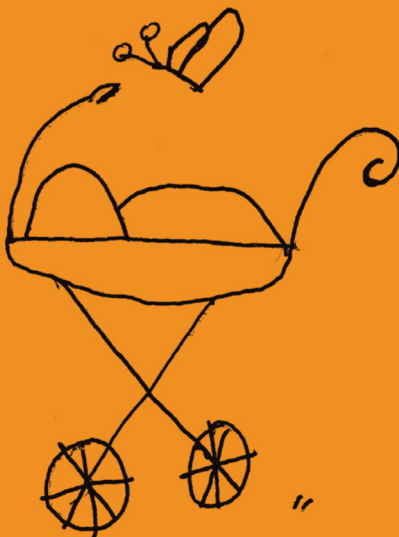


**Do You Have
a Surviving
Twin?**

*A Guide
for Parents*





Introduction

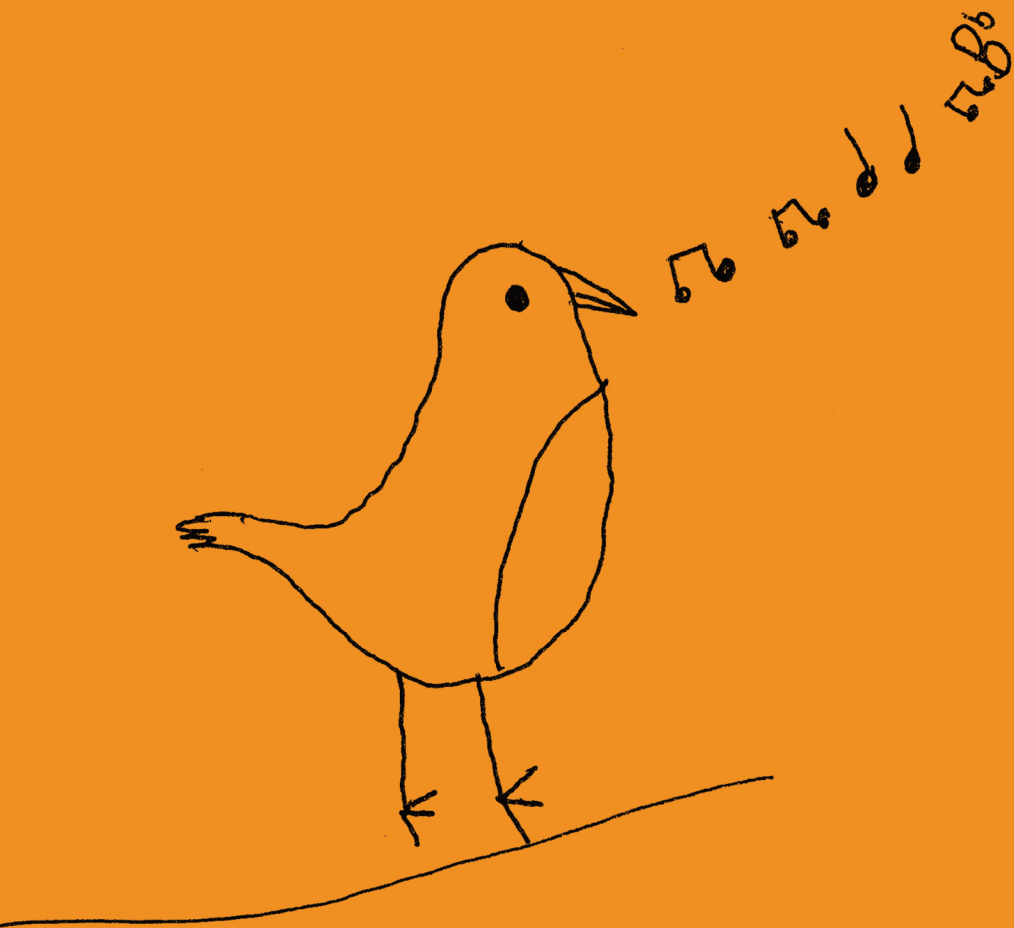
This booklet focuses on the experiences of parents who have lost one of their twins around the time of birth and aims to provide information and guidance, helping them and their surviving twin to cope with their loss.

Although this booklet uses the term ‘twin’, the information aims to also be relevant to triplets and higher order multiples.

Some of the questions surrounding raising your surviving twin might include:

- What effects could the loss of his or her twin have on him or her?
- Will my child miss their twin?
- Will our grief, as parents, affect our surviving twin?
- Is there such a thing as talking too much about my twin who has died, being too honest or telling my surviving twin too much?
- When and how will I tell my surviving twin about the loss of their twin?
- Should I tell others that my child is a surviving twin? Should I refer to him or her as a twin?

