

# Sands Bereavement Support Book

## The Use of Language

We acknowledge that some of you may have had more than one baby who died at the same time but for ease of reading, throughout this book, we use the term “baby” rather than “babies” to apply to both an individual baby and to more than one baby. We do not know whether your baby was a boy or girl, and not all parents know the gender of their babies who died. Therefore, we will use the terms “they/them” rather than “his/her”.

When we use the term “mother”, we are usually referring to the person who is/was pregnant. We use the term “mother” because it is the word that is most easily and commonly understood. In doing so we understand that not all birth parents would define themselves as a mother.

We recognise that parents who identify as transgender males or people who do not identify with the gender binary who are the birth parent may not prefer the term “mother”. We also recognise that some surrogate birth parents choose not to identify as the mother. We refer to “mothers” rather than “women” as mothers may not always identify as women.

We also recognise the fact that there may be more than one mother involved. For example, for lesbian couples there will be the birth mother and her partner, or where surrogacy is being used, the birth mother and the mother/s who would be the legal guardian or parent.

For ease of reading, we use “partner” rather than “spouse or partner”. We use this in the context of heterosexual and same sex relationships, and where couples may or may not be married. We acknowledge that not all cultures think of spouses as partners.

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*All information is correct at the time of going to print: June 2019.*

## Introduction

We are so sorry that your baby has died or that you have been told to expect that they may die soon. Few experiences can compare to the trauma and pain of losing a baby. Sands is available to provide support for as long as you need it and details of our bereavement support services are below.

You may have found out that your baby has already died and you could be waiting to give birth to them or perhaps your baby has died or is expected to die shortly in neonatal care. You could also have chosen to end a pregnancy for medical reasons or be expecting to do so soon. Whatever the circumstances, we recognise that this is an extremely sad and distressing time. We hope that you find the information in this book helpful both now and in the future.

You do not need to read this book in order. Each section is colour coded so you can easily find sections that are most relevant to you. If you would like to share a particular section with a relative, friend or an employer, you can download individual PDFs from our website. If you don't have access to a printer, you may like to download the Sands Bereavement Support App or ask for us to send you a printed PDF of a specific section. We have occasionally repeated information so that each section is complete for those who do not read the whole book.

You can also download the Sands Bereavement Support App on your smartphone or tablet, or by visiting [www.sands.org.uk/app](http://www.sands.org.uk/app).

There are various other organisations that you might find helpful. A list is available at [www.sands.org.uk/usefullinks](http://www.sands.org.uk/usefullinks).

# Table of Contents

<b>Giving birth to your baby</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Information and support for partners</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Remembering your baby</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Understanding why your baby died</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Saying goodbye to your baby</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Supporting children</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Physical and emotional challenges</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Returning to work</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Information and support for relatives and friends</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>The days, weeks and months ahead</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Thinking about having another baby</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>About Sands</b>	<b>101</b>

Click on the sections above to go there directly.

# Giving birth to your baby

Waiting to give birth to a baby who has died is a traumatic and unexpected experience, and we hope that the information provided here helps you in making difficult decisions.

## When your baby died

Your baby might have died before or during labour. If your baby has died before labour you will, in most cases, need to give birth. You may have been told that your baby is extremely unwell and not expected to live for more than a few hours or days.

Waiting to give birth is an incredibly difficult time. Whilst you are waiting you may have a huge range of thoughts and feelings racing through your head, you may feel completely numb, or anything in between. Even after your baby has died, as you change position, you might still feel the baby move in your womb and this could feel very unsettling for you.

You should be offered a private space to give birth away from other mothers and families. As it can be very hard to focus at this time, you may be encouraged to have a partner or someone else with you who can provide support and help you make difficult decisions.

## How will your baby be born?

Unless there is a medical reason for you to have a caesarean section, doctors usually recommend that you give birth to your baby vaginally. This is usually medically safer for you and you are likely to make a quicker physical recovery.

The thought of going through labour and giving birth to a baby who has died can come as a huge shock to many parents. The midwife or nurse will ensure that you are well cared for during your labour and the birth, and you will have the opportunity to ask questions before your baby is born.

With time and support, most mothers adjust to the idea of going through labour. Although it may seem strange, many mothers who have been through this experience say that it feels right to have been able to go through labour and give birth to their baby. However, if you find the idea of labour too much to cope with, or if you have had a difficult birth or a caesarean in the past, do discuss this with the doctor who is looking after you.

## How people refer to your baby

You might find that the health professionals caring for you, or even some family and friends, use technical definitions when talking about your baby without appreciating how this might make you feel. For example, if your baby died at 23 weeks of pregnancy, they might say that you had a “late miscarriage” rather than that your baby died. This could be because the requirements for registration are different, depending on when your baby died. It is important that you tell family, friends and hospital staff the language you prefer. They might know or have cared for other parents who use different language to describe a loss that happened at a similar time in pregnancy.

## When will your baby be born?

If your health is at risk, the doctor will recommend that your labour is induced as soon as possible. If there are no medical reasons for delivering your baby straight away, the main decision is whether to have medication to start labour or wait for labour to start by itself.

You may not have to decide this straight away. You and your partner can discuss the different options with the staff. If you are a single parent, you may want to include a family member or close friend to help you think through your options and to support you when you are talking with the staff. You may also want to go home and take time to think about what you want to do.

## Getting ready for labour

The staff will usually test your blood and urine, and possibly take vaginal swabs. Although these tests are important, it may not be possible at this stage to find out why your baby has died.



It is important to get support during labour. It can be helpful to have one or two labour partners to support you if possible. Having two labour partners will also let them support each other and let them take turns to have breaks. It is common for labour partners to feel helpless and to experience a range of conflicting feelings. Nevertheless, many labour partners have said that, although it was very difficult, it was important that they were there.

If your labour partner plans to take their car to hospital, then ask the staff about parking charges. Some hospitals may not charge, or have a reduced parking rate, for partners of mothers in labour.

## If your labour is induced

The way that your labour is induced will depend on the stage of your pregnancy. You may be given medication to prepare your womb for the induction and this usually takes time to work. Some women go home during this time, with an appointment to come back to the hospital 24 to 48 hours later.

If you feel too distressed by the thought of going home, you may want to stay in hospital. The staff will usually try to organise this.

In hospital, your labour may be induced with tablets. These tablets may sometimes be combined with, or followed by, gel or pessaries that are inserted into your vagina. You may also need an intravenous drip containing medication to stimulate the contractions.

Once labour has started, most mothers give birth within 24 hours. The midwife or nurse caring for you should explain what to expect and how they will look after you. Some women decide to wait and see if their labour starts by itself.

If you have no medical problems and are considering waiting, you need to be aware of the following:

- If you wait more than 48 hours, you will be offered regular blood tests to check that your health isn't being negatively affected.
- If there are any worries about your health, or if your labour hasn't started after two or three weeks, the doctor will usually recommend that you have an induction.
- If there is delay before the birth, your baby's condition may deteriorate. If you want to have a post-mortem examination to

try to find out why your baby died, this is less likely to provide information. Your midwife will be able to explain what to expect. Some changes could include a change in a baby's skin tone, their skin becoming dry, or a change in their colour.

## Where will your baby be born?

Most mothers decide to give birth in the hospital. However, if possible, some mothers may choose to have their baby at home. If you decide to go to the hospital, the place where your baby will be born will often depend on the policy of the hospital and on the stage your pregnancy has reached. In most hospitals, mothers are admitted to the labour ward or to another specialist unit if they have reached 20 weeks of pregnancy or longer.



The staff should explain where you will be cared for, where your baby will be born and what pain relief will be available. If you have a preference, do let the staff know. They might still be able to offer you certain aspects of your birth plan.

## Going home before labour starts

Before you go home, the staff will give you the name and telephone number of a contact at the hospital. You can contact the staff at any

time if you have any questions or concerns. They will also tell you when to come back to the hospital and where to go. It is important that, as far as possible, you do not travel home alone. Shock and distress can affect people's judgment and ability to concentrate. It is especially important that you do not drive.

## What to take into hospital

The hospital may give you a list of things to bring with you when you return. You may want to bring in something special for your baby to wear or to be wrapped in after the birth, and a camera or a smartphone to take photos. There are ideas for photos to take later in this book on page 22. You could also bring a soft toy or anything else you would like to place alongside your baby and maybe something in which to keep a lock of hair. All of these items will help you make memories of your baby and may become very precious to you in time.

*I washed Alice, changed her, read to her, sung to her and took hundreds of photos and videos. I'm so glad we had this opportunity because these moments are my most cherished memories and they still get me through the darkest days of grief.*  
Clare

## What to expect during labour

Different women can have different experiences of pain during labour. Some women feel pain more intensely if they feel afraid, shocked or distressed. An induced labour can be more painful than a labour that starts by itself. Inducing labour can also take a long time, especially if it is some time before your baby is due.

You may decide to use self-help techniques in the early stages of labour. For example, you might try relaxation, a warm bath, breathing awareness, massage, and different positions.

If you decide that you want additional help with pain relief, it is usually possible to change from one method of pain relief to another during labour.

“How could they expect me to give birth  
and see my beautiful baby no longer alive?”  
Nicky

Most maternity and gynaecology units can offer strong pain-relieving medication such as diamorphine. This can be given either as an injection or through a drip in your arm. Some people find this type of pain relief helpful while others might not. Strong pain medication can reduce the pain and help you relax, but it may not take the pain away completely. It can make some people feel sick, drowsy or forgetful.

If the medication is given shortly before the birth, you may still feel drowsy when your baby is born. You may not remember as much about the birth.

Gas and air (also called Entonox) is available in both maternity and gynaecological units. You inhale it through a mouthpiece as soon as each contraction starts. It is very short acting and helps to take the edge off the pain, but doesn't remove it completely. It can make you feel a bit sick and sleepy and it can also be tiring to use it for a long time.

In most hospitals, an epidural is available only to women who are cared for on the labour ward. An epidural is a local anaesthetic injected into your lower back. The needle is then removed and a very fine flexible tube is left in place so that the anaesthetic can be topped up when it starts to wear off. This usually removes all the pain.

You may have an intravenous drip in your arm and your blood pressure will be checked frequently. You may need a catheter (a small tube inserted into your bladder) if you are unable to pass urine. You should be offered a chance to talk to a doctor who specialises in pain relief for labour.

## Having a caesarean section

If you are critically ill, the priority will be to save your life. The safest and quickest way of doing this is through a caesarean section. If your baby is still alive, a caesarean may also help save them.

This situation can be very frightening for both parents. It can be particularly difficult for the partner, who can feel powerless and frightened. If there is time and you feel able, tell the staff if you have any particular wishes about your caring for or seeing your baby.

Except in an emergency, you will probably be offered a spinal or an epidural anaesthetic for a caesarean section. This is usually safer than a general anaesthetic, and recovery is often quicker. It also means that your partner, or someone else you have chosen, can be with you in the operating theatre and that you will be awake when the baby is born. However, there may sometimes be medical reasons for having a general anaesthetic.



## What to expect when your baby is born

Knowing that your baby has died before birth will not necessarily prepare you for the silence that follows once they are born. The silence can be “loud” and this can be very distressing.



Once your baby is born and your condition is stable, you can begin to think about the choices you want to make. For example, you can think about whether you want to see and hold your baby and to have photographs taken. You may also want to create other memories such as hand and foot prints, or save a lock of your baby's hair. You might have already started thinking about these decisions in the time before you gave birth.

If you are in a state of shock, or are feeling drowsy because of your medication, do not feel rushed into making decisions or feel that you cannot change your mind. Your baby will be cared for until you feel ready to make decisions. Later on, you might also have questions and want to understand more about what happened during labour. You may also find it helpful to go through the medical notes with the doctor or midwife.

# Information and support for partners

There is often the assumption that the birth mother is the primary griever when a couple experiences the death of a baby. Partners are often expected to assume a supportive role without adequate recognition of their own loss. This section is written primarily to support partners, whilst you are having to make difficult and unexpected decisions. For further support, please contact our Bereavement Support Services team, details of which are below.

This section is written for partners, including fathers in same-sex or heterosexual relationships and co-mothers. Adoptive parents might also find it useful.

Many of the other sections contain information that is relevant to both people in the couple. However, this section focusses more specifically on what a partner might need to know and how they might feel. In the case of adoptive parents, their support might be for the birth mother of the child that they are adopting.

