

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 the 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 covers some of the options available to you. It also includes links to other organisations which 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 cots (also called cold cots) which keep the baby's body cool, enabling 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, if you prefer.

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 without using 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, try to involve them in discussions about the funeral to help them feel included in this important event. 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. So long as they are prepared for what they will see and hear, most children find it helpful to attend the funeral. 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.

For more guidance, see Child Bereavement UK's information sheet, *Explaining funerals, burial and cremation to children*.

Resources and further reading

Available from bookshops or online booksellers, unless otherwise stated.

***We Need to Talk about the Funeral:
101 Practical Ways to Commemorate & Celebrate Life***
Jane Morell & Simon Smith

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***

Harriett Frazer

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

Saying Goodbye to Your Baby

Produced by Sands www.uk-sands.org

A 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

Preparing Our Child's Funeral

Produced by The Compassionate Friends
www.tcf.org.uk

A short leaflet offering suggestions to think about around the funeral. More suitable for a child rather than for a baby.

Further resources and/or references are available from Child Bereavement UK, upon request.