These are questions that will come to mind as the parents of a surviving twin. The information in this booklet hopes to answer these questions and give you some guidance.



Mia and Emma's Story

Emma is 6 years old. She is a very happy little girl who has grown up knowing about her twin sister Mia who died four weeks before their birth. I have told Emma about Mia since a very early age. She grasps some of the story about Mia's death, but as with any child of her age, cannot truly understand. For now, we have presented her with simple, basic facts, which up to now have not needed too much explanation.

We remember Mia in simple everyday ways. Mia's photograph hangs proudly in our kitchen. Emma knows that the photograph is of her twin sister and knows that Mia lives in heaven. I have also shown her the photograph of me with my big twin bump and Emma knows that "twins" means two babies. When I show Emma the photo album of her twin sister, she is extremely interested. I know Emma will know and love Mia through the stories we tell her and the keepsakes we have gathered.

We have a memory box for Mia. It includes a lock of Mia's hair, her blanket, and many other things. Alice, Mia's older sister, and Emma love to go through it.

On our twin's birthday last year, Emma wondered how many toys she would get, and whether she would have to share them with Mia and Alice. It was nice to hear her consider some of the things that would have happened, had Mia lived.

When Emma gets older, she will have to make more decisions about her twinship, for example whether she would like to have the same birthday cake as Mia or whether they will get one each. On their birthday, as a tradition, we always visit the graveyard and we take photographs of the girls at Mia's grave, so that we will have them in her memory box, when they are older.

I have often wondered about the influence Mia has had on Emma's life. One of the things that stands out is Emma's fascination with babies. She just loves baby dolls - dressing them, bathing them and pushing them around in a buggy.

Because of my volunteer work on baby loss issues, Alice and Emma have heard me talk about what happened to Mia and many of my feelings about it. Some of our friends are families who have lost a baby too. I think it's good for all of us to meet with other families who have experienced a similar loss and share experiences.

Having Alice as the twins' big sister helps Emma as she always has someone to play with. Alice and Emma get along extremely well and, except for the odd squabble, are great friends.

I know that with the heart and mind that Emma has, Mia's existence may only help to enrich her life and possibly make her stronger. She will carry her twin sister in a special and comfortable place and integrate her into her life. I have no doubt that the influence of Mia's life on Emma's will only mould her into a caring, loving adult.

By Niamh Connolly-Coyne, Mia and Emma's Mammy

Guidance to Parents

As your child becomes a toddler, you might consider telling them about their twinship, using age appropriate language. Children who are told when they are older, may feel upset having not been told earlier. You might like to allow your child to ask questions in his or her own way and in their own time.

Consider trying to answer these questions as honestly and as best you can.

Your child may look to you for direction regarding their reaction to the loss of their twin. Your own grief reactions and behaviours may shape some of their actions and beliefs. Don't be afraid to cry or show your sadness in front of your child. Let them know that being sad and crying is okay and explain that although you have immense sadness at the loss of their twin, you also have great joy that they are here.

As a bereaved parent you may be more inclined to talk about your feelings of loss with your child and by doing this, you will be offering them the skills needed to deal with death, which can be brought into adulthood.

It is also important to remember that your child may feel sad about losing their twin but it may be different to the feelings that you experience as a parent. This may be because they did not experience the excitement you had at the expected arrival of two babies and they do not have any memories of their twin's life other than what you have told them. However, despite any differences, parents and surviving twins may all have a feeling of emptiness about the loss of their twin and that will unite you as a family. This unity may happen particularly when you share your feelings with each other using language that is appropriate to your child's age.

It is also only natural that you, as a bereaved parent, may be more anxious and fearful of the worst for your surviving twin's health and safety. You may worry that something will happen to him or her too. It is important to protect your child but you must also have faith that each day they leave the house or get sick that they will be okay. You might like to talk to your local family doctor to relieve any concerns that you may have about your surviving child's well-being and your own mental health.

Remember, there is no one right way for you to parent your surviving twin. Go with your instincts and do what is best for you and your family. The support organisations listed on p20 of this booklet can also offer you support and guidance in relation to your grief reactions and the reactions of your surviving twin to the death of their brother or sister.



McKenzie's Story

My name is McKenzie. I'm an identical twin brother to Harrison. This is my story of how I've got through all these years without him!

My first memory of knowing that my identical twin brother had passed away was when I was about 4 years old. I remember we would send a balloon up into the air to heaven on the day of his passing, which is 16th March. Every year we've been sending a balloon up to heaven in his memory to show him how much we love him. We don't anymore as we're worried about the balloon having an impact on the environment, so we're trying to think of other ways, maybe like planting something.

