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WHEN A CHILD DIES, WHY DO WE STOP SAYING THEIR NAME?

Specialist grief counsellor and bereaved mother Jackie Tarabay breaks the silence surrounding one of society's most difficult conversations in her new book, Speaking the Unspeakable.

There are some losses for which our language seems to fail us. We have a word for a child who loses their parents: orphan. We have a word for someone who loses their spouse: widow or widower. But there is no commonly used English word for a parent whose child dies.

For grief counsellor **Jackie Tarabay**, that absence says something profound about the way society responds to the death of a child. We struggle even to name it.

And too often, the parents left behind are expected to carry the unimaginable while the world around them slowly stops asking, stops mentioning their child's name and eventually expects them to move on.

Tarabay knows that world from both sides of the counselling room. Her son died from cancer when he was just six years old. Now, in her deeply personal new book, ***Speaking the Unspeakable***, she is opening a conversation about child loss, grief and the pressure bereaved parents can feel to make their pain more comfortable for everyone else.

"When your child dies, you don't stop being their mother or father. You don't stop loving them. You don't stop carrying them with you. But the world can become increasingly uncomfortable when you continue to speak about them."

Speaking the Unspeakable challenges one of the most persistent assumptions surrounding grief: that healing means leaving the person who died behind.

Tarabay offers another possibility. **What if healing isn't about moving on from someone we love, but learning how to carry that love differently?**

Drawing on lived experience and her work supporting others through grief, Tarabay explores the realities rarely captured by well-meaning phrases such as “time heals” or “you have to move forward.”

She writes about the hospital rooms and the silence afterwards. The birthdays that still arrive. The empty chair. The people who disappear because they don’t know what to say. The guilt that can accompany laughter. The fear that others will forget. And the strange experience of watching the rest of the world continue when your own world has been irrevocably changed.

But *Speaking the Unspeakable* is not simply a book about death. It is a book about **love after death**. It is about surviving something you once believed you could never survive without pretending it didn’t change you.

And it is about giving bereaved parents permission to speak the names of their children, tell their stories and grieve without a timetable.

THE CONVERSATION WE ARE STILL AFRAID TO HAVE

Tarabay believes much of society’s discomfort with bereaved parents comes not from a lack of compassion, but from fear. People worry they will say the wrong thing. So, they say nothing.

They avoid mentioning the child because they fear reminding the parent of their loss.

But Tarabay says bereaved parents do not need reminding, they remember. But what can hurt far more is the feeling that everyone else has forgotten.

“You cannot remind a parent that their child died. They already know. Saying their child’s name may not create their grief. It may tell them that their child’s life mattered and is remembered.”

That distinction lies at the heart of *Speaking the Unspeakable*. Rather than offering simplistic answers to grief, Tarabay asks us to become more capable of sitting beside it. To stop trying to fix what cannot be fixed; to stop measuring another person’s grief against a calendar; and sometimes, simply to have the courage to say the child’s name.

A STORY NO MOTHER EXPECTS TO WRITE

Tarabay never set out to become an authority on the loss of a child. She became one because the unthinkable happened to her. The death of her six-year-old son divided her life into a before and an after.

Years later, that experience informs her work as a grief counsellor and now *Speaking the Unspeakable* — a book written from inside the experience itself.

Her message is not that grief disappears. It is that life and grief can eventually learn to exist together. There can be laughter without betrayal. There can be joy without forgetting. There can be a future while still loving the child who should have been part of it. And there can be healing without "moving on."

MEDIA INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

Jackie Tarabay is available to discuss:

- Why society remains deeply uncomfortable talking about the death of a child
- What **not** to say to a grieving parent and what can genuinely help
- Why saying a deceased child's name can matter
- The pressure bereaved parents experience to "move on"
- Why grief does not follow a predictable timetable
- Birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day and other difficult milestones
- How friends, relatives and workplaces can better support grieving parents
- The guilt some bereaved parents experience when they begin to feel happiness again
- The difference between continuing to live and leaving someone behind
- What Jackie learned from losing her six-year-old son to cancer
- How lived experience ultimately led her into grief counselling
- Why she believes we need to become better at **speaking the unspeakable**

ABOUT JACKIE TARABAY

Jackie Tarabay is a Specialist Grief Practitioner, Trainer and Supervisor, with a private practise offering individual counselling on grief and loss. Jackie has presented to Grief Australia, ACCA, the Confluence Conference (with Dr Gabor Mate) and Good Life Good Death Expo.

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