

Saying goodbye to your baby or child

After the death of a much longed for baby or child, thinking about what to do next can feel completely overwhelming. Whether your baby or child died at home or in hospital, you do have options. Every parent reacts differently and how each decides to say goodbye to their precious son or daughter will vary. There is no right or wrong way - it is a very personal decision. There are choices and this information sheet will touch on some of the options available to you. It also includes links to other organisations who may be of help. Knowing that you have choices will hopefully help you to feel that any decisions made, or arrangements planned, were the right ones for you and for your baby or child. Most UK hospitals now have cuddle/cold cots which enable parents to spend longer with their baby or child.

Taking your child home

Some parents choose to say goodbye to their baby or child by having them at home for a time before the funeral. In most cases this should be possible, even when a post-mortem examination has been performed.

If your child has died in hospital and you wish to take them home yourself you should be given a form by the hospital staff that confirms your child's body has been released to you. Alternatively you can ask for help with this from the funeral director who can bring your child home for you should this be your preference.

The funeral

Although arranging a funeral can be painful and distressing, it is an important step in saying goodbye. It can be helpful to take a few days to decide what is right for you as a family as your first reaction may not be your final choice. You can choose to have a burial or cremation, a religious or non-religious service, in a church, at the graveside, in your home or anywhere else appropriate. There is no requirement for a religious minister to be involved and indeed no obligation to have a funeral at all.

When a baby dies in hospital, the hospital can make the arrangements for you if you feel unable to do this yourself. It is helpful to find out what sort of funeral the hospital would provide.

If you wish to use the services of a funeral director, it can be a good idea to contact several for an estimate of the costs involved. Alternatively you can ask a friend to do this on your behalf. Many funeral directors will not charge for their basic funeral service for a baby or a child. However, if you wish to have a burial, there will be a cost associated with purchasing a grave, which can be quite expensive in some areas. If you wish to carry out the funeral independent of a funeral director, the Cemetery and Crematorium Department of your local authority can give you advice and guidance.

If there are other children in the family, to help them feel included in this important event, try to involve them in discussions about the funeral. If they are offered the option to attend the funeral or a special goodbye, they might like to contribute a favourite song, poem or reading. Provided they are prepared for what they will see and hear, most find it helpful. You may want to ask another adult who is close to the children to help support them if they choose to come to the funeral. The CBUK information sheet *Explaining Funerals, Burial and Cremation to children* has more guidance.

Resources

We Need to Talk About The Funeral by Smith and Morell

This book explains the wide choices that are available around the type of ceremony, coffin, music and much more. Although written mainly for adult funerals it offers ideas suitable for a child or baby.

Memorials by Artists for Young People, Children and Babies by Harriett Frazer

A guide to helping families find a memorial to celebrate the life of a child from birth to 30 years old.

SANDS – stillbirth and neonatal death charity Tel: 020 7436 5881 www.uk-sands.org

Produces 'Saying goodbye to your baby', a very helpful, practical leaflet which guides bereaved parents through the many decisions and tasks that have to be dealt with when a baby dies after miscarriage, stillbirth or shortly after birth. www.uk-sands.org/publications/support-and-information-leaflet

Compassionate Friends Tel: 0345 1232304 www.tcf.org.uk

Produces 'Preparing our child's funeral a short leaflet offering suggestions to think over around the funeral. More suitable for a child rather than a baby.

Together for Short Lives Tel: 0808 8088 100 www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk

Produces a helpful information leaflet 'A guide to End of Life Care'.