

Stillbirth Happens – let's talk Podcast

Supporting work and family through grief: A father's experience

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In this episode we hear from Andrew Lockhart, a father of six whose third child—his son Wilder—was stillborn in 2017. Andrew talks about how he supported his family while juggling work as he grieved. We also hear from Brandon Drouillard, a pregnancy and infant loss educator who talks about how a father's grief can be overlooked during stillbirth. Together, Andrew and Brandon give voice to the experiences dads have grieving their stillborn babies and supporting their families.

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Erin Bohn 0:00

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 0:27

My name is Jaime 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 0:58

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

Jaime 1:14

In this episode of *Stillbirth Happens*, we explore how some fathers experience and express grief after stillbirth. While no two experiences are the same, we're taking time to hear from two people who help us better understand what support can look like. First, Erin and I sit down with



Andrew Lockhart, a father of six who experienced the full-term stillbirth of his 3rd child—his son Wilder—in 2017.

Erin 1:40

Then, you'll meet Brandon Drouillard, a pregnancy and infant loss educator. He speaks to the often overlooked grief of partners after stillbirth and why acknowledging their pain is essential for true, compassionate care.

Jaime 1:55

Hi Andrew.

Andrew Lockhart 1:57

Hi Jamie. How are you?

Jaime 1:59

I'm well, thank you, so happy to have you here with us today.

Andrew 2:03

Good. Yeah, glad to be here.

Jaime 2:03

Great.

Erin 2:05

Hello, Andrew.

Andrew 2:06

Hi there.

Jaime 2:08

Andrew, we'd love for you to introduce yourself to us and to our guests.

Andrew 2:12

Yeah. So, my name is Andrew Lockhart. I am a father to six. I have five living children. We, in 2017, experienced a full-term stillbirth of our son, Wilder. Very grief-filled experience for me. Relating to people who have experienced any type of loss is one thing, but when you relate to someone who's experienced stillbirth or infant loss, is something completely different. And the loss of Wilder has created a world for my family because it's given voice to Wilder and his life in ways that I probably wouldn't have done.



Jaime 2:57

Thanks, Andrew. We're very honoured today for you to be speaking with us and give us the dad's perspective on stillbirth and loss and grief. And we'd like to jump back to Wilder's stillbirth and learning the news. From your perspective, walk us through that.

Andrew 3:12

Yeah, so you know, we had had two children before Wilder, so big kind of learning curve, obviously. First time parents, you know, you go through your first pregnancy and then your first childbirth, and then couple years later, decide to have another kid. So pretty straightforward pregnancy, nothing really concerning. I think she was 41 or 40 weeks and six days, and as she went into labour, she felt like things were moving along well, the contractions were kind of doing what they're supposed to do, getting closer together and harder. I went to the hospital and told that, yeah, we're little early, not necessarily need to be there quite yet. So did a check, and they were listening to the fetoscope, trying to pick up a heartbeat. Struggled with that. I think at this point, maybe me and Kim hadn't really kind of put any negative scenarios in our mind. It was still, oh, you know, kind of routine thing to happen here. After a little while, the obstetrician came in, and she had brought the ultrasound with her. I think at that point, you started to recognize that there was another possibility besides delivering a healthy living baby. The obstetrician pointed to the heart and what it should be doing and what it wasn't doing, everything around you just kind of disappears. And for us definitely felt like breathtakingly crushing is a way to describe that. So, really tough kind of situation to be put in.

Erin 4:56

When you guys found out the news, were you put into labour and delivery? Were you having to answer a bunch of questions? How were they with asking you questions? Or was it all more so directed to Kimberly?