## Practical and emotional support

As a partner, you might be expected to take the lead role in telling family and friends, liaising with health professionals, making funeral arrangements and supporting the birth mother. This can feel overwhelming, particularly when you are also grieving for your baby. Consider asking for help when you can. You might like to speak with one or two close family members or friends and ask them to tell others. They can also answer questions on your behalf. You may prefer to send an email or text, or put some information on social media to more distant friends and relations, telling them about your baby, what has happened, and how you would like them to make contact and support you in the coming weeks and months.



If your baby died around their due date, people are usually eagerly awaiting your news and are enthusiastic to hear about the baby. If you phone family and friends you could start by saying, "I have some very sad news." This can help set the tone for the conversation and may reduce the number of inappropriate and upsetting questions. You can also set expectations about the length of the conversation, by saying, "I can only talk for a few minutes", at the beginning, which may help you end the call when it feels right for you. If your baby

died in neonatal care, people around you might have known of your baby's health problems, but they may still struggle to find the words.

Your family and friends may just not know what to say to you. As your news will be upsetting to other people, and perhaps even trigger difficult memories of their own, you might feel you want or have to support them, or apologise for upsetting them. It is important to remember that this is your experience of baby loss and you need to receive support at this time rather than provide it to your wider group of family and friends.

Try not to feel that you have to answer everyone's questions. Say only as much as you feel able. Later, you could follow up your calls or texts with emails providing more information and outlining any help you may need. You may want to ask people to help you look after any other children you have and to support you in carrying

out daily activities, such as cleaning and cooking. People are often keen to help and appreciate clear requests and boundaries. For example, you could say, "Please could you bring food around on Thursday and you are welcome to join us," or "If you don't mind, we are not really up to conversation or eating together, but having you bring over a meal would be lovely."



You could also ask people to help you talk with any other children you have about the death of their sibling. There is more information about this in the **Supporting Children** section.

You may want to tell people what you would like them to say on your behalf, including whether and how you want to be contacted in the first few days. For example, you might prefer for people to send cards, texts or emails rather than phone you. These preferences can be communicated on your

behalf. It is possible that you won't know what you need or would like people to say on your behalf. Please contact the Sands Helpline if you would like support thinking things through.

## How people refer to your baby

You might find that the health professionals caring for you, or even some family and friends, use technical definitions when talking about your baby without realising how these definitions

might make you feel. For example, if your baby died at 23 weeks of pregnancy, they might say that you had a "late miscarriage" rather than that your baby died. This could be because the requirements for registration are different, depending on when your baby died. However, it is important that you tell family, friends and professionals what language you prefer. They might know other parents who use different language to describe a loss that occurred at a similar time in pregnancy.

“When people hear the word miscarriage I don't think they realise that we had gone through a traumatic 48 hour labour, held his body, made decisions about his body, and organised our son's funeral. I now describe Altair as having been stillborn as I want people to know that he was born. That he was here.”  
Shema

## Individual grief

The stress on couples when a baby dies can be huge. It is very difficult to give support and understanding to someone else when you are so sad and in need of support yourself. Grief is very individual, and the way that it comes and goes means that, often, you and your partner may not feel or need the same things at the same time. You may also have different ways of expressing and dealing with your feelings.

Sometimes couples find it hard if their grief patterns do not match and one partner may feel that the other is not grieving as much or in the same way. This can put a strain on your relationship. Some partners put their grief on hold for a while and concentrate on supporting their partner or the birth mother. Their grief may emerge weeks, or even months, after their baby's death.

Some partners may find it hard to open up having kept things in for so long. Sands is here to support you when you feel ready.

Whether your grief is immediate or delayed, there will probably be times when your whole existence seems to be taken up with grief. Because grief can come in waves, you may also find that you can cope well for hours or even days. Some parents feel guilty about this and worry that they are being disloyal to their baby, but this doesn't mean that you have forgotten or no longer care about your baby. It's quite common to have periods of calm and normality between waves of acute sadness.

## Special occasions

Special days such as Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, and family gatherings are times when parents often feel renewed sadness. Festivals such as Christmas, Diwali, Eid or Hanukkah, where celebrations focus on family, may be hard. The build-up to the anniversary of your baby's death or due date may feel especially painful. You and your partner/family might want to plan a day off together so that you can do something special to remember your baby.



## Baby-related mail

Reminders such as baby-related mail or adverts on social media can also be a source of distress. If, at the start of your pregnancy, you signed up to any baby clubs or for any mailings, you can cancel these subscriptions or ask someone to do this for you. You can also reduce the amount of baby-related mailings by contacting the Baby Mailing Preference Service.

## When couples have separated

Many couples find it helpful to grieve together and to remember their baby as a shared experience. However, if you have separated from your partner during the pregnancy or after your baby died, you may not have the option of sharing your grief with each other.



If you feel able, you could make joint decisions and arrangements and, if you have other children together, working together to support them may also be helpful, so they receive consistent care and information about the baby and what has happened. There is more information on talking to children later in the book on page 51.

Grieving on your own can be especially difficult and you may need additional support from family and friends, or to seek professional support.

You may find that crying and talking about your baby are good ways of releasing feelings and you may want to tell your story over and over again or find it helpful to write down what happened and how you feel day by day. Not being able to share your experience with the other parent of the baby can feel isolating, even if there are other people to support you. Think about how you need to express your grief and what support you might need. Sands can provide you with your own memory box if this is what you would like.

### Talking to others

You may find it helpful to talk to other partners who have had similar experiences, or to an understanding relative or friend. You can also use the Sands Online Community or contact Sands Helpline for information and support. The Helpline can also put you in touch with your nearest Sands support group. There are also football teams in some areas for bereaved fathers and other male family members to get together and express their grief through sport. You can learn more about Sands United at [www.sands.org.uk/sandsunited](http://www.sands.org.uk/sandsunited).



# Remembering your baby

When a baby dies, there are few happy memories to help process the grief that parents and other family members experience. This section discusses various ways in which you can make memories of the time that you have together and honour the memory of your baby.

## Memory boxes

Memory boxes can help you capture the time that you had with your baby. The box is a special place for keepsakes to remember your baby by. It could include photos, a special baby-grow, a blanket your baby was wrapped in, cards that you might receive, a lock of hair, or a hand or foot print. There is space in Sands memory boxes for you to place items of your own in the box, both immediately and over the years, on anniversaries and other significant occasions.

In addition to the opportunity to add your own items to the box, Sands memory boxes already contain a handmade blanket, two teddy bears, and other items that you might like to read or use. Parents often give their baby one of the teddy bears and take the other home as a keepsake.

Hospital staff often offer parents opportunities to create memories of their baby by collecting keepsakes. Although you may feel unsure about doing this, many parents have told us how precious and important this can be, especially in the years to come. Having items to show and share with family members and friends may also help them to understand how much your baby means to you and help you start conversations about your baby.

Sands memory boxes are created specifically for those whose babies are stillborn or have died soon after birth. For babies born very early

it may not always be possible to take hand and foot prints or to have a lock of hair, but you may still like to have a box for other memories.

Memory boxes can help you acknowledge your grief and talk about your baby with other people. If you are not given a memory box in hospital, please ask staff for one, or contact us and we can send you one. Some hospitals also stock memory boxes from other charities.

“The memory box that the hospital provided, with support from Sands, was the only thing that kept us grounded during the long sleepless nights and dark days.”

Amanda and Dan

## Taking photographs

The midwife or nurse caring for you will usually offer to take photos of your baby. You can also take your own photos. If you are not sure, the midwife or nurse might ask if they can take some to keep with the mother's hospital notes. You will be able to access these at a later time. You could also have photos taken and ask that these are put in a sealed envelope for you to take home to open if and when you feel ready.

Although it may feel uncomfortable, you may like to take photographs of just your baby or of all of you as a family. Some parents like to have photographs of their baby's hands or feet. If your baby was a twin or a multiple and their siblings are alive, you might like to take pictures of them together. It is important that what you choose to do feels right for you. We have included some ideas of photos you might like to take on the next page.

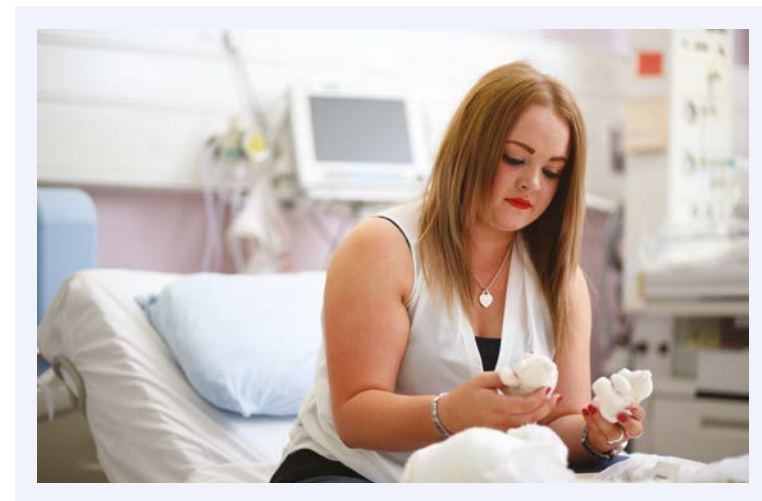
These photo suggestions were made by Esther, a bereaved mum, who felt that at the time her baby died, she couldn't think about the kind of photos to take, how to take them or who to ask, because everything was such a blur. These are examples of the photos she wishes she had taken.



Credit: @hannahbphotography

## Memorial books

All crematoria and many cemeteries and hospitals have a memorial book; often called a Book of Remembrance. You could have your baby's name entered into one of these books. Some crematoria and cemeteries ask for a small charge to arrange this. We have many ideas and opportunities to remember your baby via Sands events and also virtual online spaces, such as our tribute pages [www.sands.org.uk/always-loved-tributes](http://www.sands.org.uk/always-loved-tributes).



## Ongoing keepsakes

In addition to the keepsakes you collect soon after your baby has died, there may be other items that could form valuable keepsakes in the future. Among other things, these could include poems, letters, emails, cards and jewellery. If you had an order of service for the funeral, you could include that as well.

## Attending events

Attending remembrance events can be a meaningful way of honouring your baby's memory alongside other bereaved families and a helpful part of your grief journey. Sharing this time with other families might help you feel less isolated in your grief.

Sands holds two types of remembrance events every year. The Sands Family Day and Service of Remembrance and Hope is held in June at the Sands Garden in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. Lights of Love is normally held on the first Friday of December in London. There are also various regional and local remembrance and Lights of Love events held across the UK. You can find out more about these events on our website. You may also want to create your own event, such as a family picnic or a walk, in memory of your baby each year.



Baby Loss Awareness Week is held every year between 9-15 October and ends with the international Wave of Light at 7pm on 15 October for parents to remember their baby at the same time as others across the world. More information is available at [www.babyloss-awareness.org](http://www.babyloss-awareness.org).

## More permanent memorials

Some parents decide to plant trees in a woodland in memory of their baby. You can dedicate a single tree or larger area of woodland in your baby's name in Woodland Trust ([www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)) sites across the UK. This will give you somewhere special to visit for years to come. The Woodland Trust also offers benches and marker posts in some locations, which can be inscribed with your own message.

The Sands Garden is one of over 350 gardens within the National Memorial Arboretum and is dedicated to the memory of all babies who have died. At the heart of the garden is a beautiful Portland stone sculpture of a baby, created by the respected sculptor John Roberts. The Sands Garden is a place where you can spend quiet reflective time during our annual event, or on your own, at other times in the year. You can dedicate a small stone in memory of your baby. There are also other Sands gardens around the UK and you can contact the Sands Helpline to find out if there is one near you.



You may also be able to have a commemorative plaque at a cemetery or crematorium. There will usually be a charge for this and there may be restrictions about where the plaque can be placed. Many crematoria and cemeteries have a special section set aside for memorials to babies and very young children.





# Understanding why your baby died

Some parents are keen to know why their baby has died. Others may feel unsure. Not all baby deaths are understood and more research is needed to understand why babies die. There are, however, two possible investigations that might provide some answers. The first is a post-mortem; the second is a review.