My parents, family and friends have been very connected to me all my life and have helped me get through some very rough times when I just felt like it isn't fair for him to have passed away and not me. But they always said to remember that Harrison and I will always be connected.

I find it awkward and difficult to answer someone new when they ask if I have any brothers or sisters. I usually say "Yeah an identical twin brother and they say "cool" and then it gets awkward when I say he's dead. Sometimes I don't say anything. Mom says that's okay as the same thing happens her too.

For other surviving twins, I think if you always remember these few words in life, you'll be able to accomplish anything - "your brother or sister will always be connected to you and you'll always be connected to him or her."

Supporting Your Surviving Twin

You may wonder what it is like for your child to grow up knowing that they are a twin. You may also wonder if you are taking the right approach to telling him or her about their brother or sisters' existence. Some of the questions that might cross your mind might be:

- How is my surviving child experiencing the death of their twin brother or sister?
- What is this loss like for them?
- How will this be for them in the future?

When it comes to very young children, there is no way to know or have answers to these questions. However, younger children, may demonstrate their loss through play, for example, he or she may make-believe that they are pregnant with twins or put two babies in their buggy rather than one.

Surviving twins may talk about and imagine hypothetical scenarios about differences in their lives, if their twin had not died. These conversations might include how family life would be different if their twin was still here and what kind of relationships they would have had with their twin brother or sister. They may experience a sense of loss that they are missing out on the specialness of being a twin. They may wonder what it would have been like to grow up with a brother or sister exactly the same age as them and in the same classroom. They may also miss experiencing “twin things” such as dressing up in identical clothes. Your child may also spend time thinking about what their twin's personality would be like, what they would look like now and whether they would have been close.

Some children feel that being a twin is special because they always have a brother or sister to watch over them and mind them. Your child may also feel that because their twin is not here, they want to enjoy life as much as possible and aim to “live for two”. They may have some feelings of “guilt” that they lived and their twin died. Depending on the cause of their twin's death, they may feel somewhat to “blame” for their twin's passing. Your child may also be “jealous” of their twin and feel that their twin is spoken about as if they are “perfect”. This is where you, as their parent, can listen, understand, and reassure them that they too are very special and are not to blame in any way for their brother or sister's death.

Your child will have lots of questions about the day their twin died and the days and months beforehand and afterwards. They will want to know about your pregnancy, their birth, who met them, who held them and details about their twin's funeral. Surviving twins will have no memories, so it is up to parents to share stories and to keep mementos.

Just like you, when your child meets living twins, they might feel a bit sad that their twin is not here or he or she may feel that they want to tell others that they are a twin too. Again, it's important to let your child know that they can talk to you about these issues.

As children get older, they will show a more active interest and understanding of what being a twin means. They may become more aware and talkative about their twinship and they may begin to make decisions about how their twin can be integrated into their life.

On special days, such as birthdays, your child may feel sad that their twin is not there to celebrate with them. They may think about their twin and recall the stories that they have been told. They might want to do things that allow them to share these special days with their twin by for example visiting the graveyard or lighting a candle in their memory. Some families have traditions to celebrate both of their twins' birthdays such as having one cake with both twin's names on it. Others may prefer to remember their baby who has died on a different day, so that they can focus on celebrating with their surviving child. The way you will remember your twin that has died will be determined by what works best for you and your family.

Being a twin will always be part of your surviving twin's identity, and they will love them and keep them in a special place in their heart.



Talking and Remembering

You might like to place photographs, cuddly toys or other mementos around your home, so that your surviving child will know they had a twin brother or sister who is counted and is still very much part of the family. Looking at photographs of your twins and reading books about twins can present great opportunities to tell your child that they are a twin, to learn facts about what a twin is and to talk about his or her feelings.

Some useful children's books are:

- 'Always My Twin' by Valerie Samuels,
- 'I'll Always Be a Premmie Twin' by Nicki Cooper (www.blurb.co.uk),
- 'Two Little Monkeys' by Kimberly Jackson (www.lulu.com)
- 'The Story Of...' books for families who have lost one twin (www.lossbooks.com).

You might think about creating a memory box. The memory box could be filled with, for example:

- Scan pictures of both babies
- Photographs of your "twin" bump
- Matching items that your twins had, such as teddies, blankets, clothes or jewellery
- Clothing that your child wore to their twin's funeral
- Toys that they shared
- Names of people that visited them both while in hospital
- Childhood drawings by your surviving twin that includes their twin brother or sister.

Some parents like to keep a journal to write details about their twin who has died. The journal is then shared with their child when they get older. If you would like to create a journal, information could include details of your pregnancy, about their birth, your twin's passing and how you and your family have coped. You could also include information about ways that you as a family remember your baby who has died.