Andrew 5:11

I don't know that there was really, like, a lot of questions. I think at that point, I think the demeanor of the nursing staff and the obstetrician and our midwife kind of changed to, what can we do to support, you know, this family with what they're about to experience? You know, from a guy's perspective or from the dad in the situation, everything, like care wise, is directed to, you know, your wife. And the same thing would happen if you know you weren't expecting to have an issue like this. You know, if you go in there and you're, you're there to deliver a baby and you're there to do the job, the focus is on the wife and and on the woman. And you know, rightfully so, there's a lot going on, and there's a lot that we we know how to do right and do well. And you know, the doctors and the nurses and the midwives are there to do that. So, you know, when we realize that there was no heartbeat, I don't really think the direction of the attention was changed much from that, like it definitely goes primarily towards the woman or the

mother, right? You know, as the husband, your job, whether the child is going to be living or not, is to be there to support the wife.

Jaime 6:29

So, you're there, supporting Kim, she's obviously grieving, dealing with this new reality that Wilder was going to be born, not alive, and you were there as an equal partner, equal parent, to Wilder, and dealing with your own grief. And so can you walk us through that and how those moments were for you? And if you have any advice to other dads in those moments in the delivery room.

Andrew 6:57

Yeah, you have to focus kind of on supporting your wife or your partner and recognizing that while this is kind of terrible, there is, you know, light at the end of the tunnel, and you know, it's an opportunity to recognize how valuable life is and how important it is to kind of show up and be present for your partner and all the rest of your family as well. It's not to say that you don't deserve support yourself. I think it's to say that you still have a role to play but also support yourself and kind of give yourself some space to feel the emotions that are going to come along with, you know, holding a baby who doesn't have a heartbeat.

Jaime 7:41

Tell us about that. Tell us about when Wilder was born.

Andrew 7:45

Yeah. So, we were told by the obstetrician and the midwife how quiet it would be. I mean, it's definitely a like a somber environment, compared to giving birth to a live child. When Wilder came out, it was dead silent in that room. It is almost like people disappeared. I remember when my first child was born, when she came out, there was, had to have been about 10 people there to, you know, get their hands on her and make sure she was okay. I just remember the difference there; it was so quiet. Like the reality was, it was, how do I word this? It was so much more real at that point. This thought in your head, probably the entire time that you know you're kind of in this dream or nightmare, in this weird reality, like it doesn't you don't really know how to handle it. You don't really know how the grief is, or at its full extent. And when the child comes out and you're in this silence, it's probably hits you harder than any point the entire experience. I remember holding Wilder looking at him, and there was no movement. You don't really realize it like when you hold a child and they're breathing and their heart's beating and maybe they're really still and they're sleeping and they're in your arms and they're just there, and it's still nowhere near as still as your child that does not have a heartbeat. It's like a profound experience. So yeah, it was really, yeah, different, different experience, for sure, being in that room.



Erin 9:23

It's definitely an experience that I don't know if any bereaved parent can put into words just exactly what it's like. I absolutely love hearing that you took this space with Wilder. We really have no choice but to, right? And part of me is kind of like, okay, this is amazing to hear that the folks that worked at the hospital gave you and Kimberly space, like when you say that they were just gone, but oh my goodness, on the other side of things, what a terrible time to also leave people you know, and you may have questions and you don't know what to do. Were there things in the room that you remember or that were different from your live births compared to when Wilder was born?

Andrew 10:09

When you have a live child there, you have a nurse that kind of waits on you hand and foot almost. You know, someone's checking on your baby and your wife, kind of through the night, you know, making sure that she's doing what she needs to do, the bleeding stopped, she has what she needs, the baby's doing okay. And I remember that not really existing after Wilder was born. We were really lucky. We got we had access to a [CuddleCot](#)TM. We were able to spend some time with Wilder and really process the loss of him. And that meant we were in the hospital for a little bit of time. And especially with Kim hemorrhaged fairly bad on that one, with the placenta coming out. So we were there for a little bit, and Wilder was born in the early hours of the day, and we went pretty well through the day without too much help from any of the nursing staff there. Our midwife was was fabulous, she was she made time to stay around, even though she was not on call anymore, and the social worker, you know, made an appearance a few times while we were there. She helped with some of the arrangements that needed to be made. But we didn't really feel like there was much help other than that. And I remember having to go to the nursing station to interrupt their conversation and ask if they could please bring us some new sheets for Kim's bed, because she didn't want to sleep in the sheets, you know, that were soiled from earlier in the day. So definitely it feels different, you know, like it's, it's not just childbirth, it's not just leading up to the childbirth. It's, it's kind of everything you end up feeling different, unfortunately.