## Post-mortem examinations

It can be very hard to think about a post-mortem examination for your baby. If you think you might want a post-mortem examination and are feeling unsure about it, you can discuss this with the staff at the hospital. You might also like to discuss this with your family and friends, your doctor, or a midwife or nurse. The staff on the Sands Helpline are also available to provide you with support.

### What is a post-mortem?

A post-mortem is a clinical investigation to help understand any factors that might have contributed to your baby's death. You will usually have the opportunity to spend time with your baby in hospital or to take them home. The hospital staff will give you advice on how to keep your baby cool so that their condition does not deteriorate. You may be able to borrow a cold cot or unit from the hospital, or a nearby children's hospice, to take home.

Usually, a senior health professional will talk with you about the option of having a post-mortem examination. Unless it has been ordered by a coroner (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or a procurator fiscal (Scotland), a post-mortem examination cannot be done without your consent or authorisation<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "Consent" is the legal term used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. "Authorisation" is the legal term used in Scotland. For simplicity, we will use "consent".

Your baby will be examined by a specialist doctor who will try to find out the reason for your baby's death. Keepsakes such as soft toys and blankets can be included with your baby, and your baby will be well looked after and treated with respect. You will be able to see your baby until the time of the post-mortem and, if you wish, after it has been completed. Some parents choose to say goodbye to their baby in advance of the post-mortem.

Ask the staff if you have any questions about the post-mortem. You may also like to look at this animation for parents: [www.sands-lothians.org.uk/post-mortem-animation](http://www.sands-lothians.org.uk/post-mortem-animation).

### When should a post-mortem take place?

A post-mortem will usually provide the most information if carried out within a few days of the baby's death. If you need to hold the funeral within 24 or 48 hours, tell the staff at the hospital as they may be able to arrange a post-mortem within this time. Sometimes, babies need to be transported to specialist centres in other hospitals where post-mortems can be carried out.

### What might a post-mortem examination tell you?

A post-mortem examination of your baby and of the placenta (afterbirth) may help to find out why your baby has died. Although it does not always find a definite cause of death, it may still answer some questions and rule out some possible causes of death. Here are a few examples of why a post-mortem might be useful:

- It can confirm or change an existing diagnosis.
- It may identify conditions that have not been diagnosed previously.
- It can exclude some common causes of death, such as medical problems with your baby, infections or growth restrictions.

- It can help assess the chances of problems recurring in a future pregnancy.
- It can help provide information about a genetic condition.
- It may tell you the gender of the baby.

If you already know the immediate cause of your baby's death, a post-mortem might confirm this or highlight additional problems that might be useful for you to know for a possible future pregnancy.

Once you have consented to have a post-mortem examination, you can change your mind and withdraw consent. It is best to ask the hospital how much time you have to do this.

“ The post-mortem showed that there was something wrong with my placenta and it had stopped working. This means the amniotic fluid wasn't being produced and the baby wasn't gaining weight. ”  
Sophie

## When is a post-mortem compulsory?

If your baby died after birth and the cause of death is not clear, the doctor looking after your baby must, by law, refer the case to a coroner (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or to a procurator fiscal (in Scotland). In Northern Ireland, the coroner may order a post-mortem even when a baby has died before birth and the cause of death is uncertain. In these cases, the coroner usually agrees that the doctor can issue a stillbirth certificate.

Once the coroner or procurator fiscal decides that no further examinations are required, they will inform the registrar. You will

then be able to obtain the certificates that you need to organise your baby's funeral. You will be told the results of the post-mortem examination but these may not be ready for up to 12 weeks.

## Ending a pregnancy for medical reasons

A post-mortem examination may be helpful if you have had to end a pregnancy for medical reasons. Even though detailed scans and diagnostic tests may have been done during pregnancy, a post-mortem examination, following the ending of a pregnancy for medical reasons, might find additional information. Whether or not a post-mortem is possible will depend on the stage of pregnancy and the method used to end the pregnancy. It is best to discuss this with the hospital staff as they can advise you on your options.

## Limited examinations

If you do not want a full post-mortem, you could choose to have a limited examination of certain organs, skin samples, or an external examination of your baby. You might also decide to have an examination of your placenta. This can provide extremely valuable information. During this examination, samples are taken for study under a microscope. Hospitals do not have to ask for consent to examine your placenta but should inform you if they intend to do this.

## Future pregnancies

A post-mortem examination may also discover whether there was a problem that could affect any future pregnancies. Whether a post-mortem examination confirms an earlier diagnosis or finds new information, it can help the doctors understand your baby's condition or cause of death, and can assess the chances of the same problems happening in a future pregnancy.

## Does a post-mortem examination include genetic testing?

With your consent, as part of a post-mortem examination, a piece of tissue about the size of a postage stamp, or a blood sample, can be taken which can then be stored and/or sent for genetic testing. Any samples stored can be sent for testing in the future and can help provide information for future pregnancies.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland samples can be stored with your consent only. In Scotland, samples automatically form part of the medical record.

Genetic testing may be especially useful if your baby had an anomaly or if the doctors think that your baby may have an underlying genetic disorder. If your baby is smaller than expected and there is no other explanation for their death, a genetic test can sometimes explain what happened. If you think you may have another baby in the future, genetic testing may be particularly useful for assessing the



risk of the same thing happening again. Depending on when your baby died, genetic testing may also be able to confirm their gender.

Many parents find post-mortems helpful. The information they gain may help them come to terms with the death of their baby.

## Reviews

Another process for trying to understand why your baby died is a review of the care that mother and baby received. This includes care during pregnancy, during labour, and when the baby died after birth. This is a part of standard NHS care and all baby deaths should be reviewed.

There are different types of review:

- Hospital review: The Perinatal Mortality Review Tool (PMRT) in England, Wales and Scotland is a review of your care that should be carried out for all babies who die after 22 weeks gestation.
- NHS Serious Incident Investigation (SII) when it is thought something may have gone wrong with the quality of NHS care.
- Health Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB) investigation (England only) for babies born at 37 weeks or later.
- Coroner's (procurator fiscal in Scotland) inquest, when there is concern about the circumstances of the death.

## Hospital reviews

The death of a baby before or shortly after birth should always be reviewed by the hospital to understand what happened. This review is designed to support you and other members of your family to understand why your baby died. It could also help to prevent other babies from dying of the same cause.

In the weeks after your baby died, the hospital will hold a review meeting.

The review meeting will:

- Try to understand what happened and why your baby died.
- Answer any questions or concerns you may have.
- Look at medical records and test results, including a post-mortem, if you have consented to one.
- Talk to staff involved.
- Look at guidance and policies.

The review may also provide the hospital with information that it needs to change the way that staff work. It could also reveal that the care provided was not at fault, but there were other contributory factors. Your thoughts, feelings and questions are important. Before you leave hospital, staff should inform you about the review process and ask you if you would like to share your experience or ask any questions about your care. To support you in doing this, the hospital should provide you with a key review contact.



Your key review contact will:

- Call you within 10 days of your going home to inform you again about the review process.
- Ask if you would like to ask any questions or share your concerns with the review team.
- Give you choices about how you might contribute to the review, either in person, online or via telephone or email.

## Keeping you informed

It can take many weeks to gather all the information required for a review process. We understand that this is a long time to wait and if you would like to meet with a consultant before the review takes place, you can arrange this through your review contact. The hospital may, however, not have any further information at that time about why your baby died. Once the review report has been completed, a consultant can discuss its findings with you. The hospital can also send you the review report by post or email if you prefer. For more information about the PMRT hospital review process go to:

[www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/pmrt/information-for-bereaved-parents](http://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/pmrt/information-for-bereaved-parents).

## Other investigations

If something has gone wrong that may have caused your baby's death, an urgent investigation called an NHS Serious Incident Investigation (SII) is begun. This is so that the NHS can be open and honest with families about any mistakes, and learn from poor care. This learning could prevent future harm or deaths. The NHS should take the views of families into account when deciding whether or not an SII is needed. Deaths in maternity and neonatal care that trigger an SII will usually include a death where the mother arrived in labour close to her due date but the baby subsequently and unexpectedly died either during labour, at birth, or shortly after.

In England, if your baby died at term (37 weeks or more) due to an unexpected event, it may be investigated by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB). Like an NHS SII, it will carry out an investigation if your baby died during or after delivery because something went wrong in labour. The difference is that HSIB investigations are wholly independent and not run by staff from the Trust where the baby was born or died. An NHS hospital review will still be carried out even if an HSIB investigation is also being done, but any hospital review will not conclude its findings until the HSIB has finalised its report. For more information go to: [www.hsib.org.uk/maternity](http://www.hsib.org.uk/maternity).

When a baby dies as a newborn the hospital must, by law, inform the coroner (or procurator fiscal in Scotland). It is their job to ascertain where and when the baby died. They can establish the cause of death and determine whether it is thought to be “unnatural”. If the coroner is concerned about the circumstances of the baby’s death being suspicious, they will open an investigation and then possibly an inquest. The coroner may then write a report about any specific concerns.

It is not common for a coroner to open an inquest into the death of a newborn in hospital, but if they do they may require a post-mortem. In this instance, parents are not asked for their consent, but the coroner’s office will keep them informed about any decisions that are made.

As parents, you will be given the details of when and where the inquest will take place. You may be called in as a witness, in which case you must attend the inquest. You can ask any questions you have at the inquest. There may be other professionals who are asked to be witnesses.

In Northern Ireland all stillbirths as well as neonatal deaths must be reported to the coroner.

# Saying goodbye to your baby

No parent expects to arrange a funeral for their baby. While this is a very hard thing to do, many parents have said that doing special things to “say goodbye” was a way of honouring their baby, including others in their baby’s life and helped them to move forward through their grief. This section talks about seeing and naming your baby, registering their death and arranging their funeral.

## Seeing and holding your baby



If your baby lived for a short while, or was admitted to a neonatal unit, you may have held and cuddled your baby before they died. You may have provided skin-to-skin care and spent time next to their incubator reading stories to them and, if you are the birth mother, you might have expressed your milk for them.

If your baby died before or during the birth, the midwife or nurse will usually ask if you would like to see and

hold them. If you want to see your baby and no one has suggested it, ask the staff caring for you.

Some parents feel it is important to see their baby regardless of their size, condition or the stage at which they died. Some parents may find the idea of seeing and holding their baby strange and a bit frightening, especially if they haven’t previously seen anyone who has died.

For many parents, the time they spend with their baby becomes very precious memories in the months and years afterwards.

If you are not sure about seeing your baby, or are anxious about how your baby will look, you could ask the midwife or nurse to show you a photo. If your baby has a visible anomaly, you can ask your midwife or nurse to describe your baby. You can also ask for your baby to be washed and dressed before you see them.

If your baby died quite a long time before the birth, their appearance and colour may have changed. These changes are difficult to predict and may influence whether or not you wish to see your baby. You could ask the midwife or nurse to describe your baby for you first. If you choose not to see your baby, you may decide that you want to see just part of them, such as their hand or foot.

If you initially decided not to see your baby, or were too unwell to see them, you will have the option of seeing them afterwards. You can contact the hospital and let them know that you would like to see your baby. You can ask to see your baby more than once or to take them home.

It is important to remember that you do not have to make the same decision as your partner. Each parent needs to do what is right for them.

## Naming your baby

Many parents decide to name their baby, giving the baby their own identity and making it easier to talk about them. Some parents continue to use a nickname that they used during the pregnancy. If a baby is extremely premature or has died some time before they were born, it can be hard to determine their gender and you might like to choose a name that fits either gender.

You do not have to name your baby if this does not feel right for you.

## Washing and dressing your baby

You may want to wash and/or dress your baby, or you could ask the midwife or nurse to help you. For many parents, bathing and dressing their baby is a special opportunity to care for their baby and form treasured memories.

You could bring something from home for your baby to wear. If your baby is very small, the hospital may be able to supply suitable clothing. Many units have a stock of very small clothes. You may also be able to order very small clothing online at [www.littlebabyandco.com](http://www.littlebabyandco.com). If your baby's condition makes dressing them difficult, you might want to wrap them in a blanket or something similar. If it is helpful, you can ask a midwife or a funeral director to help you do this.

## Deciding on a funeral for your baby

If your baby died before birth and had not reached 24 weeks of pregnancy, you won't be able to register their birth officially. You may, however, request a special certificate from Sands.