Telling Others

It is a personal choice whether you decide to tell others that your child is a surviving twin. Some bereaved parents will always mention the baby that they have lost while others will not. Some people decide to tell others that their child is a twin when an opportune time comes up. It might depend on the situation and the circumstances of the conversation. Your child will also do the same. Sometimes they will want to tell others and sometimes they will not.

It is very important that you let others, who are important in your child's life, know about how you would like them to handle the situation when your child talks about their twin who has died. This includes family members, friends, childminders and teachers.



School

You might like to tell your child's teacher that his or her twin died around the time of their birth, so that if he or she talks about their twinship, the teacher will know that their twin is real and not in their imagination.

It is important to maintain a link with teachers, so that the school understands what information your child knows and how you would like them to support your child. It is fine, for example, if your child wants to produce a drawing or write a special message for their twin on their birthday, to include their name on a card along with other family member's names or share a photograph or memento of their twin with the class. The child should be enabled to include their twin brother or sister in their family structure, in whatever way they would like to do so.

If your child prefers not to mention their twin, that is fine as well. The most important thing is that, teachers create a safe and supportive environment, so that your child can feel that they can talk and remember their brother or sister, if they so wish.

Harrison and McKenzie's Story

In 2004, our identical twin boys were born 10 weeks early. It was a worrying time as they were attached to tubes and drips in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Harrison sadly died when they were 12 days old. McKenzie was oblivious to what had happened. He continued to make steady progress. I wanted every test in the world to be done to assure me I wouldn't lose him too. Our grief was immense but focusing on McKenzie really helped. We kept every memento from the hospital to help us tell McKenzie about Harrison as he got older.

Harrison was cremated. His ashes are still with us, we wanted to wait until McKenzie was old enough to help us decide what to do with his ashes. McKenzie, now aged 17, would like Harrison's ashes to stay with him where ever he goes. He had some of his ashes made into a ring and he wears it on special occasions.

McKenzie has always known about his twin brother. We have always spoken openly about him and included him in celebrations. Every anniversary, we release a balloon and send it full of kisses up to heaven. McKenzie, when he was younger, would write a Christmas card to Harrison and leave it for Santa to deliver, as Harrison was the only one that could get close enough to heaven to deliver it. McKenzie was christened when he was 8 years old and he held his brother's ashes for the whole ceremony and asked the priest to bless Harrison's ashes too. Both boys' names were on the cake for his holy communion and for his confirmation. He has a rainbow cake for his birthday, as rainbows remind him of Harrison.

Over the years, McKenzie has come to me when he is missing his twin. We would sit down and have a cuddle and a cry and talk it through. This worked well up to losing my mother, six years ago. I think he didn't want to burden me with more grief and probably found it hard seeing me cry, so we felt he needed to talk this through with someone independent, who could help him with his fears and anxieties. This has helped and it's something that he can top up, any time he thinks he needs it.

Certain milestones are hard like their first steps, their first day of primary and secondary school, their first medal or certificate, birthdays or celebrations and filling in forms that ask you how many children you have.

I have found that talking with my family and friends from the very start about this awful tragedy is key. I have talked to whoever will listen. I think it's important to make it normal and not a taboo subject. There will be some situations that I will not

want to share Harrison with certain people and there will be times when I am just bursting to tell others that my child is a twin. So, I just do it!

McKenzie is a happy, healthy and very loving teenager. He has grown up with double love, which has helped ground him and appreciate life. Whenever he sees a beautiful rainbow or a little wagtail, he says it's Harrison sending him love. I couldn't be prouder.

By Sinead Deutrom, Harrison and McKenzie's Mammy

What Next?

The following is a list of some of the organisations that can offer further guidance and support:

- A Little Lifetime Foundation
www.alittlelifetime.ie
- Anam Cara
www.anamcara.ie
- Barnardos
www.barnardos.ie
- Every Life Counts
www.everylifecounts.ie
- Feileacain
www.feileacain.ie
- Irish Childhood Bereavement Network
www.childhoodbereavement.ie
- Irish Neonatal Health Alliance
www.inha.ie
- Leanbh mo Chroí
www.lmcsupport.ie
- Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep
www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org
- Miscarriage Association of Ireland
www.miscarriage.ie
- Peas in a Pod - Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy - Facebook at Peas in a Pod - Loss in a Multiple Pregnancy
- Potter's Syndrome
www.potterssyndrome.org
- Pregnancy and Infant Loss Ireland Directory
www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie
- Rainbows Ireland
www.rainbowsireland.ie
- Soft Ireland
www.softireland.com
- Twins Trust
twinstrust.org/bereavement.html
- VP Ireland
Facebook at Vasa Praevia Support & Awareness Ireland



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