like, fight over that. I remember even, like, when Quinn and I were younger, too we used to talk about, like, what foods we used to think that Ryann was like, because there were some things that I liked and some things that Quinn didn't like.

Jaime 26:42

That's so neat. I like hearing about this insight and what those conversations may have looked like. And so, looking into the future, I know, I know that you're 17, and this, you know, is into the future. But do you think Ryann and your family's experience with losing Ryann may influence your decision, or what your thoughts on childbirth look like?

Gracie 27:05

I think, like, I still want to have children. The thought of it like makes me super nervous, but I know that if it were to happen, because I've grown up with it being such, like, so talked about so often, I would be in a different position. Like, I'm not the sibling anymore, I'm the mom, but I think if it were to happen to me, I would know that I could get through it in a way. And like, there's, like, people that I could talk to and stuff.

Jaime 27:33

We are so, so very grateful that you spent the time with us this afternoon to have this chat, and you're going to help a lot of people so, thank you so much, Gracie.

Gracie 27:46

Thank you.

Erin 27:51

Now it's time to bring in my son, Quinn. Here's our chat with him.

Quinn 27:58

My name's Quinn. I'm 13. I live in Manitoba. I have some top three sports. I really like hockey. I've played it for a little while, since I'm seven, and then I've just picked up the uh, sport, golf, it's very fun...

Jaime 28:13

...nice...

Quinn 28:13

...um, really enjoying it so far. And then badminton, it's a school sport, but I'm pretty good at it, and I'm enjoying it so far.

Jaime 28:21

That's awesome. Quinn, I'll go back to hockey. It's one of my favorites. And I come from a hockey family too. So, I hear you're a goalie. What got you into that?

Quinn 28:32

I picked it up one time, and my coach said I was pretty good. I mean, Dad wasn't too happy, but...

Jaime 28:38

Haha. Goalies tend to have, like, different prep that they like to do before the game. Is that something in your mind too, or how you prepare for your games?

Quinn 28:51

I mean, I like to show up a little bit earlier than most people, and I have to, just like, sit by myself for a bit and just kind of like being quiet. And then I'll warm up by myself, and then I'll go warm up with my team, and then we'll go back to the dressing room and get ready.

Jaime 29:06

Excellent, excellent. So, you were born about 13 months after your sister, Ryann, passed away from stillbirth. Do you remember when you first found out about Ryann?

Quinn 29:18

She's kind of just always been there, like I just remember my mom telling me about her memory box and showing me stuff in it.

Jaime 29:24

Yup. Are there any family traditions or little things that you do to make you feel connected to Ryann?

Quinn 29:33

All the time during her birthday, we always go and make an angel cake for her, and we decorate it, and it's kind of just like a memory of her, and then we'll look through a memory box, and that's really it.

Jaime 29:46

Nice. So, as a family, you make you make the cake together.

Quinn 29:50

Mhm.

Jaime 29:51

Excellent. And so, when you say she's always there, what does that mean? How? How can you describe that?

Quinn 29:57

Well, it's like, it would almost be like a little gap in, like, time. It's like she is or she was there, and then she just has a space in it. So, if, like, we didn't have that she, like our family, wouldn't be kind of complete.

Jaime 30:11

Wow. That's a great way to describe it, Quinn. So, have you ever had to explain Ryann to a friend of yours?

Quinn 30:18

Um, yes, I've explained it a couple times now. But just, like, little questions of like, did you get to meet her or something like that? But then I explain it, like, the same way to everybody, mostly. I just mostly say, like, the timeline of when she was born and when I was born. I explained that I didn't really meet her, but I'll say some stories about her.

Jaime 30:37

So, being part of a family that has gone through loss, do you think it has changed the way that you see things or handle tough stuff?

Quinn 30:45

Um, not really. Because if you really think about it, every family has, like, gone through people like, died in their family. So, it's like, almost everybody has to experience that once in their life. But like, I mean, I think it would just affect everybody the same.

