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The Mourning Response of Parents to the Death of a Newborn Infant

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ABSTRACT We observed the reactions of mothers to the loss of a newborn infant and explored the strength of the affectional ties between mothers and their infants before the first physical contact. Twenty women were interviewed after the death of the infant; every mother mourned even when her baby was nonviable and lived for only an hour. There were no unduly upsetting effects of early tactile contact in emotionally healthy mothers. A high degree of mourning was most often found in mothers who were pleased to be pregnant and who had previously lost a baby. There was also, possibly, a higher degree of mourning in mothers who had touched their baby before its death, and who had not talked with their husbands about the loss.

Strong affectional bonding appears to begin before physical contact and caretaking but is enhanced by these activities.

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