

The Stories We Live By:

two innovations in baby loss
bereavement support

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Extraordinary loss

A loss without a narrative

Perinatal loss is 'the only type of loss in Western society for which there are no culturally sanctioned rituals or traditions to help the bereaved say good-bye' (Markin and Zilcha-Mano 2018, 21).

In well-meaning condolences we can see 'an active culture of denial and intellectualization that discourages parents from grieving' (*ibid.*)

Learning from palliative narrative therapy

- The self 'is made up of stories'
- This is creative work
- Caution: there are limits to narrative

Two innovations in bereavement support

A new collaboration:

- personal experience
- article: Norwood, T (2021). 'Metaphor and Neonatal Death: how stories can help when a baby dies at birth' *Life Writing Journal* 18 (1), 113-124.
- twitter contact
 - introduction to **Held In Our Hearts**

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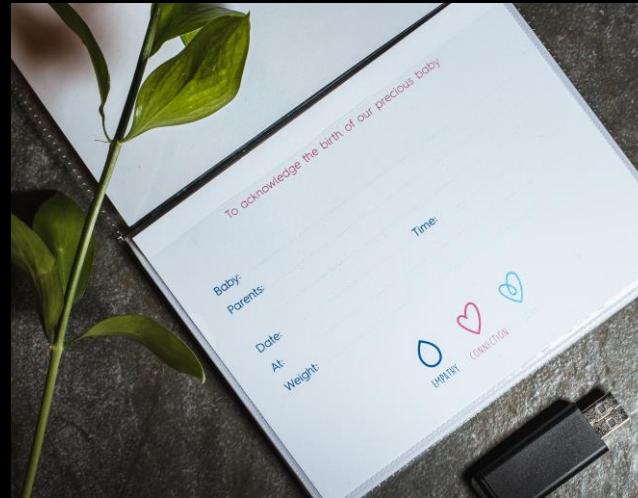
'From the Heart'
memory prompt
notelets