If your baby was stillborn at 24 weeks or later, or died after birth, you are legally required to have a burial or cremation for them, although not necessarily a funeral. Your baby's stillbirth, or birth and death, must be registered by the local registrar of births and deaths. The hospital staff will tell you how and where to register. The registrar will give you a certificate that you will need for the burial or cremation.

Although there is no legal requirement to have a funeral, this could be an opportunity to say goodbye to your baby in the presence of your family and friends. If you prefer for the hospital to arrange the funeral, you might need to let them know before you are discharged to go home. Some hospitals can arrange funerals only for those babies who died before birth. Most funeral directors will offer a funeral free of charge for babies.

## Before the funeral

Some parents feel they want to take their baby home before the funeral. Unless a coroner or procurator fiscal has ordered a post-mortem examination, this is usually possible.

If you would like to take your baby home, or out of the hospital environment to a place which has special meaning for you, feel free to discuss this with a midwife or nurse. Many hospitals give parents a form to take with them to confirm their right to take their baby's body out of the hospital. You may like to take your baby for a walk or to meet any other siblings, family or friends.

The staff should also give you information about keeping your baby as cool as possible. Some hospitals, children's hospices and funeral directors have cold cots (also known as cuddle cots) which can help to keep your baby cool and stop their body from deteriorating. You may be able to borrow one for your baby.

If your baby remains in hospital, they are likely to be kept in the hospital or maternity unit mortuary. You will be able to visit your baby although this might feel more difficult than the time you spent with them on the ward. Your baby might be in a Chapel of Rest or a room by the mortuary that is for both adults, children and babies who have died and this might feel more difficult for you.

If the hospital is arranging the funeral, the staff will tell you when to bring your baby back or when to take them to the funeral director. If you are arranging the funeral yourself, you will have the option of keeping your baby at home with you until the funeral takes place. We have resources for funerals on the Sands website.



## Preparing your baby for the funeral

You may want to wash and dress your baby for the funeral. If your baby has had a post-mortem examination, ask the hospital staff to tell you what to expect. For example, they can describe where any stitch lines might be and make other suggestions for handling your baby. Any stitch lines will be covered when the baby is dressed and wrapped. Alternatively, you could ask the hospital staff or the funeral director to help you.



Depending on your baby's size and condition, you may want them to be dressed in a particular outfit or wrapped in a special blanket. You may also want to put special items into your baby's coffin, such as a soft toy, photos, a letter or a poem. Some parents keep an identical outfit, blanket, toy, letter or poem as a keepsake. Any other children within or close to your family may like to draw a picture or write a letter. However, if you have decided to have your baby cremated, you should ask the funeral director or crematorium what you can put in the coffin with your baby.

If your baby was in neonatal intensive care, they might not have worn any clothes. Many babies wear only a nappy when they are in an incubator so this might be the first time that you will be dressing your baby.

## Accompanying your baby's coffin to the funeral ceremony

If your baby is at the funeral home or the hospital, you can ask the funeral director to take them to the venue of the funeral. If you do not want a hearse, you could ask that your baby be transported in an ordinary car. Some funeral directors have cars that are adapted to carry a small coffin and have space for the family.

You will also have the option of collecting your baby and taking them to the ceremony yourself. If you are using a taxi, make sure that they agree in advance to transport a coffin. If your baby is at home, you can take them directly to the funeral.

## The ceremony

If you are arranging the funeral yourself, you will need to think about the type of ceremony you would like. For some bereaved parents, their baby's funeral will be the first funeral they have had to think about, and for some it will be the first they have ever had to attend. Couples sometimes find that they want different things and need time to reach decisions. You may also want time to discuss your choices with family members and close friends. If you have had twins or more babies from a multiple birth who have died, you may want them to share a coffin and a funeral.

If you have older children, you may want to include them in planning your baby's funeral. Likewise, if you have a baby who is in hospital, you might like to wait until they recover and take them to their sibling's funeral. It is important that you make a decision that feels right for you at the time.

If you need to arrange a funeral very quickly for religious or other reasons, please tell the hospital staff. They will advise you about urgent registration so that you can see if this is a possibility.

## Funerals arranged by the hospital

If the hospital offers to arrange your baby's funeral, there may not be as many choices as you would have if you make your own arrangements.

Hospital funeral ceremonies for babies are usually led by one of the hospital chaplains. Most hospitals hold a shared funeral ceremony at regular intervals for all the babies who have died within a certain period of time. Some hospitals might be able to organise an individual ceremony for your baby if that is what you prefer.

Shared funeral ceremonies are usually non-denominational and suitable for those of faith and of no faith as well. Parents, and anyone else they want to invite, are usually welcome to attend. The ceremony may be held in a hospital chapel, crematorium or cemetery chapel. You could ask the hospital chaplain if it is possible to include a poem, a reading, or music that has meaning for you. You might also like to take some flowers with you. The hospital can arrange a funeral for your baby even if you don't feel able to attend.

If the hospital offers you an individual funeral, you can choose a hospital chaplain or another religious leader to lead the ceremony. If there is no religious leader of your own faith, the hospital might be able to recommend someone. You might instead choose a non-religious leader.

Some hospitals offer both burials and cremations. In areas where the cost of graves is very high, hospitals may offer only cremation, or burial in a shared grave.

## Burials

Burials arranged by the hospital are often in a shared grave. Although many babies are buried together, they will still be in their own coffins. Some hospitals offer parents the option of an

individual grave as well. Individual graves are most commonly offered to parents of those babies who died after birth or who died at a later stage in pregnancy. Similarly, individual cremations are often reserved for those babies who died after birth or at a later stage in pregnancy.

Many cemeteries have a special area for babies' graves. Most cemeteries have restrictions about what can be placed on or around a grave and it is usually not possible to put a headstone or memorial on a shared grave. You may be able to make your own arrangements for a plaque somewhere else in the cemetery. Although the hospital would be arranging the funeral, you can contact the cemetery directly to ask about memorial options.

## Cremations

One of the key questions for parents who have opted for a cremation is whether they will receive their baby's ashes. This could depend on:

- Whether or not you have opted for an individual or joint cremation: ashes are available for individual cremations only. For shared cremations, all the ashes will be buried or scattered together in a special place in the crematorium grounds.
- The size of your baby: if your baby is very small, the amount of ashes might be very little. Some ashes usually get absorbed in the cremation chamber. This means that there might be no ashes left.
- The facilities at the crematorium: some crematoria have special facilities to protect ashes even for babies who are very small. You can enquire in advance to help you choose the right crematorium.

The ashes will contain remains of any items that are cremated with your baby inside the coffin. Any items that are placed on top of the coffin may be removed before the coffin is placed in the cremation chamber.

You may choose to scatter or bury your baby's ashes somewhere special to you, a favourite walk or woodland. If you choose to bury or scatter your baby's ashes in a crematorium, they may have regulations about what you can place near the area where the ashes are buried or scattered. You may, however, be able to have a plaque placed somewhere else in the crematorium gardens.

“ At his funeral I wore a blue dress. I didn't want anyone wearing black. When his tiny coffin was taken out of the car I heard a collective intake of breath from our families. In that moment, for them it became real. Gemma

## Funerals arranged by funeral directors

If you have chosen not to have the hospital arrange a funeral for your baby, you could contact a funeral director to assist you. A few crematoria will accept cremations through funeral directors only. The hospital staff may be able to give you the contact details of local funeral directors who specialise in funerals for babies.

You can also find information in the Good Funeral Guide [www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk](http://www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk) or the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) website at [www.nafd.org.uk](http://www.nafd.org.uk).

It is important to make sure that the funeral director you choose is a member of a professional body such as the NAFD. The funeral director will ask you to sign a form allowing them to collect your baby from the hospital mortuary and they can usually organise the other paperwork that is required.

## Forms you will need

If you are making funeral arrangements without the help of a funeral director in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, staff at the crematorium will give you copies of the forms you need to complete. Forms are no longer needed in Scotland.

In England and Wales, if your baby died after birth but before 24 weeks, you will need a cremation form that is signed by a registered doctor. Your midwife or doctor can give you more information. You do not need this form if your baby died before birth or after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy.

In Northern Ireland, you will need a cremation form and a confirmatory medical certificate form to cremate your baby, if they died before birth at a minimum of 24 weeks, or if they died after birth. These forms need to be signed by two different doctors. Your midwife or doctor can give you more information.

If your baby needs a post-mortem examination, you will need to wait until this is completed before you can hold the funeral. If a referral has been made to the coroner or procurator fiscal (in Scotland), there may be a slightly longer delay before the funeral can be held. The coroner's or procurator fiscal's officer will explain what will happen and provide expected timescales for returning your baby to you.

If your baby died before birth and had not completed 24 weeks (legally described as a "late miscarriage"), their death cannot be officially registered. Although it is not an official document, Sands can provide a certificate for you to keep as an acknowledgement of your baby.

The funeral director, crematorium or cemetery will usually need a form or letter from the hospital or your GP to confirm that your baby died before birth before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy. A burial or cremation can then be arranged.

## The service

Just as with adult funerals, you can choose the type of service you would like to have, including an order of service, readings, music and flowers, and let people know what colours you would like them to wear to the funeral. You may like to have a small gathering after the service.

If you choose not to have flowers at the funeral, you might like to request donations instead to a charity of your choice. Sands has funeral envelopes and other resources available if you would like. You may choose to hold the funeral service at an external public venue or you may prefer a more intimate space such as your home or your garden. If you are looking for a reading for the service, you can browse some readings and funeral resources at [www.sands.org.uk/funeralresources](http://www.sands.org.uk/funeralresources).



Some parents ask a friend or relative to take photographs. It is important to let them know exactly what you want them to do and especially if there are any times during the service that you want them to avoid taking photographs. Photos can provide you with precious mementoes and remind you of the people who came to honour your baby and to support you. These photos may also be helpful for young siblings as they grow older, or as a way of starting a conversation with them about their brother or sister.

If you want photos or a video of the funeral ceremony itself, check first with the person leading the funeral, the funeral director and any staff involved in the funeral. It is usually possible as long as the funeral is only for your baby and is not shared with others.

## After the funeral – cremations

If your baby was cremated, and it is possible to collect the ashes, you will have time to decide what to do with them.

There are various options for burying, immersing or scattering your baby's ashes:

- The crematorium could bury or scatter the ashes in a special place in the crematorium grounds. The crematorium will have regulations about this.
- You could choose to scatter the ashes in a place that is special to you such as a woodland or in your own garden, though before you decide, consider whether you might move home in the future.
- You could choose to scatter or immerse them in water as long as the urn you use is biodegradable. You might like to scatter flowers or petals as well. Phone your Local Environment Agency office to make sure that the site you are thinking of falls within their guidance.
- If you want to keep the ashes, you could store them in an urn or another container of your choosing. There are also frames that have a compartment at the back to hold ashes behind the photograph.

- You could also choose to have jewellery made from ashes.

### After the funeral - burials

- It could take at least six months before you will be able to set a headstone for your baby.
- There may be restrictions on what you can place on and around your baby's grave. Please contact the cemetery for more information.



# Supporting children

The death of a baby at any time can be a major bereavement for the whole family. It will have an impact on children who were expecting to have a new brother, sister, niece, nephew, or cousin, or a surviving child of a multiple birth, and also on brothers and sisters born after a baby has died. Children in the wider family, children of close friends, and friends at school may also be affected.

This section considers ways in which to share the news of the baby's death with their siblings and other children who may have known or known about your baby. This section is written for parents but could also be useful for relatives, friends and other people, including nursery and school teachers who are able to provide support.

## Breaking sad news

Telling anyone that a baby has died can be difficult. Telling children may be especially challenging as it can be hard to work out the right amount of information to provide them with and to explain it in a way that works for their age and ability. It can also be difficult to offer reassurance to children about a situation that cannot be changed. If you do not feel able to tell your children what has happened, you may be able to ask a close family member or friend to tell them for you or help you to tell them. For example, this person could help explain what has happened and explain why you are sad. The person could also explain why they, rather than you, may need to look after them.

If your baby died on a neonatal unit, there may be a counsellor, psychologist or play therapist who could help you with this.