Erin 11:50

What an extra weight that you didn't need to be asking for just the bare necessities.

Andrew 11:56

Yeah, and, you know, I don't really fault the nurses or the workers there, you know, they have a job, and you know, this is, can't be the first time that they've experienced something like this. From their standpoint, it's probably really hard for for some of them to kind of enter into that atmosphere that two parents are there grieving, probably the hardest that they've ever grieved. I know for myself when I hear that somebody is grieving like I know that I want so badly to support that person or have like kind words, but I struggle. That's just sometimes the way it is,

especially if you're put on the spot. And I could only imagine that being a nurse comes with some of that unfortunate, awkward situation that you have to kind of interject yourself into. And when you have a stillbirth, they put that butterfly on the door and, and I'm sure, to some extent, nurses may be a bit uncomfortable to come in. And...

Erin 12:51
Absolutely,

Andrew 12:53
...I think that with stillbirth and child loss and infertility, I think that sometimes the conversation just doesn't get had.

Jaime 13:00
Absolutely.

Andrew 13:01
You think about the nurses that were on shift that day and I had to go be like, "Hey, can we please get some sheets?" Like we're struggling over here. You know, the intent wasn't to go make them feel bad, but just to be like, "Hey, like, you can come in, come into this room. It's not off limits. And we need your help."

Jaime 13:20
Absolutely. And I can remember similar experiences, but I also remember an experience where a housekeeper came in, and she came right up to me and she said, "I saw the butterfly on the door, and I just wanted to say, I'm so sorry." It's all people's experiences and their ability, and I think it's just that particular unit in the hospital is not one where one expects to be dealing with death and grieving parents, and so there's still lots of learning and lots of educating that needs to happen, for sure. As Wilder's dad, were you able to spend some time and memorialize him, whether in the hospital or after you left?

Andrew 14:00
Yeah, we, we did spend some time there. Since the hospital with Wilder there, we have spent quite a bit of time memorializing him. He is an often spoke about topic in our household. My kids speak about him. We celebrate his birthday. We have a picture of him on our wall. You know, we were really lucky to be able to get a photographer down not long after he was delivered, and were able to have a picture with him and Kim and I and our other two living children at that point. And it was tough for us to make a decision on whether or not we wanted to bring our two living children down to introduce them to Wilder. We felt like if we didn't do it, that we would probably end up wishing that we had. It's a bit of a funny one, because I think that there's probably some people that think that memorializing your son, your deceased infant, with

photography or introducing them to your living children might be a bit odd, but I think that it helped with the healing process for our children and understanding kind of how life unfolds sometimes. And what it's done is it's really allowed us to bring Wilder into this world, rather than like not talking about him or not really including him, we're speaking about him, and we're having his birthday, and our kids say they miss him, and our kids tell us they wish he was here. And we are able to connect with our children, and we're able to grieve together. It almost becomes easier. It'd be hard for my wife to run something like the charity run, The Butterfly Run, or put on support groups, or anything like that, if we didn't kind of embrace everything about him and memorialize everything about him. So, you know, it became a real thing, like you really you do need to memorialize your child, regardless of what's happened, that's what we did, and and we're very grateful for it. It's benefited us immensely.