'The Stories We Live By'
creative writing course

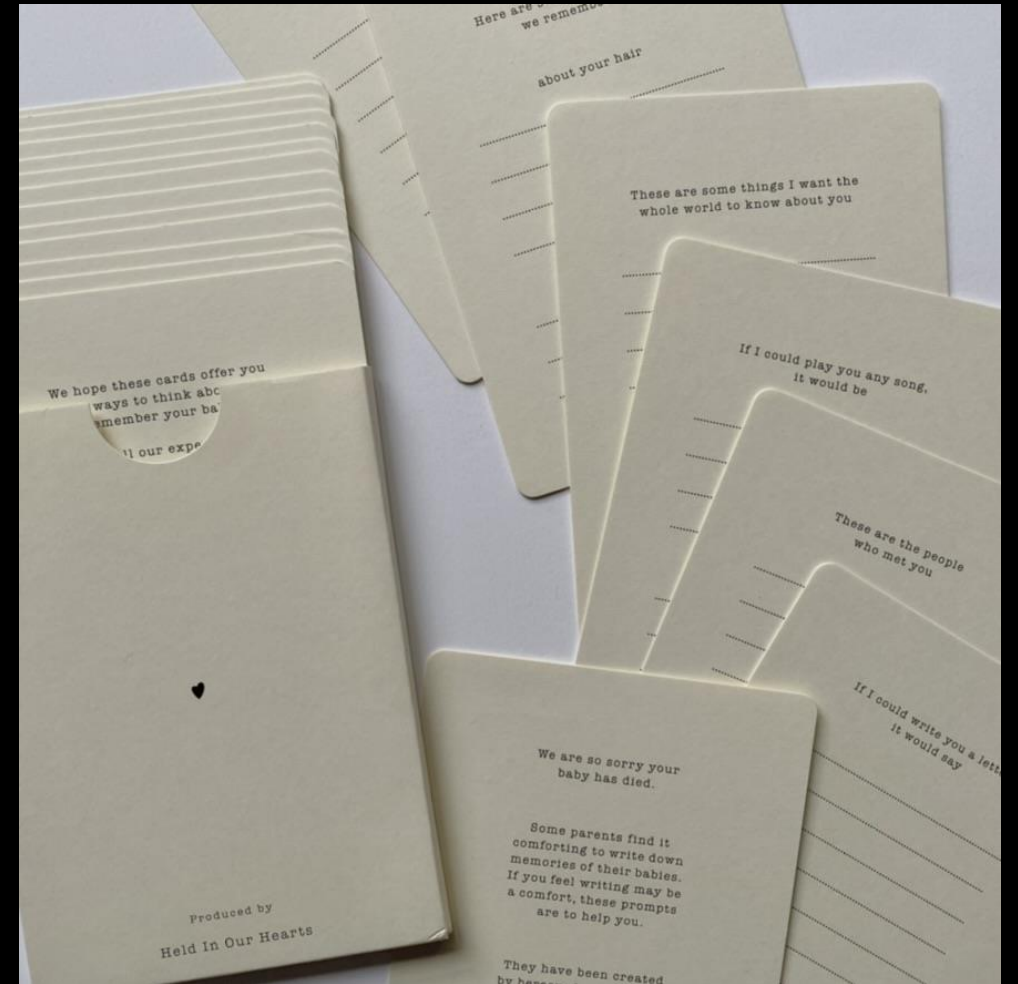
Collaborating: some practicalities



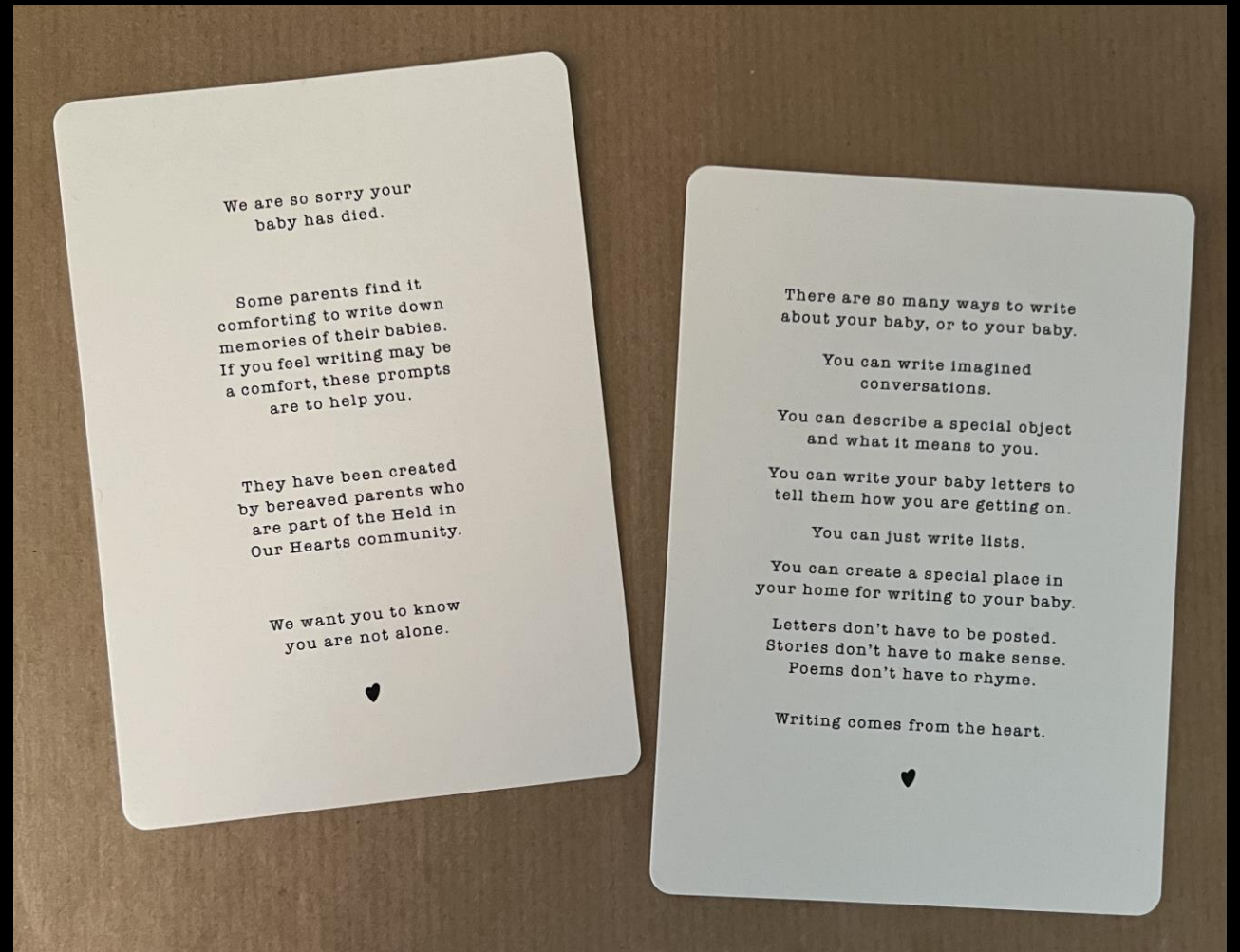
Held In Our Hearts memory bags



'From the heart' notelets



'From the heart' notelets



'From the heart' notelets

How you can access this resource

'From the heart' notelets

<https://youtu.be/gMv1dIO7R04?si=1FfxSBfPsr1IVJJR>

'The Stories We Live By' writing group

Week 1: taking a tiny image, thought or memory and making it bigger.

