

Hope Has Many Names

A family guide to rainbow, sunshine,
and pot of gold babies

Understanding the words.
Making room for your own experience.

United Mothers of Loss Foundation

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A few words before you begin

You may have heard someone say “rainbow baby” and wondered what they meant. You may use that name for your own child, or find that it does not fit at all. This guide explains a few words used in the pregnancy and baby loss community.

These are informal names, not medical terms. Families may use them differently. They are not a measure of how much someone loves a child, how deeply they grieve, or how they should feel about a new pregnancy.

If you are reading after a loss, you can take this a little at a time. If you are here to support someone, let them lead when it comes to the words they want you to use.

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This guide offers general information and peer support. It does not replace individual medical or mental health care.

What is a rainbow baby?

A term some families use for a child who comes after loss.

In the pregnancy and baby loss community, a rainbow baby usually means a baby born following a pregnancy or infant loss. Some families also use the term during pregnancy or when welcoming a child through adoption.

For some parents, the rainbow is a way to describe hope after a very painful experience. Others do not like the comparison with a storm or feel that it makes grief sound simpler than it is. You do not have to use this term.

A new child has their own place in the family. Their arrival does not replace a baby who died, end the grief, or make an earlier loss less important.

Words you might use

“This is my baby after loss.”
“This is our rainbow baby.”
“I prefer to use my child’s name.”

Choose the words that fit your family. You do not owe anyone an explanation.

What is a sunshine baby?

A term for a child who was born before a loss.

Some families call a child born before they experienced a pregnancy or infant loss a sunshine baby. It describes where that child’s birth falls in the family’s story.

The name does not mean life was easy before the loss, or that a living child is responsible for keeping a parent happy. Children can be loved and enjoyed while parents also grieve a baby who died.

A living child may have questions or feelings about the loss, even if they never met their sibling. They may want to talk, draw, play, or move between those things. Let them know they can ask questions and that an adult is there to help.

A simple way to explain the name

“Some people use ‘sunshine baby’ for a child who was born before a baby in the family died. We can use that name if we like, or just use your name.”

Your child does not need a special title to have an important place in the family.

What is a pot of gold baby?

A term some families use for a child who comes after a rainbow baby.

In some loss communities, a pot of gold baby means a child born or adopted after a family has already welcomed a rainbow baby. The term is less widely used, and families may understand it differently.

It does not mean the family’s grief is over or that a later pregnancy will feel easy. Parents may still worry, miss a baby who died, or need support while also looking forward to another child.

Each child has their own place in the family. You can celebrate a new baby while also remembering a baby who died. This name does not make one child more important than another.

When the meaning is unclear

You can ask, “What does that name mean to you?” A family’s own explanation is more helpful than assuming everyone uses it the same way.

You can use this term, choose another, or use no special term at all.

Questions you may have

Do I have to use any of these names?

No. Use your child’s name, say ‘my baby’ or ‘my child,’ or choose other words. You can also keep your experience of loss private.

What if I have had more than one loss?

You do not have to find a label that explains every part of your history. You may use names, speak about each loss separately, or share only what you want others to know.

Can I feel happy and still miss the baby who died?

Yes. Enjoying a pregnancy or a living child does not mean you have forgotten. You may feel different things at different times without needing to choose one feeling.

What if there will not be another baby?

Not every family will have another child, and not every family wants to. Your baby and your loss matter regardless of what happens next.

If your feelings or worries are becoming hard to manage, a trusted person or a qualified professional can help you find support.

When someone you love has experienced loss

You do not need to find a positive side or make the loss feel better. Acknowledge what happened, listen, and ask what would help.

Follow their language

Ask whether they would like you to use their baby’s name or a particular term. Avoid calling a new baby a ‘replacement’ or telling a parent they should be grateful for their living children.

Offer something specific

“Could I bring dinner on Thursday?” or “Would you like company at your appointment?” can be easier to answer than a general offer. Leave room for them to say no.

Keep remembering

A short check-in around a due date, birthday, or anniversary may be welcome. Ask before sharing their story, arranging a tribute, or posting about the loss.

United Mothers of Loss Foundation supports families after pregnancy, infant, and child loss through grief resources, peer connection, remembrance, and practical support programs. Visit our website to learn about current services and how to request support.

For concerns about a pregnancy or your health, contact your healthcare team. Peer support is not a substitute for clinical care.

Stay connected

Find free resources, peer communities, and ways to request support at turninglossintolight.com.

For Foundation inquiries, email diane@turninglossintolight.com

Email is not an emergency service. For immediate danger, contact local emergency services.

Further reading

Pregnancy After Loss Support: What is a rainbow baby?

Tommy’s: Rainbow baby information and support

Sands: Pregnancy after loss

The explanations in this guide draw on these organizations’ information. They have not reviewed or endorsed this guide. Some services are based outside the United States; availability varies.

Sharing this guide

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