Jaime 16:09

Thank you so much for sharing that. That resonates with me fully. What's right for one family is right for that family, and we all make whatever choice it is. And like I said, my family, we made different choices both times, and it was the right decision at the time for us. When you said that you had a whole family photo of you and the three kids, we didn't get one of my husband, myself and the two kids and I just gives me chills that you have that. And so, with the opportunity knowing and, and I think the important thing is for people to know they have that opportunity and that choice. Even if you take the picture and you don't look at it, maybe down the road you want to look at it.

Erin 16:49

I think exactly what you just shared, Andrew, is going to help so many people, help them make the choice, because those choices are scary. In the moment, you don't know what's right, what's wrong. Is this normal? Is it not normal? I didn't have my oldest daughter meet her sister. I did get photos. However, after listening to you, I think I would have easily allowed and felt more comfortable allowing Gracie to come in and meet her sister, Ryann. So even though I am almost 15 years out, I still learn from bereaved parents, even to this day. So, I love that you're sharing your voice just to let people know. And it doesn't mean anybody's right or wrong or anything on their decisions, but it gives you the power of "we have choices", and "we can take control of what feels comfortable for us." I wish I would have heard your voice 15 years ago, Andrew.

Andrew 17:50

Thank you. You know, you both said it exactly right. Like, what's right for one person is not necessarily right for everybody. You know, before Wilder, would I have ever carried the opinion that, you know, if I lost a child, I would do X, Y and Z? No, I probably would have told you that I would do exactly the opposite of everything that I did do. But it's important to just recognize how important this event is in your life. You know the memory doesn't go away because you didn't take a picture with your child or introduce them, the memory stays. That child is always going to

be a part of your life, and it's always going to be part of you. Whether you do or you don't, you'll more than likely want to have something to cherish or remember.

Erin 18:30

Exactly. Andrew, just a question, since Wilder's passing, have you been involved in any father support groups? Or have you shared your voice? Have you spoken out? Have you offered your help and support anywhere?

Andrew 18:48

I have been asked a number of times to be part of like father support groups or speak. I am involved in the sense that my wife is involved, and somebody has to watch our living children. That's about as much as I've contributed to the community. I mean, I've set up The Butterfly Run every year and taken it down, and I've spoken about my child, and I have done some counselling on my own. Everybody experiences and deals and copes and learns and grows in different ways. And, you know, I just benefitted from having somebody who was so passionate about helping the community, and that's kind of where I drew the line for myself.

Jaime 19:36

And everybody like you said, grieves differently, and often partners grieve differently. Absolutely, we have to do what's right. Grief is really lonely.

Andrew 19:44

Yeah, it can be really lonely. It absolutely can be. I was really lucky to have a partner in this who really explored everything, you know, and really put herself out there and spoke up and, you know, kind of forged her own path through the into the community, and I, as a byproduct, found a lot of support through that and through her. And, you know, you find people and you connect with them. And, but for me, it was just nice to have her there and have her understanding and kind of what she's learned from it. You know, she shares kind of everything with me and, and it was really beneficial for me. But I think that there's some people who need to probably be more involved than that.

Erin 20:35

Meet Brandon Drouillard.

Brandon Drouillard 20:38

My name is Brandon Drouillard, and I work for the [Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network](#) as Education Coordinator and a pregnancy and infant loss educator.

20:46



I've been able to, now, for the last three and a half years, been able to facilitate compassionate care workshops and connect with health and service professionals and describe some of the challenges that bereaved families face. I think it's important that we recognize and bring to the forefront that grief is universal for everybody. Those people that are attached to a pregnancy or that are attached to it, the idea of becoming a parent will experience grief, and that grief is, it is universal, but it is also individual for everyone, and everyone experiences grief vastly differently.

