



Sands

the next
few days



When a baby dies, it is so hard to think clearly, yet you are faced with many difficult decisions. Because you are grieving over the death of your baby, other people may offer to make these decisions for you, but the next few days are a chance for you to build memories of your baby. These are some ideas shared by other bereaved parents who want you to know that you are not alone.

You may wish to choose a name for your baby; no matter how many weeks into the pregnancy you are, your baby is already part of your life. Giving your baby a name can be helpful to you and may also help those around you to identify with your baby. Some names are suitable even if you do not know whether your baby is a boy or girl.

One of the most important things is not to hurry. There is no need for anything to be rushed. You now have a limited time with your baby and a limited time to create memories for yourself and your family – you will want to make the best use of that time.



Making loving memories

We never expect our baby to die. We expect to build a lifetime of memories. It is important to spend time planning the memories you would like of your baby.

This may be the time to make a wish list to give to your support person so that people will know exactly what you want and expect. Although you may be feeling powerless, your support person can ensure that your wishes are met. Your wishes are the most important.

You may wish to:

- bath or sponge your baby with very salty water (a natural preservative)
- spend time with your baby at home
- unwrap your baby and look at him/her (parents have commented that they didn't see their baby naked and wish they had).



Photos

We advise you to take lots of photos of your baby. Some can be for sharing, others for yourself. We suggest some photos of just your baby (undressed and dressed) and close-ups of the baby's face, hands and feet. If your baby has visible abnormalities, then include these in some photos – these can often answer questions that arise later. Have photos taken of you holding your baby. Maybe you would like some photos of other family members with your baby. There may be a Sands member or hospital service available to take photos for you. Ask hospital staff about this. You may not want to see the photos right now, but it is very important to have photos taken because after your baby has gone, they are often the only tangible memory.

Autopsy/Post-mortem

An autopsy and/or tests may need to be performed in order to try to obtain answers as to why your baby died. The hospital staff will have information about autopsies or post-mortems for you to read. You do not have to have a post-mortem or autopsy performed on your baby – the choice is yours. Making the choice can be very hard, and it is helpful to talk about it with your midwife, hospital staff or the pathologist (if possible) if you are unsure. If you give permission for an autopsy to be performed on your baby, you are also giving permission to have clinical photos taken.

Some opportunities will have gone when your baby has gone, so ...

You can decide whether to have footprints or handprints taken, or you may like to trace around them. You may also like to have a record of your baby's weight and length. Keep a lock of hair, cot cards, birth cards, hospital wrist or ankle bracelet, measuring tape, baby's blanket or clothing. You may wish to take your baby to a special place that has significance for you (like the beach). You are able to do this, but do be aware of the appropriateness of where you take your baby and other people's reactions to seeing a deceased baby.

Transporting your baby

You are able to transport your baby by car. The baby should be secured in a babyseat, bassinette or casket. You need a form called the Transfer of Charge of Body form (BDM 39) with you at all times in case there is an accident or you are stopped by the police. Sands has produced guidelines for

transporting a deceased baby that hospital staff will provide you with.



Blessing/Naming/Baptism ceremony

You may wish to have your baby blessed or baptised or to hold a naming ceremony. Your baby can be blessed and named by your own minister, a hospital chaplain, yourselves or a friend or family member. You could choose to hold this blessing either at the same time as the funeral service or in a separate ceremony. You may wish to hold a small ceremony at home.

If you are reading this because your baby is only expected to live for a short time, you may like to talk to someone about this. You could ask your support person or midwife to contact the minister or chaplain or talk to your family.



Funeral/Ceremony

There are many possibilities and legalities for funerals/ceremonies. Your Sands contact person can be very helpful in this situation because they can often let you know all your options. Ministers and funeral directors can also help you. In some cases, your midwife or another hospital support person may be able to assist you with some options. It is important for you to do what you feel comfortable with. (See the Sands leaflet, *Your Baby's Funeral*.)



Newspaper notice

One of the things you may like to do is acknowledge the birth of your baby by placing a notice in the births and/or deaths column in the newspaper. If you choose to have a private funeral, you may wish to wait until afterwards before placing a notice. The value of placing

a notice in the newspaper is that:

- you are acknowledging that the birth of this baby is important to your family
- it may be a slightly easier way to let the community know that your baby has been born.



Registering the birth and/or death

You are required to register the birth of your baby if:

- your baby was born alive
- your baby was born after the 20th week of pregnancy
- your baby weighed 400 grams or more when he or she was born.

Death must be registered within three working days of burial/cremation if your baby has lived, even if for only a short time outside the womb. Registering the death is usually taken care of by the funeral director, but you can choose to do this yourself if you wish.

If your baby lived (maybe for a few hours or for a few days or weeks) the word deceased will appear on the birth certificate. This is to prevent any possibility of identify theft. It is not possible to receive a birth certificate for your baby without the word 'deceased' on it. This does not apply to a baby who is stillborn – the word stillborn will appear.



Milk suppression

One of the difficult things for a bereaved mother to cope with emotionally and physically at this time is the body's natural

process of producing milk. It seems so unfair when you haven't got a live baby, yet your body carries on as if you have.

Your breasts may start to produce milk from 13 weeks' gestation. The amount of physical discomfort will vary for each individual. Fresh cold cabbage leaves inside a firm bra or binder is the most common way used to suppress lactation, combined with a painkiller to reduce the discomfort. Doctors can prescribe tablets to prevent lactation. These are effective for some women, but many find that this simply delays milk production, which can prolong the body's natural process. Ask your midwife about the medication and/or natural alternatives.



Follow-up appointment

In most cases, you will need a follow-up appointment (often with a consultant, specialist or your doctor), for several reasons:

- You may need a physical check-up.
- You may be waiting for test and/or autopsy results.
- There may be things that you wish to discuss with your doctor about events surrounding the birth. You may have questions that you would like answered. It is important to write down any questions that you have as they come to mind and take these with you. Often when you get to the appointment, you are quite stressed and it is very difficult to recall everything.

The days leading up to a follow-up appointment can also be very stressful. This can be the time that you build yourself up in

the hope that there will be some medical reason or answer to the question ‘Why did my baby die?’. Sadly, in a lot of cases there is no reason found for the death of a baby. This can be particularly hard to understand and very difficult to accept. It is important not to go to this appointment alone. You need your partner or another support person with you. The follow-up appointment is usually made before you leave the hospital. It is a good idea to phone the day before this appointment to confirm that your test results are back.

It is never too late to make some memories

- Write a letter or poem to or about your baby.
- Prepare a family tree that includes your baby.
- Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings about your baby.
- Hold a memorial service or blessing – a year, or even 20 or 30 years later.
- Plant a tree of remembrance – perhaps one that flowers around the anniversary of your baby’s birth.
- Design a memorial to place on your baby’s grave or in another special place.
- Enter your baby’s name in a hospital book of remembrance.
- Make a cross-stitch birth sampler, a photo frame, a memory box, a ceramic tile ...
- Adopt a star.
- Write a letter or poem to or about your baby on significant dates or special occasions.