



Helping parents cope with grief

LOSING a child can be one of the hardest things a parent has to deal with but finding the best support can be even more difficult.

This is exactly what Cathie Shipton, from Ealing, found when her son Ivan died in intensive care, four days after his birth exactly two years ago this week.

Not only did Cathie have to endure the pain of losing her son, she also struggled to find a support group that could help her grieve.

Now she has set up her own group to help other parents through their grief.

She explained: "I looked for some support in the UK after Ivan's death but I did not find what I was looking for. Of course there are a number of bereavement support groups in the UK but they were not for me. I needed something more than they were offering."

Over the internet, Cathie came across an American bereavement support group for people who have lost children called the MISS Foundation, which stands for Mothers In Sympathy and Support.

MISS is a non-profit voluntary organisation which is committed to providing support to families in crisis after the death of their baby or young child from any cause. The support is for mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings anyone who feels they need it.

Cathie said: "I found MISS on the internet by chance and they had adequate support that I needed. The Americans are a lot more open when it comes to sharing their feelings and that was what I needed.

"I could post messages on their online message board about anything without worrying about what people would think or say about me. Bereaved parents have the most weird thoughts and it's open 24 hours a day so I can even post a message in the middle of the night. No organisation in the UK offers this type of support."

Cathie found that by the time she had posted her message the night before and logged on again in the morning, 20 to 30 people had already replied to her message offering her support or answering some of her questions.

She was completely blown away with the amount of support and kind messages she received and found it helped her grieve the loss of her son.

But she wanted a little bit more than what the website was offering. She wanted to be able to share her grief with parents within a social group so she thought about setting up her own group.

Cathie added: "At the hospital where Ivan died I was surprised to find that they did not have a social support group. The hospital must lose a lot of babies and there must be a lot of families who are affected by their deaths so I was surprised when they did not offer this type of support.

"I was looking for an extension of the website and I was not getting it. If I needed a hug from someone on the website I couldn't physically get one."

Cathie contacted Joanne Cacciatore-Garard, the woman behind the MISS Foundation, about setting up her own support group in the UK and was delighted when she encouraged the idea.

The foundation gave Cathie as much support as she needed to set up her own group and as of May this year Cathie was able to offer the support of the MISS foundation.

The group meets on the second Sunday of every month at the Northfields Community Centre in West Ealing and Cathie is hoping her group will help more grieving families to deal with their loss.

She added: "There is an enormous taboo to talk about grieving – especially if they have died at birth or just after.

"I hope my MISS support group will help others like it has helped me."

For more information about the MISS Foundation support group call the helpline on 07932 812931 or email cathie@missfoundation.org For additional information about the MISS Foundation visit www.missfoundation.org

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By Ushma Mistry

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