

The loss of your baby

Information and advice for bereaved parents

Bereavement Services

We would like to offer our condolences on the loss of your baby. At this time you may find it difficult to take in the many things that may be said to you. The loss of a baby, whether during pregnancy, labour, or after birth, is a time of great anxiety and distress for everybody involved.

The aim of this booklet is to give you important information and advice so you can make informed choices without feeling too overwhelmed by the decisions you have to make.

Grief

Everybody reacts in different ways to losing a baby. Apart from differences in personality, there are a variety of circumstances, cultures and beliefs which will influence the way you react to grief. It is likely that you will feel numbed and emotionally confused. Although difficult to understand, these emotions are normal. Grieving varies greatly from person to person and there are no set time limits as to how long it will last.

Bereavement support midwives

We have bereavement support midwives who are specially trained to give support to bereaved parents. While you are in hospital one of these midwives will try to see you. In the rare event that this is not possible (for example at weekends or during the night) we can assure that they will know of your admission and the other midwives and nurses caring for you can answer your questions.

The bereavement support midwives will give you individual and family support following the death of your baby. They can offer immediate support and advice regarding registration of death as well as funeral arrangements. Long term support and care is also offered.

We encourage you to ask questions, even if they seem trivial. If the midwives or nurses cannot answer your questions, the bereavement support midwives or the Chaplaincy department may be able to. Help and support is always available at this very difficult time.

Taking time

Taking time to think about what you want for your baby is important so go at your own pace. Only the registration of a baby who was born alive and died later, needs to be completed quickly (within five working days).

In the time following the death, you will be offered the opportunity of spending time with your baby. You may wish for your baby to stay with you while you are in hospital. Some parents wish to see and hold their baby straight away, and some choose not to. It is important to remember that you have a choice, and the staff caring for you will support you in your decision.

The use of a cooling cot is recommended, to slow down any changes to your baby, which will allow you to spend more time with them.

Leaving the hospital

Once your baby has left the Labour Ward or the Neonatal Unit, we can make arrangements for him/her to be taken to a private room within the Bereavement Viewing Room where you and your family can see your baby again if you wish. This can also be arranged after you have left hospital, by contacting the Bereavement Viewing Room during office hours. Over the weekend you can contact the Duty Manager, via the hospital switchboard, to arrange a time. However, this option is only available in exceptional circumstances.

By law, if your baby was born alive or after the 24th week of pregnancy, he/she must be buried or cremated. Take your time and discuss the options with your partner and family before deciding what arrangements you wish to make. You may want to bring some special clothes for your baby to be dressed in, or a shawl to wrap him/her in. If you don't have any of your own, the midwife or nurse caring for you and your baby may be able to provide something suitable. A small toy, such as a teddy bear, can be left with your baby.

Spiritual care

People have different needs following the loss of a baby. The chaplaincy can provide support from several Christian traditions, Islam, Hindu and Sikh. Other faiths can be contacted in the community if you do not have links with a local representative of your faith. Hospital staff can contact the chaplaincy for you if you wish to speak to somebody.

The Book of Remembrance

This is kept in the Spiritual Care Centre. Please tell staff if you would like to have your baby's name included.

Creating memories

The midwife caring for you in labour, or the nurse caring for your baby on the Neonatal Unit, will be aware of your distress and understand that you may feel you do not want physical memories relating to your baby. It has, however, been found that some parents are pleased to have these later. These may include photographs, footprints, identification bracelet and/or a lock of hair, which will be presented together in a memory box. You can decline any or all of these if you wish.

Photographs

The midwife/nurse caring for you will suggest taking photographs of your baby if possible, although photographs will never be taken without your consent. We will offer to take photographs for you, or you may wish to bring in your own camera to take photographs of your baby.

Lock of hair

If possible, a lock of hair can be taken from your baby and this might give some comfort if placed in a locket or just kept in a special place. If you do not wish to have your baby's hair cut, please tell the midwife or nurse and your wishes will be respected.

Naming or blessing your baby

Naming can be very important, even for very small babies. Choosing a name is one way of doing something positive for your baby. It helps to give focus and identity to any thoughts and feelings you have about your baby.

It may not be possible to tell the sex of very small babies, but you may want to choose a name suitable for either sex.

Some people find it helpful to have a brief ceremony for naming or blessing their baby. You may like to ask someone to do this with you. The Chaplaincy can support you in this. If you would like us to arrange a naming or blessing service for your baby, the midwife/nurse or bereavement midwife will contact the chaplaincy department or another appropriate person.

Taking your baby home

There is no legal reason why parents should not take their baby home to make their own arrangements for the funeral. For your protection, and to avoid misunderstanding, there is some important paperwork which will be given to you to complete.

If you would like to do this please have a look at the 'Taking your baby home' leaflet.