When deciding what to tell your children, it is natural to feel anxious and protective towards them. It is important to consider their age and their ability to understand. Try not to let any possible fear that they might get upset determine what you tell them. It is important for children to know that it is okay to cry and that they might see you crying as well. When talking with your children, you might like to start by telling them what happened, without including too much detail. You could also say, "We are sad because our baby has died. When someone dies, it means that we won't be able to see them again." You can then be led by their questions. You might like to include the baby's name if you have one and the gender if this is known. Let your children know that they can come back to you to ask questions at other times. They may accept your simple explanation and immediately change the subject, or carry on with their previous activity. This is very normal.

Young children who visited the baby in neonatal intensive care might have believed that the baby would get better and go home. They could be confused and distressed as to why this has not happened. It is likely that their own lives were disrupted as their parents spent long periods of time with the baby in hospital. They might also have started to develop their own relationship with the baby. It is important to encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and to explain to them why the baby died.

Some children might like to know about the funeral or ask where we go when we die. You might have religious beliefs that could influence your answers, or wish to provide more secular or neutral answers such as "Some people believe..." or "We don't know where people go". For young children, focus on what might happen at the funeral so that they know what to expect. Young children might need reassurance that the baby can't feel anything. Otherwise, they might find the idea of a burial or cremation frightening. You could say, "When people die, we bury them," or "When people die, we cremate them," and explain what this means.

One way to help younger children understand death and dying is to read them books for children that discuss these topics in an age-appropriate manner. The Sands online shop stocks various children's books that you can order, as does Winston's Wish. You can also check your local library for appropriate books.

## Being open and honest with children

Even very young children usually sense when something is wrong. If they are not told what is happening, they may be frightened and imagine they are at fault for making you feel sad.

It is best to use direct language rather than words and phrases that also have other meanings. For example, telling a young child that the baby is sleeping could be confusing and worrying as they might not want to go to bed. Similarly, words such as "lost" or "gone" could lead them to think that they might also get lost or go away. These words could also lead to false hope such as thinking that the baby might wake up or be found. The child may worry about whether the same



could happen to them or to you. Similarly, saying that the baby was unwell might frighten the child when they are unwell.

Like adults, children of any age may experience a range of feelings; these may not come in any particular order or at any predictable time. Similar to those of adults, children's feelings may be complicated and conflicting.

Children sometimes have mixed feelings when a new brother or sister is expected. A child who felt jealous during the pregnancy might feel guilty after the death of their sibling. It can be helpful to try to reassure a child that the death was nobody's fault and that nothing they did or thought made the baby die.

Some children may feel angry towards the baby who died or towards their parents. Children may also fear that they or others close to them might die as well. They may be more upset than usual at being separated from their parents, especially if their mother is critically ill or has to stay in hospital.

As with adults, children, especially younger children, might find it difficult to express their feelings. Look for changes in behaviour, especially acts of going back to younger behaviours. For example, a child who is toilet-trained might want to wear nappies again or start wetting the bed. Children might become clingy or dependent. There might also be changes in eating and sleeping patterns, and there might be a tendency to fall sick. Maintaining a routine as far as possible is really helpful and giving lots of opportunity for children to ask questions.

It is common for children to express their feelings through play, drawing or painting. This can give you an idea of what your child is thinking and feeling as well as give them an opportunity to express how they feel. Consider what external support your child might need, either from relatives or friends, or through play therapy.

Professionals such as your child's health visitor, teachers, child minders and your health visitor, should be informed so that they can support your child accordingly. Winston's Wish and Child Bereavement UK specialise in supporting bereaved children and have various resources available through their websites.

Children will generally move through the broad stages of understanding as described below, but there can be a great deal of variation. If a child has already experienced the death of a family member or friend, or has a learning disability, this may affect their understanding and response. It is important to check their understanding even if they have been bereaved previously.

*How do you explain to a 3 year old that his little sister has died? We sat him down on the couch between us. John tried to explain as best as he could. It affected him just as much as it affected us.*

Claire

## 2-5 Years

Young children may be beginning to understand the concept of death, but do not realise that it is permanent. They may well need repeated explanations of what has happened, before moving on to other seemingly unrelated questions or conversations very quickly. You may find you feel anxious getting ready to tell them that the baby has died and their response is brief and then moves on to what might be for dinner, or if they can go back to playing. As their thinking is very much focussed on themselves and their world, they may need reassurance that nothing they did or said caused the

death. It is also important that children of this age have a chance to understand why the baby died, as they may otherwise create fantasies and stories which may be much more frightening. Children may also make the baby an imaginary friend. You may find this unsettling even though it is a common way for children to cope with their loss.

## 5-8 Years

Between the ages of 5 and 8 years, children begin to understand the difference between being dead and being alive, and between 7 and 8 years old they start to understand the permanence of death. Separation anxiety may increase or return at this point. They may not ask questions but may be very interested in what is happening and why, so giving them the opportunity and time to ask questions is important. They may "play" funerals or act out scenarios where a death occurs to help them process what is happening. This can be a good opportunity for you to gauge their understanding and concerns. Try to respond in a calm way, even if their responses may feel unsettling for you.

## 8-12 Years

The understanding of children at this age is closer to that of an adult, although they may find the abstract nature of faith or less concrete concepts hard to understand. Like younger children they will need specific questions answering and find detail important. They may become more anxious about their own mortality and those around them. It is important to listen to and acknowledge their concerns, and to put them in a realistic context.

It can help children to practise answering questions they may receive from other children, with information and language that they are comfortable using.



## Teenagers

Anxiety about a young person's own mortality and that of those close to them continues at this age. This combined with a natural need for independence may be a struggle. Teenagers can respond by engaging in an increasing amount of risk-taking behaviour and becoming angry more easily. This can be very hard for parents at a time when they may be feeling more anxious and protective of their other children. Questioning the meaning of life is an important part of adolescence and bereavement can have a significant impact on this process. This can sometimes result in depression. Adolescents may find it easier to talk to friends or a trusted adult rather than their parents. It can help to think about who this might be and support the teenager via this person. Teenagers in step families can feel very conflicted about their place in the family and may need more reassurance than usual.



## Telling the parents of other children

You may also want to tell the parents of younger children's close friends so that they understand if your child's behaviour or mood changes. If they have not discussed death with their own children before, they may need time to think about what to tell them.

Some parents may offer to help by inviting your child to play or have a meal. However, some parents may decide to

keep their distance in order to "protect" their own child from learning about death at a young age. This might feel painful for you and your child, and your child may need to be reassured that they have done nothing wrong.

## Ways to involve children

There are different ways in which you could involve your children and help them feel part of what is happening around them. You could ask if your child would like to come to the hospital to see the baby and say goodbye. If you are going to be bringing your baby home, you could explain that this is so that the whole family can say goodbye together. Depending on your child's age, you might like to take them to the funeral and encourage them to participate in the service.

Many parents collect keepsakes of their baby, which can be stored in a memory box. Other children might want to add something of their own to the box. Depending on their age, they could do a drawing or painting, or write a poem or a letter. Some children might want to give the baby a cuddly toy, which could be placed in the coffin or kept in the memory box. Children might also want to help make a memory box for the family or to make one themselves. They might also like to have a photograph taken with the baby.

In the months following the funeral, you might like to take your children to visit their sibling's grave, or a special place where you scattered their ashes or planted memorial trees. Children may want to bring something special to leave on the baby's grave. Some places have restrictions about what can be placed on the grave. For example, they may not allow items such as balloons, soft toys, pictures or wind chimes. It's a good idea to find out in advance about any restrictions in order to avoid disappointing a child who wants to take a special item along with them.

## Anniversaries, memorial services and family celebrations

Important dates, such as the anniversary of the date when the baby was born, died or was due to be born, or occasions traditionally celebrated with family, such as special holidays, can be especially sad for parents. It can be helpful to talk to children in advance about any dates on the calendar that might be more difficult than others, so that they are aware that you may be sad again for a while. Do not be surprised if important dates and the lead up to them, trigger feelings of grief for children too.

Holidays and other times when families gather together can be a time when the baby is especially missed. Family birthdays, and especially those of a surviving twin or multiple birth, can also be bitter-sweet. Some families do something special to remember their baby on these occasions, such as lighting a candle for the baby or choosing a special decoration together.

Many families mark birthdays, anniversaries or other special occasions by lighting a candle, baking a cake for the baby or visiting a special place, such as the baby's grave, the place they scattered their baby's ashes, or another place that has strong associations with the baby. If you celebrate Christmas, hanging a stocking for the baby or putting ornaments on the tree in their memory, might help other children. Children can be involved in any of these activities and this can provide comfort and ways to acknowledge the grief that is felt by the whole family.

You may want some time on your own whenever grief resurfaces. It might be helpful to explain to children why this is, rather than risk further upset and confusion at what might already be a time of heightened emotions.

# Physical and emotional challenges

There are arguably few experiences that can compare to the trauma of losing a baby. As well as the various practical aspects that might occupy your time in the first few weeks, there will also be a significant physical and emotional impact on you and your family.

## Physical challenges

If you are the birth mother, you will be recovering from the physical impact of the birth of your baby, just as you would if your baby was alive. Your body would have prepared itself for a live baby and not register that your baby has died. If you are experiencing any medical issues after the birth of your baby, it is vital that you receive any medical care that you need.

You might find that you are producing milk in preparation for breastfeeding. This can be very painful both physically and emotionally.

If your baby died in neonatal care, you might have already started breastfeeding either directly or by expressing your milk.

You could consider donating your milk to a milk bank. This can help those mothers whose babies were born very prematurely and who were therefore unable to produce milk. Someone from your health-care team will be able to talk with you about milk donation. There is also information on the United Kingdom Association for Milk Banking (UKAMB) website [www.ukamb.org](http://www.ukamb.org). You can allow your body the time to stop producing milk naturally or, if you prefer, you can ask for medication to slow down milk production.

For all parents, grief can be exhausting. You may be physically as well as emotionally drained. You may be tired from the shock of finding out that your baby died, the decisions you have had to make, or the

labour. You may also have had the stress of travelling long distances to and from home to get to a neonatal unit or to appointments. Telling people that your baby has died might also have felt exhausting.

Other physical reactions could include a loss of appetite, inability to care for yourself, or difficulty sleeping. Where possible, ask family and friends to help you look after other children you might have and to help with day-to-day tasks such as shopping, cooking and cleaning.

If you have had twins or multiple babies, you might be faced with a situation where all of them have died, or one or more is alive. If the babies who are alive are also unwell and in neonatal care, you might be exhausted trying to focus on their needs while also grieving for the babies who have died. Sometimes, twins or multiples who are unwell might be in different specialist centres in different parts of the country. Visiting them, while managing the practical and emotional aspects of your grief, can be extremely difficult.

## Sexual relationships

When grieving the death of a baby, people's feelings can also be very complicated and vary a great deal. These can have an impact on your physical health and influence physical contact with your partner. You might be associating sex with creating your baby, and this can cause anxiety about having sex. Try to accept your feelings rather than fight them and try to resist the pressure to be "strong".

Some people may not feel ready or able to have sex. Other people may find that it is comforting or reassuring to have sex. Grief can also lead to a loss of sexual desire for some people. Mothers particularly can also feel that their body has "let them down" and their self-esteem and self-worth is affected. There may be new scars and changes to the mother's body that are magnified by the loss of the baby.

When considering when to have sex, it is important that the mother has healed from any surgery, and that the cervix (neck of the womb) is closed again otherwise sex could lead to an infection. Oral sex, where the mother is the recipient, should also be avoided because there is a small but serious risk of air getting into the mother's bloodstream and this can be fatal.

Physical healing from birth usually takes approximately six weeks, but grief and bereavement and any kind of psychological impact can have an effect on physical responses. For example vaginal dryness and inability to have an erection are common physical responses to trauma. Sometimes physical closeness is enough whilst you heal.

Often, people wait until after the six week check-up before thinking about having sex again. Some people wait much longer. It is a complicated and distressing time so be patient with yourself and with each other.

If you feel the need for professional support, you can contact the Sands Helpline or visit your GP for help accessing psychosexual counselling.