Jaime 31:02

Mhmm. So, being born after Ryann was stillborn, is there anything you feel is unique to you in your family in relation to Ryann?

Quinn 31:13

Um, this may happen to all young children. Usually, the youngest will get treated differently. Maybe get, like, more attention, but like, I think I may have gotten extra attention just because, like, Ryann, she was not here. And then when I was born, it was just like a relief, almost. So, then they probably, like, spent a lot of time with me.

Jaime 31:34

So, do you have some examples that you could share of that?

Quinn 31:39

Some of my friends call me coddled, like, almost get treated like better than some of them. Get more attention, get, like, more advice. I don't know. It's just like, almost a better life, not really, though you can't really say that, but, like, kind of is.

Jaime 31:57

Yeah, but, but it's something that is noticeable, or you feel, and your friends notice something.

Quinn 32:04

Mhm.

Jaime 32:04

Quinn, if you could say something to Ryann, what would it be?

Quinn 32:08

I've always wanted to know, like, what her personality and her, like, looks would be like, and like, what would she wear? And like, what type of person would she be?

Erin 32:16

Quinn, do you remember having a conversation with me in the truck going to hockey, and you were having like, a panic attack?

Quinn 32:25

Mhmm.

Erin 32:25

And do you remember just this year, what you said to me? Okay, can you share that?

Quinn 32:31

Um, I've seen possibly, she may have been really stressed when she was, uh, like, I was in her room, and, like...

Erin 32:40

What? In my womb? In my belly, when I was...

Quinn 32:41

Belly, ha-ha. And then what happened, uh, maybe she was really stressed during it, and that may have caused me to have anxiety, because I've seen that I do.

Jaime 32:55

Thank you so much for sharing with us this afternoon, Quinn.

Quinn 32:58

Thank you.

Jaime 33:03

And now, let's meet Andrea Warnick.

Andrea Warnick 33:08

My name's Andrea Warnick, I'm a registered nurse and a registered psychotherapist. Ended up really developing a passion for having the hard conversations and the conversations that I don't think we have enough. Children absolutely grieve, and often people wonder if they grieve the same as adults, or if it presents differently. There's this great quote that for kids, it's sort of like puddle jumping, you know, and they're in it, and it's huge, and then they jump out and they play

and have fun. And then for adults, it's like they're in this leg just wading through this ocean of grief. I believe it's Julie Stokes from Winston's Wish, who said it that way, and I think she's right on.

Andrea 33:46

I often remind people, just because kids are playing and having fun or seeming happy doesn't mean that they're not grieving. I always encourage families after a death, or if we know that there's a death that's going to happen in the family, to be honest. I sometimes refer to our 2-3-4, year olds as our most disenfranchised grievers that get quite quickly pushed to the sidelines, because sometimes people feel like, well, they're too young, so we don't even have the conversations with them. And that's where I really encourage families to take the lead in opening the conversation even with the youngest of children. Use the right language, call the sibling by name if the baby has a name, you know, and use the D word too, which is hard. Sometimes families will say, well, you know that they've just they've passed on, or they've passed away. Kids often don't understand what that is, and so I'll encourage you know, use the words that the baby has died, tell them what that means: it means a body doesn't work anymore and it won't ever work again. But then let your kids take the lead in how much information do they want?

34:51

Quite often, if kids have had enough, they're going to leave the conversation, or they're going to start fidgeting. They're going to start playing in, which point I'd want to check in now. I'm not going to make an assumption that they don't want any more information. It might be that they need to play, they need to fidget, they need to move their body physically while listening to the information. So, I would just check in and say, I'm wondering, would you like us to stop having this conversation right now and we can come back to it later? Or would you like to hear more? Right? So, giving really the most important information right now, which is often the baby has died, and how this is going to directly affect the child right now. Maybe the family is going to be at the hospital a lot more. Maybe there's trips to the funeral home. I've had many siblings, you know, be able to be at the funeral home or the hospital, hold their sibling who's died. That's where I want to let them know, like, do you want to touch your brother? You can. I want you to know that even when a body dies, you can touch it, you can hold it, that's okay. If they want to. I would never force them, but I want to invite them.