Registration of birth/death

In England and Wales all births, stillbirths and deaths have to be registered by the Registrar of Births and Deaths. Registration must be completed before a baby can be buried or cremated if he/she was born alive and then died or was stillborn after the 24th week of pregnancy. There is no legal requirement to register your baby if he/she was not born alive before the 24th week of pregnancy.

Registering a stillbirth

The midwife or doctor who attended the delivery of your baby will complete a Medical Certificate of Stillbirth.

The stillbirth certificate will be scanned and emailed to Sandwell Register office. The register office will be in contact with you by telephone to make a face-to-face appointment to register your baby's death. The stillbirth certificate will be kept by the hospital.

The registrar will ask for:

- The mother's name, occupation, date and place of birth, and any other names that the mother might have used, including maiden name if applicable.
- The father's name, occupation, date and place of birth, and any other names that the father may have used.
- The date of your baby's delivery.

The registrar will enter your baby's name in a stillbirth register. You can have your baby's first name(s) entered if you wish, as well as the surname, so you may want to give some thought to names for your baby before registering.

The registrar will issue a Green Certificate after registration is completed (a certificate to allow burial or cremation), this is free of charge. It is needed before a funeral can take place and will be forwarded to your chosen funeral director, or the hospital funeral director as appropriate.

The mother or father may register their stillborn baby or baby's birth alone when they are married to each other. Parents who are not married to each other have to see the registrar together if they want to have the father's name entered in the birth or stillbirth register.

If you wish, the registrar will give you a special stillbirth certificate for you to keep, free of charge. This too can show your baby's full name. A full stillbirth certificate is also available at the time of registration, which shows your details as well as the baby's details, but a fee is charged for this certificate.

Registering a neonatal death

For babies who die after birth, even if they only live for a very short time, both birth and death must be registered. In order that you can register the death, the doctor who looked after your baby will complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. The certificate which is issued will be scanned and emailed to the medical examiner. By law the medical examiner has to have oversight of all neonatal deaths, and is required to countersign the certificate - they will then forward this onto to Sandwell Register Office. The register office will be in contact with you by telephone to make a face-to-face appointment to register your baby's death. The certificate will be kept by the hospital. The birth/death may be declared at any register office, but if out of town, it can delay the funeral arrangements as the completed paperwork is then sent to the town of birth.

The registrar will ask for:

- The mother's name and occupation.
- The father's name and occupation.
- The date of your baby's delivery.
- Your baby's name.
- The date of your baby's death (shown on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death).

When registering the death, the registrar will record your baby's first name(s) as well as the surname, so you may want to give some thought to names for your baby before registering.

The registrar will issue a Green Certificate after registration is completed (a certificate to allow burial or cremation), this is free of charge. It is needed before a funeral can take place and will be forwarded to your chosen funeral director, or the hospital funeral director as appropriate. A white certificate is also issued free of charge to notify the Social Fund, part of the Department of Work and Pensions.

Registration in Coroner's cases

In a few cases the Coroner's office is informed of a baby's death because the doctor is unable to issue a death certificate.

The registrar may also inform the coroner to seek advice if the cause of death entered on the certificate is not clear, but this is rare.

You will be informed at the hospital, by the doctor or bereavement midwife, if the coroner is to be involved. The coroner will issue a special certificate to enable registration and the funeral to take place.

Special registration for urgent burial

Some parents, for religious or cultural reasons, may want to have their baby buried as quickly as possible. If the death occurs near a bank holiday or a weekend the local registrar will be able to issue a certificate of burial to allow this to go ahead, provided the death is not reported to the coroner and the baby is not being cremated. The bereavement midwife will give you more information.

Contact details for Sandwell Register Office can be found on page 15.

Postmortem examination

It will be recommended that a postmortem examination be carried out on your baby. This is an examination of your baby's body and internal organs in close detail, to try to understand more clearly what happened.

It can be very difficult and distressing to think of such an examination, but sometimes a postmortem is the only way to provide information which may help you to understand what (if anything) was wrong with your baby.

Other reasons for postmortem examination

The doctors may not know the cause of your baby's death and so cannot issue a death certificate, or more information is needed to confirm the cause of death. If this happens the doctor is legally responsible and will have to report the death to the coroner for advice. If the coroner decides a postmortem is necessary it can be done without your consent.

A postmortem examination is helpful to confirm abnormalities seen on scans, especially if you had your pregnancy terminated because abnormalities were detected.

By doing a postmortem examination, important information can be gained which can help you in the future if you wish to have another baby, or help other couples who have similar problems. In these cases you do not have to agree to a postmortem unless you feel you want to. The postmortem will not be carried out without your written consent.

You will be given more information in writing as well as verbally for you to consider before giving your consent.

Where will the postmortem be carried out?