Week 2: stepping back to take a wider view, imagining moving through a landscape

Week 3: writing routines and habits to help get through the day (and the night) when we're grieving

Week 4: an extended musical metaphor to explore and 'direct' more challenging feelings

Week 5: different examples of writing about baby loss, including medical language, autopsy reports

Week 6: consolidating a writing practice, editing, and sharing our writing

The Letter

She shifts uneasily from foot to foot whilst waiting for her coffee, keen to get on with her next task, but also trying to put it off for as long as possible. She opens the door to her office, sets down her coffee on the desk, takes off her coat, places her bag on the floor next to her chair and opens her laptop.

Dear Lindsay and Chris, firstly let me take this opportunity to say how sorry I am that your baby, Esmae died. There are no words to describe the pain you will be feeling right now.

She pauses for a moment and takes a paper tissue from her bag - just in case. Clutching the tissue as if it is mini security blanket she stares wistfully at the photo of the perfect little foot in the delicate frame facing her on the desk.

She continues - No parent should ever have to say hello and goodbye to their child in the same day and no parent should ever have to endure the indescribable pain of leaving hospital without their precious child.

(What this letter doesn't say is..) This letter is written from the heart of a bereaved mother. Yes, I am a consultant who looked after you and your daughter, but I have said those first hellos and goodbyes and walked those tortuous steps with every ounce of my being silently screaming "you're leaving your baby behind". (I lost my daughter too I know how you feel.)

In closing I would like to express my most sincere condolences for the loss of your daughter, Esmae. If you have any questions or concerns, please never hesitate to get in contact with me.

As she prints off the letter and adds her signature a tear rolls down her cheek, this baby shares her daughter's name and birthday. The tissue is at the ready.

There is an urgent knock at the door. She is needed on the ward.

Lindsay

'The Stories We Live By' writing group

Participant feedback:

A practical way for making time for my grief and my baby

Helped me focus at work

Helped me develop a much more logical narrative of events

It was lovely to have a set time each week to dedicate to thinking about how grief feels

Helped me let go of difficult thoughts and feelings

Helped me process a lot of information

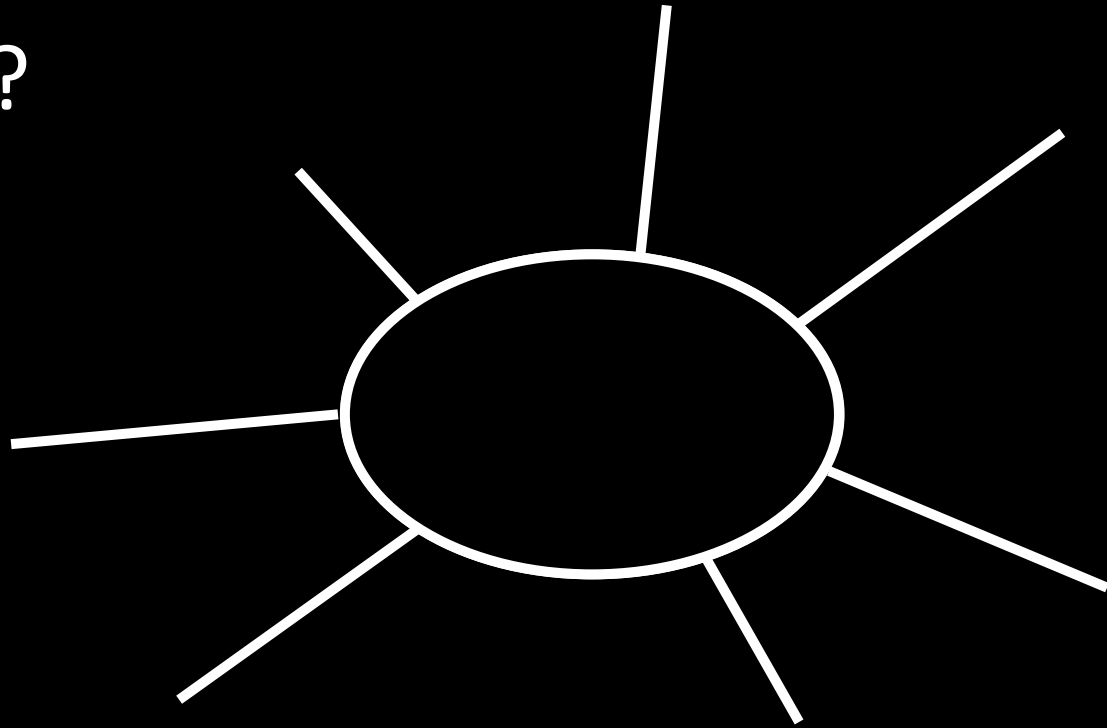
Helped me sleep better

I am thinking of doing the writing exercises again to explore my feelings about another bereavement

Helped me work through feelings I didn't know I had, and understand them better

Absolutely no negatives for me at all. I can honestly say that attending this course has been extremely beneficial

What can writing do?



Q&A



Loughborough
University

LEVERHULME
TRUST _____

Keep in touch!

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