21:15

And we do hear that from partners and from dads that we support throughout the province of Ontario, quite frequently. Their grief is different from from the birthing parent or from the mom, but some of the experiences of grief by partners are universal in themselves, and often we hear from fathers that they feel like they're overlooked and unacknowledged in the grieving process or in the process of losing their child or having a stillbirth, and that fathers or partners often feel that concern is really only directed towards the birthing parent or towards the mom. And although that is important that we do direct care towards both parents, we do acknowledge, and we do try and push for our healthcare providers to try and direct care for both the birthing and non-birthing parent. Partners often feel that they have concern for the partner and that the role expectation, or how they view themselves, or how they view fatherhood, is that of being a protector and protecting their family, and they feel that they're not able to do that when they experience a stillbirth or when they lose a child. And so, we hear that from partners, that they feel that their role is challenged in the family, and they feel that they aren't able to offer that security for their family.

22:18

We often hear from partners as well, that they often feel like they're the storyteller or the communicator for their family, and they speak on behalf of the family, that can be a gift for fathers or for parents, being able to share their experience or to share what happened. It can also be a burden at times, as they're constantly having to retell that story or constantly having to relive those emotions, and so acknowledging that and offering suggestions for fathers of maybe delegating some tasks or relinquishing that role to somebody else, a support person, a family member or a friend, to be able to ease that burden from them is very beneficial. And we hear from fathers, you know, that they have feelings of disenfranchised grief, where they don't feel like their grief is socially validated or supported, and then that grief is then internalized, where they really kind of keep that built up or pent up. That can lead to drug and alcohol abuse and unhealthy coping strategies and so really imploring the idea of grieving openly and being able to grieve publicly is really important. You know, often men or dads feel like they're problem solvers, and they're able to rectify a solution, and there's a problem, and then there's a solution to the problem, and we're able to fix them. And unfortunately, this grief is going to be a long process. This journey of being able to process your grief and find new meaning in life, and really kind of re-steady your life, because this can be a life altering event. And so, acknowledging that there



isn't a solution, there isn't a quick solution, excuse me, to the problem, but rather that this is going to be a long process, and that there may be different avenues that we have to explore to try and find support, or find the best support for ourselves, and that's something that does take time. Grief differs a lot for fathers in a way that it is a more silent grief and a more internalized grief. It's not a more publicized grief where we do internalize things, and we do try to solve these problems ourselves, and we're not reaching out externally for help.

24:08

We need to also explore the idea and keep in mind that everybody's past experiences and personal experiences are different too, and they play a lot into people's grieving process, and traumas or experiences that somebody goes through earlier in their life can be re-intensified and can bring up additional trauma or can intensify their grief or their trauma. A lot of historical things that play into somebody's experience of life really play a lot into how they grieve. And so that can really differ even though people do grieve the loss of, a one child, they do grieve those situations differently.

24:36

And so one of the immediate changes that we would make is that we would acknowledge both the birthing parent and the non-birthing parent at the time of loss, whether it's in the hospital or in a provider's office, wherever that is. Is that we acknowledge both parents are experiencing grief, or will experience grief, and that they both will need support moving forward, and that support begins almost immediately, or as immediately as possible, that we connect our parents with mental health supports or peer supports immediately after a loss, so that they are able to navigate those initial days of their grieving process, as those can be the most challenging and the most terrifying for parents, as they don't know what to do or where to turn or where to look for support. And then we'd absolutely be able to provide support to families on an ongoing basis, and whether that's with ongoing mental health supports or peer supports, or group supports, whatever it may be, that those supports are in place for an extended period of time. And we talk about things like supportive time off work and job protected leave that vary by province and to province and there isn't a national standard.

25:38

Being open and honest about how you're feeling can really have an impact as well. And not trying to mask your feelings but being open and when you are reaching out for help, really sharing exactly how you're feeling, so that the professionals are able to provide the correct resources for you. If you're supporting a family member or if you are a family member that has experienced this, these conversations are important, and the more that we are vocal in public and sharing about our feelings and asking questions and supporting families that have experienced loss, the easier it will be for the next families that unfortunately have to experience this, it will be easier for them to go through.