36:02

And I love that idea, like the taking photos is a really important approach as well, that I often just encourage families to think about. You know, if there's siblings, take photos with the siblings, you can decide if you don't want them, that's fine, but if you change your mind down the road, and I've actually worked with a number of families who that's exactly what's happened for they didn't think they wanted them necessarily at the time and down the road, that they were incredibly grateful to be able to have those memories of their time physically together.

36:32

When it comes to memorializing, I really encourage families to include kids. Often, what we'll have in our society as we've got funerals, we have memorials and things like that, I encourage people to have those rituals, acknowledging and almost introducing the community to all of their babies who have died, giving them names, dates. In our society, we're so quick sometimes to be like we want to celebrate a life, no matter how brief that life was, but almost to the exclusion of grieving the death, and that's where I really encourage families I work with, like, make some time to do grief collectively. Music can be a very powerful way of, sort of, eliciting emotion in a way that people don't need to talk but just you can be together and maybe have some collective grief that happens communally. And, and I really believe we're designed as humans to do the hardest things in life, in community. But for the long haul, maybe it's planting a tree. Maybe it's a situation where I think of one family that I work with, actually, what they do is they have a day of the year, the baby's birthday, and they name it the baby's name, and they do something every year on that day to honour their baby.

37:51

A really important piece in terms of supporting kids when a baby has died in the family is to really reiterate for them that this is not their fault. And I think often that's not on the radar for families, I know many families are pretty surprised when I suggest that that might be something that their child hasn't verbalized but might be grappling with. There's no harm done just across the board, even if the child's not expressing any feelings of responsibility or guilt, just saying, I want you to know there's nothing you did to cause this, this is not your fault.

38:28

I find language can be powerful. So, if the family is using "born still" or "stillbirth", if there are medical names, even with young kids, we can talk about that and help them understand what that means and how that contributed to the baby dying. We're going to use that D word even when it feels hard. Another word that I'm often encouraging families to teach even the youngest of kids is the word grief. That's where I want to let them know, you know, you might see us being really sad. You might see grandma crying, go through what they can expect and let them know this is grief. Often in life, when something really hard happens, such as our baby dying, we have all kinds of different thoughts and feelings, and some of those include really sad that can be mad. I like to always give kids permission too, you can be happy as well, right? We can be happy even when we're grieving and giving them explicit permission to have the wide range of emotions, because we know kids innately do a much more beautiful job than we do as adults in juggling that deep joy and deep sorrow at the same time.

39:43

But I really want to prepare kids for the emotional reactions of the people around them, including at any of our ceremonies or memorializations, and let them know, if you talk about our baby who died and I start crying, you've not made me sad. I'm sad because our baby died, and that's a confusing one for kids. If I talk about the family member who died, and the adults or anyone starts getting upset, their automatic sort of assumption is I am inflicting pain on this person. And so, it's not unusual that kids will just start backing off and not want to have the conversation,

because quite often, kids are trying to protect adults, just as much as adults are trying to protect their kid.

Erin Bohn 40:33

Thank you so much for listening and spending time with us.

Jaime Ascher 40:37

This episode of *Stillbirth Happens - let's talk* was produced by the Hummingbird Project of BC Women's Hospital + Health Center. It was produced by Jasmine Coleman.

Erin 40:47

If this episode resonated with you, we invite you to take care of yourself in whatever way feels right, whether that's by accepting support, setting boundaries or connecting with others who understand.

Jaime 41:00

You can find information, resources, connections and ways to take care of yourself in the show notes of every episode and on our website. Go to bcwomens.ca and search for [Stillbirth Happens](#).

Erin 41:12

To stay connected, follow us and drop us a comment or a review on Spotify or Apple Podcasts; we truly do love hearing from you.

Jaime 41:23

Thank you again for joining us. Until next time, remember to be gentle with yourself - you're not alone.