## Emotional challenges

The emotional impact of baby loss is long lasting. You might feel shock, numbness, anger, resentment, sadness, emptiness, guilt, self-blame, loss of self-esteem, and many other emotions. While this can be difficult to accept, it is important to grieve for your loss and to do what you need to receive support. Some people may change the subject if your baby is mentioned, or unknowingly say insensitive or hurtful things. They may not know what to say or are frightened of causing more distress. Many bereaved parents say that some friends and acquaintances cross the road to avoid having to talk to them, or may stop talking to them completely. You might find it helpful to view this animation and to recommend it to family and friends so that they can support you:

[www.sands.org.uk/findingthewords](http://www.sands.org.uk/findingthewords).

There are many ways to express grief. These vary from person to person and can also change over time. Being aware of what you need will help you grieve in a way that is right for you.

Many parents contact Sands for support. You can contact our Helpline, share your experiences with others on the online community, attend a local Sands support group and meet other local bereaved parents and family members, contact a Sands befriender, or download the Sands Bereavement Support App.

Sands support is available for as long as you need.

“After we lost Rachel it became clear that I was struggling mentally. I did not sleep well, and had frightening flashbacks to the labour and the observation ward. Hearing new-borns crying would create a panic inside me that I needed to run from. The environment that I had been nursed in, and the fact that I had not been able to speak about the birth, created nightmares – both waking and sleeping.”  
Cheryl

It is possible that you might grieve both for the loss of the baby and for the loss of your own hopes and dreams. Until the 1980s, the death of a baby was often dismissed as unimportant and most parents did not receive much understanding or support. Parents were likely to have been told to forget about their baby, to have another, and to carry on as though nothing had happened.



However, even with sensitive and supportive care, the grief that follows a baby's death may remain for a long time.

It is normal to experience strong emotions of sadness and loss, but you may find that your grief lasts for longer than you expect. If you are still finding it hard to manage everyday life or to work after several months, you may want to seek professional help.

You can also make an appointment with your GP and explain how you are feeling. They can refer you for specialist help and support if needed. You may also like to seek counselling directly.

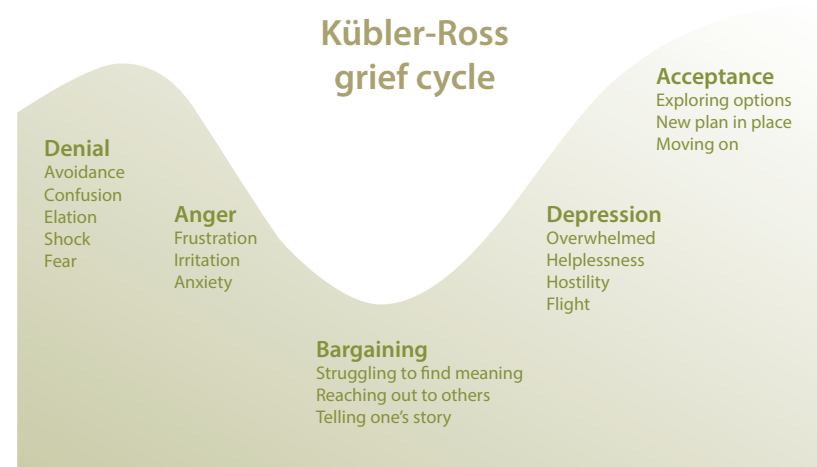
You may already know someone who has experienced the death of a baby or you may have had this experience previously. Comparing your grief to that of another parent, or to yourself during a different baby loss, may not be helpful as each bereavement is different and everyone grieves differently. You might, however, find it beneficial to talk about your experience.

There are various theories of grief. We are including two of them here as these might help you understand and explore your grief

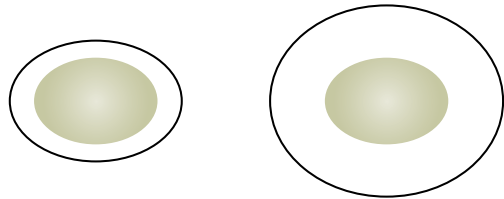
over time. At no time is there the expectation that you should be "fine" or feel "normal".

“ My husband had already returned to work which I think helped him stay focussed. My children had returned to school. I was on maternity leave but I had no baby to look after. I sank deeper and deeper into grief. When we found out Rebecca's death was due to complications this added so much guilt. It consumed me. ”  
Natasha

One theory, by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, talks about the five stages of grief, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages do not necessarily happen one after the other; you might find yourself at any stage at any time, or perhaps experience a combination of any of these stages.



Lois Tonkin's model talks about "growing around your grief". The idea is that your grief remains intact and that your life grows around it.



The green represents the grief and the white represents the growth of life around the grief. The grief of losing your baby initially takes up almost every part of you, but as time goes on, and with support, your grief does not diminish but other aspects of life grow around it, enabling you to find a new kind of normal.



# Returning to work

If you were working before your baby was born, you might start thinking about returning to work. For some parents, going back to work can feel daunting; for others, the routine of work can be helpful. This section explains your leave entitlements and also discusses how you can help make the transition from home to work.

## Legal entitlements

If you are the birth mother, your baby died either before or during birth, and your baby was at least at 24 weeks of pregnancy, this is considered a stillbirth in law and you are entitled to the same leave as mothers in your position whose babies are born alive. This could include Statutory Maternity Pay, Maternity Allowance or income-related benefits from the State. The same entitlements apply if your baby was born alive and then died, even if your baby was born before 24 weeks gestation.

If you are self-employed, you are not entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay. Depending on how long you have been self-employed and your National Insurance contributions, you may be entitled to Maternity Allowance.

If you are a partner, or a co-mother, you are entitled to one or two weeks of parental or paternity leave. Couples can also take Shared Parental Leave as long as notice to take the leave was given before the baby died.

If your baby died before birth and was under 24 weeks, this is considered a late miscarriage. Unfortunately, you are not entitled to maternity leave or maternity allowance.

Birth mothers who have early or late miscarriages may be entitled to sick leave as long as their GP can provide a note to this effect. It is good practice for your employer to record sickness following miscarriage separately from other Sick Leave so that it does not count towards your sickness record. Long-term sickness could form part of your sickness record. Compassionate leave may be granted for bereaved parents, but this will be at the discretion of the employer.

The Parental Bereavement (Pay and Leave) Act will come into effect in 2020. It is expected to require employers to offer an additional two weeks of paid leave to anyone who experiences the death of a child under the age of 18. This entitlement does not depend on the length of service. Parents of babies who are stillborn will also be entitled to this leave. It is envisaged that the leave will need to be taken within 56 days of the bereavement, although it does not have to be taken as block leave. Parental Bereavement Leave is independent of maternity leave.

## Deciding when to go back to work

The decision about when to go back to work may depend on how you are feeling, your physical health, finances, and work-related factors. Birth mothers who get paid maternity leave may not need to think about returning to work for some time.

When you are ready to think about going back to work, you need to contact your employer to discuss practical details. You may be offered, or want to request, a phased return to work. This could involve working only a few days a week or a few hours each day for the whole week. You could also explore the option of home working. If you have a full-time job, you could request part-time working for a short period of time. Although employers have a legal obligation to consider this, there is no legal obligation for them to accept the request.

Once you have agreed a date to return to work, you may find it helpful to talk to your manager or employer about how you are feeling and what might help you settle into the work environment. You could also ask to visit your workplace and meet up informally with your colleagues before you return to work. Think about how you might like to share the news with your manager or your colleagues and whether you would like to tell everyone directly or have your manager or a trusted colleague tell people on your behalf.

If you named your baby, you could share their name, anything you feel comfortable sharing about how they died, and anything else you feel is relevant for them to understand. Let your employer know if there is anything you would like them to do or communicate to colleagues that you feel would be helpful for you.

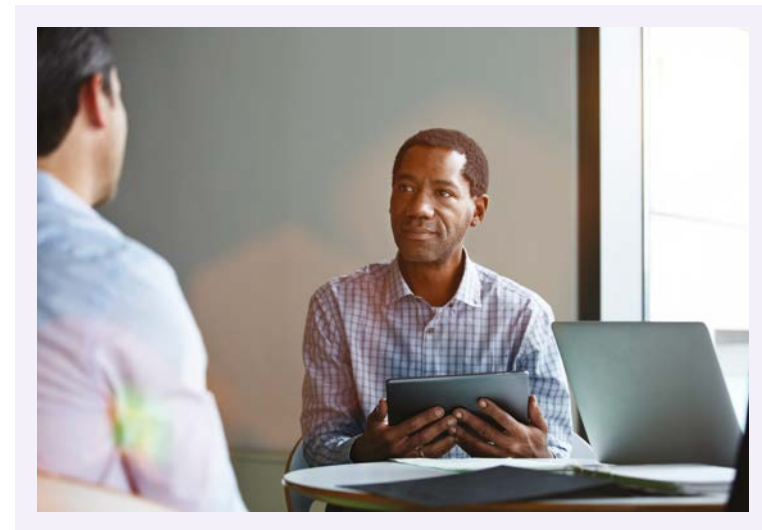
*“My return to work was completely my own decision and I felt it was the right time to try, on the basis that upon returning I might find that it was too soon and I would need some more time off.”*  
Andrew

## Being back at work

In addition to settling into your role after a period of absence, there are various things which might feel difficult for you. There might be colleagues who are pregnant or those who visit during their maternity leave to introduce their new baby. There might also be colleagues who have experienced the death of a baby at an earlier time. If you are the birth mother, colleagues may have seen you pregnant so might be more sensitive to your situation. For fathers,

co-mothers, foster parents and adoptive parents, the loss may seem less obvious to other people and more isolating for you.

Grief can be tiring. You may be surprised at how exhausted you feel and you might find that you struggle to concentrate and remember things. You may find that you are very sensitive to what people say, or that you lack confidence about making decisions. Some parents become frustrated with themselves and anxious that they can no longer cope with work. However, all of these reactions are common effects of grief and should pass with time and support.



If you suddenly feel overwhelmed, take a break if you can. You could possibly go for a short walk or find a quiet space to be alone. You may also find it helpful to find somewhere private to talk to a sympathetic colleague, phone a family member or friend, or phone the Sands Helpline. If you find that being back at work is too difficult, you could talk to your manager or employer about having some more time off or talk to your GP and see if you can have sick leave.

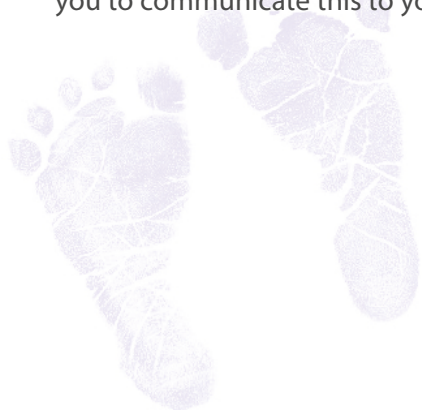


## Dates and anniversaries

Certain dates and the days leading up to them may be particularly difficult; for example, the anniversary of your baby's due date or the day they died. Many bereaved parents feel particularly sad before or during special holidays. If you attended antenatal classes, hearing about other babies being born may be especially hard.

You may want to consider booking leave on dates that you expect to be especially difficult for you. This can take the pressure off and perhaps give you an opportunity to do something different or visit a place that has special meaning for you. From 2020 if these dates fall within the first 56 days of your baby's death, you could use your leave under the Parental Bereavement (Pay and Leave) Act to do this. The Act is due to come into effect sometime in 2020.

Returning to work might represent a certain sense of "normal" for you even if nothing seems normal. Falling into a routine does not mean that there won't be occasions when you need to take time off to process your grief, or that you are "forgetting" or not honouring your baby. At work, it is important to communicate your practical and emotional needs as far as you feel able with your employer. The Sands Bereavement Support Services Team may be able to help you to communicate this to your employer or manager.



# Information and support for relatives and friends

This section is written for grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, colleagues and friends of the parents. Each of you reading this might have had a different relationship with the baby and their family. We are very sorry that a baby who was important to you has died.

We know that this is a very sad and difficult time for the baby's parents, for you and for the whole family. It is important that you access support yourself if you need it and be aware of the impact that the death has had on you and those around you.

## Grieving for the baby

The death of a baby at any time during pregnancy is a major bereavement for the baby's parents. However, how the death affects the wider family isn't often fully understood. Not everyone realises the need for other family members or close friends to grieve or to share their distress.