Jaime 26:18

And now, going back to our conversation with Andrew Lockhart.

Jaime 26:22

Can I ask, going back to the father's experience, having to manage work and home responsibilities after Wilder's stillbirth, and what does that look like? And how are you able to manage through that?

Andrew 26:37

Oh man, I'm probably not the best example. I took about a month and a half off, you know, bunkered down and held my family close and didn't really go back to work. I work in construction. I was working for a company that was run by a friend of mine, a good friend of mine. He was actually the best man in my wedding. So, when Wilder was born, I think I called him that day and told him, and he took it pretty hard. It was devastating for him. Our families were really close, and I was learning how to, you know, deal with the grief, and I didn't have the space to, like, help him understand, kind of, the grief that he was feeling. And, you know, maybe like it wasn't his child, but, you know, us being as close as we were, it was definitely grief for him, but we never really spoke about what would happen with work, and he was really understanding, I think, by not really pushing that on me. I had a real struggle. Our parents were around a lot. My wife's parents were around a lot. They understood that we were struggling and that we, you know, still had two kids that we had to take care of but were really struggling to even take care of ourselves. So, for work, work was tough. There's not a lot of support out there, you know, for people who experience the loss of a child like this, like I can't even remember if Kim was able to get her [maternity benefits through EI](#) at that point. I ended up getting another job, a friend of mine, I think about a month and a half after Wilder was born, gave me a call and just said, "Hey, man, how ya doing? What are you doing? I've got some work that's coming up. You want to come and take a look and maybe get out of the house, you know, kind of get back on your feet?" And I said, "Yeah, like, I think it's probably time to do that." Was I ready? I I don't know. I don't know if anyone's ever really ready to put grief to the side. You kinda learn how to keep it there and not let it hurt as much. There's still times when I, you know, that drive home from work and that right song comes on the radio, and I just have to feel, you know, and I recognize that I haven't felt it for a bit, and maybe I need to feel it right now. And that's never going to end. But definitely, you learn how to like, let your work and your other, like the rest of your life, kind of co-exist with that grief, and it just kind of becomes a little more manageable, I think.

Jaime 29:00

Trying to focus on the dad perspective here today and recognizing dads as equal partners in pregnancy and childbirth. What does this look like and what needs to change from your perspective?

Andrew 29:30

That's a really good question. It's a lot bigger than just, you know, something that affects the loss community or the infertility community. I think what really needs to change is there needs to be a broader understanding of, like, how mental health challenges affect everybody in this population. We need to be able to support people better. You shouldn't need to, you know, have health insurance or pay out of pocket in order to get that support. I'm so thankful that there is more and more supports out there becoming available, because I think the grief support community as a whole recognizes there, there's a need for it. It's almost like, you know, these type of things should be primary care, and they're, they're just not. And, you know, you're left kind of, there's a struggle through on your own. There's enough people out there that know what it's like to, you know, be able to find that you're not alone. But if I think one thing needs to change, I think it's that there needs to be more support for people who experience this type of loss.

Erin 30:11

Absolutely. Andrew, I have, I'm thrilled to have spent this time listening to you and learning from you. So, thank you very much.

Jaime 30:21

I want to thank you too, Andrew, for being with us here today. You've shared some very profound messages, and it will be helpful for our listeners as they walk through this, parents, moms, dads, but providers as well, to hear what you had to say. So, it was an honour to learn about your experience and Wilder's experience and just thank you very much for being with us here today.

Andrew 30:44

Thank you, guys, for having me. There is help out there. If people need help, there's lots of resources out there and and you know, you guys are doing a good thing by having these voices published and put out there to really bring awareness and bring people together. That's what we need. We're all in this together.

Erin 31:05

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

Jaime 31:08

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 31:19

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 31:32

You can find information, resources, connections and ways to take care of yourself on our website, go to bcwomens.ca and search for "stillbirth happens."

Erin 31:45

And 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 31:54

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