

Brisbane twins' parents need compassion, not judgment

When tragedy strikes, it's natural to want to find a sense of meaning. But the death of two six-week-old twin girls shouldn't be met with this kind of venom and hatred, writes Lucy Carne.

Lucy Carne

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It was the “howling” that broke me.

“Howling and screaming” was how a neighbour described the sound a Brisbane father made on discovering his six-week-old twin daughters unresponsive early last Wednesday morning.

One of the newborns was declared dead at the Sunnybank Hills home. Her sister died in hospital the following night.

It's understood the children were co-sleeping when their mother, aged in her 30s, woke to find the babies covered in bedding.

Police said they were not treating the deaths as suspicious. It was simply a tragic accident.

The couple, who have a toddler son and a daughter kindergarten age, are not coping, a friend told media.

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But the fact that these deaths were no one's fault and a family is now drowning in a sea of pain and grief has failed to deter venom and blame festering on social media.



Police leaving the Sunnybank Hills home. Picture: Peter Wallis

There were the usual tone-deaf demands that parents have licences, insensitive calls for more foster carers and the self-righteous wanting to rub it in that they've been perfect parents and never co-slept. And there was worse, not ever worth repeating.

When tragedy suddenly takes two tiny lives and a family is utterly broken, why is empathy and compassion impossible for some?

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Why are we so fixated on accountability and find it so hard to accept an accident?

“Human beings are meaning-making machines and this is an emotional response relating that event to our personal situation,” human behaviour expert Mark Carter says.

“Our mind works like a judge and jury and sometimes, like in this case, we can be too quick to lay judgment without facts.”

Unless you've had twins yourself, you cannot understand the delirious depths of sleep deprivation.

I've been there. I had newborn twins, a two year old who never slept through the night and a husband who regularly travelled for work.



One girl died at home, with the other later dying in hospital. Picture: Peter Wallis

Stupefied with exhaustion, I have stood at my front door surrounded by babies and groceries repeatedly pressing the unlock door button on my car key, unable to understand why I couldn't get in the house.

I've lost count of the times in those debilitating early months that I woke in a sudden panic and frantically ripped off the sheets adamant I'd left a baby in bed – and that the baby was dead. The sight of the twins safely asleep in their cribs did little to reassure my pounding heart.

Other times I've woken from a thick sleep sitting upright and looked down horrified to see the twins still on the breastfeeding pillow hours after their feed, one precariously about to roll off and hit the floor.

A couple of times I've opened my eyes and found a baby beside me in bed with absolutely no memory of how he got there.

Many nights I didn't sleep at all. The relentless up and down and settling and feeding and burping and nappy changing and stumbling along the hallway in the dark from room to room until the creep of grey dawn announces that the day has begun, again. No sleep for you, it says. Too tired to cry, too tired to care, too tired to eat meals, too tired to put on active wear and pretend "I've got this". Too tired to ask for help.



It's understood the children were co-sleeping when their mother, aged in her 30s, woke to find the babies covered in bedding. Picture: Peter Wallis

I co-slept. I said I wouldn't do it and I don't endorse it. But I'm not ashamed to admit I've done it – many times. Sometimes with all three small children in bed with me.

Often it seemed my only possible option to survive the never-ending rotation of waking, crying and feeding.

Sleep deprivation is far more dangerous than we previously thought, according to one of the largest studies ever conducted on sleep, released last week.

The Michigan State University's Sleep and Learning Lab research found that people who haven't slept well were at a far greater risk of making costly errors – both in work and life.

Parents of newborns – especially newborn twins – have no reprieve from this bone-aching exhaustion.

Be kind and understand what parents of newborns endure. Offer help, don't wait to be asked. Drop off a meal, do the laundry, take their bins out.

In this terrible tragedy, no one should be shamed just to ease other's selfish fears.

These grieving parents don't deserve criticism or judgment. They need our sympathy and prayers that one day they may find hope and joy again.

And that their little twin girls may rest in peace and forever watch over their family as angels.

Lucy Carne is the editor of Rendezview.com.au