Some people change the subject if the baby is mentioned, or unknowingly say insensitive or hurtful things. Often they don't know what to say or are frightened of causing more distress. Many bereaved parents say that some friends and acquaintances cross the road to avoid having to talk to them, or stop talking to them altogether. You may find that some people do the same with you. You might find it helpful to view this animation: [www.sands.org.uk/findingthewords](http://www.sands.org.uk/findingthewords).

It is possible that you might grieve both for the loss of the baby and for the loss of your own hopes and dreams. You may also grieve for the parents too. It can be extremely upsetting to see someone close to you in distress and be unable to protect them or to take their pain away. If you are a relative, you may also experience difficult feelings

of guilt if the baby had a hereditary condition even though there was nothing anyone could have done to prevent it.

For some relatives and friends, the death of the baby might also bring back painful memories of their own experience of having had a baby who died. Until the 1980s, the death of a baby was often not recognised as traumatic and most parents did not receive much understanding or support. Parents were likely to have been told to forget about their baby, to have another, and to carry on as though nothing had happened. They may not have been allowed to see or hold their baby, or make any special memories. However, even with sensitive and supportive care, the grief that follows a baby's death remains and may be reawakened many years later.

It is normal to experience strong emotions of sadness and loss. You are welcome to access Sands support resources and the Sands Helpline. If you are finding it hard to manage everyday life or work, you may want to seek professional help. You can make an appointment with your GP and explain how you are feeling. They can refer you for specialist help and support if needed. You may also like to seek counselling directly. Please do get in touch with the Sands Bereavement team to help you with this.

## Care from health professionals

Parents are usually offered a number of choices about how they would like to give birth, what they might want in terms of making memories and spending time with their baby. There are no right and wrong decisions and parents need to decide what is best for them. Depending on the situation you may also be invited to be involved. It is always important to try to take your cue from the parents rather than imposing your views or needs onto them.

Details about labour and giving birth are in the section *Giving birth to your baby*.

## Seeing and holding the baby

If a baby is stillborn or has died shortly after birth, parents are asked if they would like to see and hold their baby. For many parents, the time they spend with their baby becomes a precious memory. Not all parents will decide to see their baby. The parents may ask you if you would like to see and hold the baby. If they do, and you feel this is something you would like to do, seeing the baby can give you precious memories to share with the parents in the future. It can also be helpful for parents if someone else has seen and perhaps held their baby. If the parents invite you to see or hold the baby, and you do not feel able to do so, it is important to let the parents know in as gentle a way as possible.



If the baby died in neonatal care, you might have already seen and held them while they were alive. You might have visited them in hospital and bought them presents. You might have seen them in an incubator with numerous tubes and in only a nappy. This might be the first time that you are seeing them clothed and without tubes.

## Creating memories

Parents may want to create memories of their baby and, depending on what they decide, you may also want to ask about creating your own keepsakes.

If the parents decide to have photos taken, these photos may include some of the baby alone, with one or both parents, with brothers and sisters, or with you or other family members. You may want a photo to keep and perhaps display at home.

## Remembering the baby

In addition to the grief of the parents, many family members and friends will feel waves of sadness when other children they know, who were born around the same time, start nursery or primary school, or begin to be independent. A living child's progress is inevitably a reminder of what might have been. You might want to acknowledge various anniversaries for yourself as well as share them with the baby's parents.

## Offering support

Offering support can feel complicated. The extent to which you want or feel able to be involved, can be affected by your relationship with the baby's parents and how you have dealt with shared problems and grief in the past.

Some parents need time and privacy and want to work things out on their own. They may want to talk to you but they may also prefer to talk to someone else, or use one of Sands Bereavement Support Services.

It is important to listen to the parents to understand what support they need. Everyone grieves differently, so offering a form of help that might have been beneficial for you in the same situation might not be helpful for them.

If they refuse your offers of help or want to be alone, you may feel hurt or excluded. However, they need to do what feels right for them at the time. This does not mean that they will not value further efforts you may make to support them when they are ready. They may also be so distressed that they cannot appreciate your offers of help.

It can be difficult to find the right balance between being supportive and being intrusive. It can also be hard to show bereaved parents that you care without saddening them with your own grief, making them feel that they need to support you, or that your grief “overshadows” theirs. They may need to be reassured that you care about their baby and about them; however, it is important that they should not feel that they have to comfort you. The Sands Bereavement Support Services Team is available to support parents as well as other family members and friends.

Relationships can come under additional strain when there is a bereavement, and grief may make it harder than usual to see other people’s points of view and to accept different ways of doing things. It can be helpful to remember that remarks about how you think the parents are coping, or advice on how you think they should be grieving, can feel hurtful. Being there to listen is often the best form of support.

In addition to providing support to the parents, you might find that you grieve together. This could be helpful as long as each person is doing what they need at the time. It can be useful to allow time to grieve separately as well.

## Getting support for yourself

It can be extremely hard to offer support under these circumstances if you do not have support for yourself. Having a safe place, where you can express your own grief and pain, can be very helpful. You may have your own friends you can contact. You could also contact Sands for support; our support services are available for parents, families and anyone else who has been affected by the death of a baby.

## Using the baby’s name

If the parents have named the baby, and they would like people to use the baby’s name, it is important that you do this as well. Using the baby’s name is an important acknowledgement for many parents. You may also want to include the baby when talking about how many grandchildren, cousins, nieces or nephews you have, but ask what the parents would like you to do.

## Supporting partners

You may notice that most people focus on supporting the birth mother and assume that her partner will be able to support her. People may not realise that parents who haven’t physically given birth may also be profoundly affected by the death of their baby; as a result, their needs and feelings may not be recognised. In addition to experiencing their own grief, partners are often also witnessing the birth mother’s pain and distress and may appreciate being asked how they are and having their own pain recognised.

It is often the partner who has the hard task of breaking the news of the baby’s death to family and friends and of coping with their shock and pain. If the couple already have children, they may also need to find a way of ensuring that the children are cared for and to explain to them what has happened. When the mother is ill, or if her life is in danger, her partner may also face additional fear and worry.

## Adoptive parents and foster parents

Prospective adoptive parents and foster parents might be awaiting the arrival of a new baby. It is important to recognise the death of the baby as the death of their baby as well and to support them as they need. While they might not be actively involved in preparations for the funeral, or be making other practical decisions, they will have still experienced a loss. They may need to explore their own ways to mark the death of the baby and could benefit from support. You might like to help them by asking what they need.



## Becoming parents through surrogacy and surrogate mothers

If the baby was born through surrogacy, one or both of the parents would be genetically related to the baby. Even though neither would have been pregnant with the baby, as intended parents, they would have still experienced the death of their baby and need support.

Surrogate mothers, i.e. those who are pregnant but do not intend to become parents through the pregnancy, may still need support after the death of the baby. Although they may not necessarily be genetically related to the baby, they may still need to grieve for the baby and face many of the same challenges as any birth mother would.

## Relationships between couples

The death of a baby can place a huge amount of stress on a couple. It can be very difficult for couples to find mutual support in each other as they grieve, especially as they may not feel or need the same things at the same time. They may also find it hard to understand and sympathise with each other's reactions and behaviour.

If a bereaved couple feels angry and hurt by each other's behaviour, it can also be tempting to "take sides". However, it may be more helpful if you can try to support both parents.

## Single parents

A single parent may never have had any support from their partner or may not have had a partner. Alternatively, their relationship may have broken down during the pregnancy or as a result of stress caused by their baby's death. They are likely to need a great deal of support from their family and friends and it is important to offer support if you feel able.

## Younger parents

Young parents are also likely to need a great deal of practical help and support even if there are two parents involved. This may be very important if young friends are unable to provide the support that the parents need or if they are not around.

It is really important that young people are not judged for being pregnant and that it is not assumed that the pregnancy was a mistake. If the parents are still at school or in education, there may be student support services available. Sands is able to work with these services to ensure that support is offered in a sensitive way.

## Funerals

If the parents have decided to have a funeral for the baby, you could offer to help them with organising it. They may need time to decide what will be right for them. This can be difficult, especially if there are different ways of doing things or differing religious beliefs in the family. You may be able to offer the parents support and time to make the decisions that feel right for them as well as help them explore the options available.

## Helping around the house

In the early days and weeks after their baby dies, many bereaved parents find it extremely difficult to do everyday things, such as cooking, housework, shopping, sorting out bills, or walking the dog. Parents may find it helpful if you are able to offer to help with some of these types of things. However, parents may also need privacy sometimes, even if they want you to be around at other times. It may be helpful if you offer to leave after providing some help. On the other hand, if they need you to stay for a while and you have only limited time, it is best to let them know this early in the visit.

## Clearing away baby things

Sometimes relatives and friends try to protect the parents from further pain by removing equipment and clothes that were bought for the baby. It is really important to check carefully as to whether this would actually be helpful. Many parents prefer to clear away the baby's things themselves in their own time, even though it

may be weeks or months before they feel able to do so. Doing this in stages might help them with the grieving process and it is very important not to rush the parents into getting rid of or donating things that they might have had ready for the baby.

## Other pregnancies and births

Some bereaved parents find it distressing to be around expectant or new parents and babies. It can be very hard if another family member or friend is pregnant or has a healthy baby. It can also be difficult for the parents of a new baby; they may feel constrained and unable to celebrate their baby's arrival as they would like. It is important to recognise and acknowledge this and maybe give bereaved parents a private opportunity to meet a new baby when they are ready.

## Other relatives and friends

You might find that the parents rely on other relatives and friends more than on you, and this might feel painful for you. Be aware of prioritising the parents' need for help over your own need to help. There can often be a rush to help initially but there will be a need for ongoing support for many months and years.

## Other children

Even though babies and very young children might not understand what has happened, they are likely to be sensitive to the feelings of people around them. Their behaviour may change. For example, they may become clingy and dependent, and their eating and sleeping patterns may change.

This can be very hard for grieving parents who are already exhausted with grief. If it is possible for you to help with childcare, this could help them have some time for themselves. Being looked after by a

trusted relative or friend who loves them may also help children to feel cherished and important. However, it may be better for some children to remain in their own home and spend time with their parents and with you.

It is important that parents tell their children what has happened. What a child is told will often depend on the child's age and ability to understand, the questions they ask, and the parents' decisions. It can be helpful if you know what has been said and discussed with the children. It may also help if you try to use the same words and phrases, and avoid giving more information than the parents have agreed.

You may also notice that the parents change their approach to caring for their living children. For example, some parents may react by becoming very protective of their children. Other parents may "relax the rules". It is important to try to understand that the parents are doing the best they can in extremely difficult circumstances.

### Fundraising in memory

Many friends, family and colleagues choose to raise money in memory of the baby and as a way of showing their support to the parents. From making a donation to organising a fundraising event, doing anything in memory can provide a real comfort to those who know that their donations are going to help others going through difficult times. There are loads of ways you can do something tangible in their memory. Do visit our website [www.sands.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.sands.org.uk/get-involved) or contact our Supporter Care team on 0203 908 5525. You might like to talk to the baby's parents to make sure that they are happy for you to carry out any fundraising in memory of their baby.

The days,  
weeks and  
months  
ahead

When you find out that your baby has died, it may feel incomprehensible that you will ever feel differently and less in pain or broken than you do at that time. Saying goodbye and leaving hospital without your baby is possibly the hardest thing you'll ever have to do.

Sands is here to support you for as long as you need in the months and years ahead. Finding support from others who have found their way through losing a baby can offer hope and show that you will survive this. There are other parent stories on our website and social media.

## The early days

In the first few weeks you may just take one step at a time, or accomplish one small task and that is enough. Many aspects of life will just feel like hurdles to overcome and you may not find any joy or positivity in anything. This is very normal.

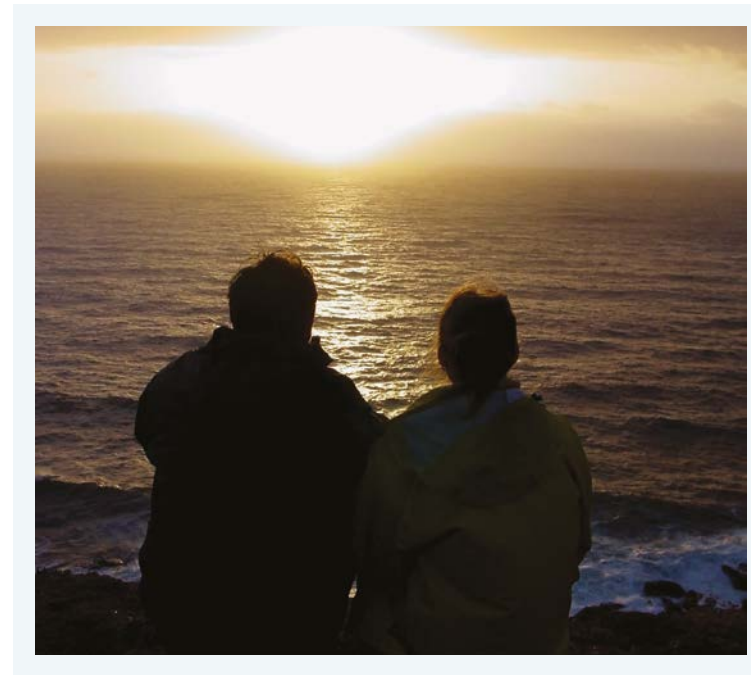
Planning your baby's funeral and the build up to the day can be incredibly challenging and the Sands Bereavement Support Services Team are here to support you through this.

## Important dates

Important dates, such as the anniversary of the date when your baby was born, died, their due date, or occasions traditionally celebrated with family, such as special holidays, can be especially hard. Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day can be especially difficult and our Helpline extends its hours on these days. Often the build up to the actual day is harder than the day itself and planning something specific can be really helpful.

If you have other children, it can be helpful to talk to them in advance about any dates on the calendar that might be more difficult than others, so they are aware that you may all feel sad again for a while. Do not be surprised if a child also shows signs that important dates, and the lead up to them, trigger feelings of grief for them too.

Holidays and other times when families gather together can be a time when the baby is especially missed. Family birthdays, and those of a surviving twin or multiple birth, can also be bitter-sweet. Some families do something special to remember their baby on these occasions, such as lighting a candle for the baby or choosing a special decoration together, having a picnic, or doing something they've always planned, but not managed to do. It's important that you do what feels right for you.





Many families mark birthdays, anniversaries or other special occasions by lighting a candle, baking a cake for the baby or visiting a special place, such as the baby's grave, the place they scattered their baby's ashes, or another place that has strong associations with the baby. If you celebrate Christmas, hanging a stocking for the baby or putting ornaments on the tree in their memory, might help other children.

Some parents buy a gift for the age their child would have been and donate it to a charity. Many families choose to raise funds for Sands by taking on a fundraising challenge, organising an event such as a sponsored memory walk or making a donation in memory of their baby. There are many ways you can do this and you can find out more at [www.sands.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.sands.org.uk/get-involved).

## In memory

Sands has many In Memory opportunities to enable you to mark special days and see your baby's name recorded somewhere significant. Children can be involved in any of these activities and this can provide comfort and ways to acknowledge the grief that is felt by the whole family. You may also want some time on your own whenever grief resurfaces. It might be helpful to explain why this is, rather than risk further upset and confusion at what might already be a time of heightened emotions.

A Sands Always Loved tribute is a wonderful and lasting way to remember your baby. In partnership with the memorial website charity MuchLoved, we are able to provide you with a way of creating a tribute website in memory of your baby, which, if you wish, can also be used to raise funds for Sands. Your free online memorial dedicated to your precious baby can be shared with family and friends or kept completely private if you'd prefer.

An Always Loved tribute is a safe space to help you remember and reflect. You can create a beautiful, unique, personalised website in memory of your baby, where you can easily add and display a whole range of information and memorabilia, including stories, messages of condolence, pictures, music and video clips. You can also write an online journal.

Find out more at [www.sands.org.uk/always-loved-tributes](http://www.sands.org.uk/always-loved-tributes).



## Over time

Your need for support may change over time as you begin to find a "new normal". You will never forget your baby and life will grow around your memories and grief will feel less all-consuming. Grief is not a straight line and you may move backwards and forwards through the process with bad days when you least expect them.

There are many ways you can remember your baby and Sands' website has examples of how people have turned their grief into another memory for their baby or another way of honouring them. What is important is that you give yourself the time and space you need to grieve and to move forward, which is different for everyone. You may undertake challenges or volunteer for a period of time and when you feel you need to step back it is not a sign of letting your baby go, or letting them down, but an important recognition of all that you have done and where you are now in your journey.

As with the early days of grief, you may find that you and those around you grieve in different ways and need different types of support or opportunities at different times. If you are worried about yourself and feeling that you are not coping, or have suddenly started to feel worse, please do reach out to the Sands Bereavement Support Services Team, or your GP or trusted health professional. Sudden changes in how you, or those closest to you, feel are signs that you may need more support. It can be harder to reach out at these times and feel that you "should" be coping, particularly if some time has passed, but grief is not a straight line or process and sometimes we need more help.



# Thinking about having another baby

One of the questions that you might ask yourself after the death of a baby is whether you will ever be able to have another baby. Family and friends might try to cheer you up by encouraging you to think about this as an option. However, it is important to grieve in the way that you need for the baby who has died and to think about another baby if and when this is right for you.

## Having another baby



If you do decide that having another baby is the right decision for you, it is best to wait until any medical issues have been resolved. These could include underlying conditions for the birth mother, illness during the previous pregnancy, or scars from the birth. You might also want to wait until the birth mother's six-week check-up before you try again. Your baby's post-mortem examination might also reveal specific problems so consider this information before trying for another baby.

If you find that you or your partner is pregnant, it could feel very difficult to share the news of your pregnancy or allow yourself to get excited about having a baby. As with grief, you and your partner may

not experience these feelings about a new pregnancy at the same time, which can be challenging. Having had experience of loss, you will be aware in a very personal sense that not all pregnancies end happily. If you have other children, they might remember the time that their sibling died and, like you, be afraid that this might happen again.

You might find that your child re-visits conversations that were held at the time that their sibling died with further questions and feelings. It's important to see what the child remembers and try to fill in any gaps in their understanding if you can. If this feels too distressing for you, perhaps a family member or friend can help.

## Antenatal care

Some parents choose to go back to the same maternity unit while others do not want to re-live the memories of their baby's death in the same place. If you do not have the choice to go to another hospital, and find the prospect of attending the same hospital too distressing, you can ask to be under the care of a different consultant and a different team of midwives from the ones you had previously. It is natural to want to be extra cautious and to feel very anxious. If there is anything about your pregnancy that is worrying you, it is essential to tell a member of your healthcare team. In addition to the usual antenatal clinics, some maternity units run special clinics or drop-in sessions for bereaved parents who are expecting another baby, where they understand the anxiety and pain of a new pregnancy and can provide extra reassurance and check-ups.

If you are the birth mother, you might feel especially anxious throughout and this can be particularly hard when you reach the point in your pregnancy when your previous baby died. You can ask for extra checks to help reassure you. Your notes should be marked with a special sticker or alert to indicate that you have

had a baby who died. Sands provides special stickers or alerts to health professionals to use. This helps them be more aware that you might need extra care. If you go to antenatal classes, tell the person facilitating the class that your previous baby died. They can then be sensitive to your needs and understand why you might have additional concerns to some of the other parents who attend the class.

## Relating to the new baby

For most parents, planning a nursery and choosing clothes for a baby they are expecting is an exciting experience. When your previous baby has died, it can be difficult to feel confident enough to make preparations for the arrival of your baby. Again, you can speak to someone about your anxieties and maybe ask a family member or friend for practical help in putting together a hospital bag or going shopping for baby clothes and equipment with you. You may feel more comfortable to wait until after your baby is born before you make any extra preparations.



You might also feel afraid of loving the new baby or forming strong attachments until you are confident that the baby is alive and well. It is totally natural to have these fears. You might also find that you are extremely protective of the new baby when they are born. Think about what you would like from your birth plan and what those caring for you need to know.

## When you choose not to have another baby

Experiencing the death of a baby whom you dearly wanted and loved does not mean that you will automatically want to try to have another baby. Equally, you might decide not to have another baby straight away but decide to try to have one later. If you're feeling unsure, give yourself enough time and space to consider what is best for you. You may be unsure for a long time before you make a decision.

There may be both adults and children around you who will assume that you want to have another baby and this could feel painful for you. They might be grieving in their own way and feel that another baby would help their own grief. While this might be true for them, you are under no obligation to meet others' expectations, or to help others cope with their grief. You also do not have to find a reason such as ill health or infertility to explain why you are not trying to have another baby.

You may want to grieve for the baby who has died and how you feel as a parent towards that baby rather than thinking about any future parenting. You might also not want to experience any risks and complications that you had to experience with the baby who died, or any health problems that you might have developed as a result of being pregnant. In addition to these concerns, you might not want to risk future loss. The thought of future loss can feel very frightening.

If you do not want a baby but your partner does, try to resolve this as you would any other issue in your relationship. The death of a baby can have a huge impact. It might be helpful to arrange couples therapy to help you talk through some of your feelings and the impact of the loss on your relationship.

For the partner who does want another baby, having this denied can feel like a further loss. For them, it can be important to find a way to say goodbye to the baby who has died but also to those babies they imagined they might have. If you have had IVF, there might be embryos remaining. Deciding not to have another baby can feel especially difficult and cause conflict as these embryos could be implanted. It might be possible to donate the embryos for use by other people or for research if you wish, however, this may still create feelings of loss that will need to be processed. Your IVF clinicians will be able to discuss options with you.

*We're too scared to try again. Too scared another loss would break us. It hurts. We'd love another child, not to replace the ones we've lost but because we feel our home isn't full yet. We've tried but the IVF hasn't worked. We're doing our best. For some of us a rainbow baby isn't coming.*

Natalie

## When it is not possible to have another baby

Not all parents will have the option of trying to have another baby. Sometimes there are medical or personal reasons why another pregnancy is not possible, such as the mother's health, age or the couple's relationship. Parents who had IVF may need to decide whether they are able to bear the emotional and financial costs of going through this process again.

In these situations, it is best to think about where to receive support. Attending a support group for parents who have experienced the death of a baby might be useful in many ways; however, there might also be parents who announce that they are expecting another baby. This can create feelings of jealousy, anger, or provoke a further sense of loss.

The grief of wanting another baby and knowing that this is not possible might compound the feelings of loss for the baby who has just died. Working on a one-to-one basis with a counsellor who can support you through this grief may be more helpful than attending a group. Some Sands groups have been set up specifically for those parents who are expecting another baby, thereby allowing other groups to support parents solely through their experience of loss. It is important to explore the right option for you. The Sands Bereavement Support Team are experienced in supporting parents in many different situations and our Online Community is an opportunity to share experiences and ideas with other parents in similar situations.

# About Sands



We hope you have found the information in this book helpful. We would encourage you to use Sands for as long as you need. Our services are open to anyone affected by the death of a baby, no matter how recent or how long ago.

Our website also has a number of ways that you can help Sands make a real difference for bereaved families now and in the future. Visit [www.sands.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.sands.org.uk/get-involved).

## About Sands

Sands is the leading stillbirth and neonatal death charity in the UK. Founded in 1978, Sands exists to reduce the number of babies dying and to ensure that anyone affected by the death of a baby receives the best possible care and support for as long as they need it wherever they are in the UK.

Sands strives to reduce the number of babies dying and to better understand the causes of baby deaths, working with governments and other organisations to drive change and raise awareness of the issues relating to baby loss.

Sands exists to support anyone affected by the death of a baby, before, during or shortly after birth. Sands provides bereavement support services at both a local and national level. These include the Sands Freephone helpline, mobile app, online community, family support packs, memory boxes and over 100 regional support groups run by trained befrienders.

Sands works to improve bereavement care available to parents and families, by offering a range of training programmes and resources and working in partnership with health care professionals, trusts and health boards.

## Your notes

## Your notes





**Sands supports anyone affected by the death of a baby, works to improve bereavement care and funds research to save babies' lives.**

### **General enquiries**

020 7436 7940  
info@sands.org.uk  
www.sands.org.uk



### **Support**

0808 164 3332  
helpline@sands.org.uk



### **Postal address**

Sands  
Victoria Charity Centre  
11 Belgrave Road  
London SW1V 1RB



### **Sands Online Community**

[www.sands.community](http://www.sands.community)



### **Sands Bereavement Support App**

[www.sands.org.uk/app](http://www.sands.org.uk/app)



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