If this is a coroner's postmortem it is usually carried out at the coroner's mortuary by a pathologist of the coroner's choice. Afterwards your baby will be brought back to the hospital or taken by your funeral director to their Chapel of Rest.

If you have given your written consent the examination will be carried at Birmingham Women's Hospital by the Perinatal Pathologist who specialises in the examination of babies. On occasion it is necessary to transfer your baby to a hospital further away to avoid delays in the examination being carried out. In most cases you will be able to see and hold your baby again after the postmortem, however, please bear in mind, during this time, there will have been physical changes to your baby's appearance which may be distressing.

Both examinations will be carried out with care in a sensitive manner.

How long will it take?

Once written consent has been received by the pathologist, there can be a delay in performing the examination, as a 48 hour cool off period is required, and it may be necessary to transfer your baby to a hospital in another area. The examination can only be carried out on weekdays (Monday to Friday) and can take up to 3 weeks before your baby is brought back to our hospital.

How long before the results are available?

The full results of the examination can take up to 6 months, sometimes longer. However, the results may take longer, the bereavement support midwives will be in contact with you and keep you updated. This is due to the detailed examination and investigations which are necessary. However, postmortems do not always provide a definite cause of death.

Funerals

Your baby's funeral can be a way of moving on, or perhaps marking the end of the first stage of grieving. For others in your family it can be a way of acknowledging your baby's death as well as their own grief. It is important you take your time and choose what is right for you and your family.

This may be your first experience of bereavement, and you may not realise what is involved. The bereavement support midwives, hospital staff and chaplains will be at your service to offer you the information, support and guidance that you will need to help make your choices.

By law all live-born or stillborn babies born after 24 weeks of pregnancy must have a formal funeral. Babies born before 24 weeks of pregnancy can also have a funeral.

Your options

You will need to decide whether you want your baby to be buried or cremated. If you choose to have your baby cremated you should be aware there may not be any ash remaining. You can make arrangements privately through a funeral director, or the hospital can arrange the funeral if you are unable to.

If you want your baby to be buried you also have the option of burying him/her yourself on private land, without the help of a funeral director. If you think this is something you would like to do, please see the 'Taking your baby home' leaflet.

Arranging a private funeral

By arranging the funeral privately you will have more choice over the type of funeral that you want.

To arrange a private funeral you should contact a local funeral director of your choice. You should be able to find information on the internet for local funeral directors. It is worth bearing in mind that you can contact several funeral directors for quotations.

The ceremony can be very personal and may be important for religious and spiritual reasons, however it can also be non-religious. You may choose who you would like to conduct the service, whether it is a religious leader or a relative or friend. Your funeral director will discuss this with you.

If you are receiving certain benefits you may be able to get help from the social fund towards funeral costs. Your funeral director will be able to give you advice and provide the necessary forms for you to complete.

A special letter will be provided by the hospital if your baby was not registered i.e. if they were born at less than 24 weeks and not alive.

Hospital funerals

If you feel you cannot, or do not, wish to organise a funeral yourselves, the hospital will arrange a simple funeral for your baby. You can choose whether you want your baby buried or cremated. If you choose burial, your baby may be buried in a grave shared with other babies in a special part of the cemetery, although only your baby's funeral will take place at that time. As 4 babies' coffins may be buried in one grave it may be some time before the plot is finished and grassed over. It is important to bear in mind that, if it is a shared grave, there can be no lasting memorial, i.e. headstones or other markers, on the plot.

You can, if you wish, be involved with the funeral. There is no restriction on the members of your family who want to attend.

If you choose a hospital funeral, the hospital will pay. The hospital has a contract with a funeral director who will organise the date and place where the funeral will be. We will act on your behalf; therefore there is no need for contact between yourselves and the funeral director.

If you opt for the hospital to arrange the funeral you will receive a call from the CARES office at Midland Metropolitan University Hospital to discuss your options. You can contact them yourselves if you wish on 0121 507 3464/4638.

Symptoms to report

Who to contact if you have any of the following postnatal complications:

- Sudden or continuous and increasing blood loss, passing multiple large clots, feeling faint or dizzy, and/or having palpitations. This can be a sign of a secondary bleed - Contact Triage.
- Vaginal discharge that has an offensive smell, or offensive smelling wound (Including oozing from the wound) and lower tummy pain. These can be symptoms of infection and you can see your GP - if accompanied by Fever and chills(Shivering) - Contact Triage.
- Headaches with visual disturbances i.e. flashing lights, especially if you suffer with high blood pressure - Contact Triage.

- Red painful area on the breast, this can be a sign of Mastitis- Contact your GP.
- Red/swollen and painful area on your leg(s), especially the calf, that is warm to touch, breathlessness, chest pains and/or palpitations.. These can all be signs of blood clots developing in the legs or chest - Contact Triage or attend A&E.

Further advice and support

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)

A self-help organisation for families whose baby has died.

Website: <https://www.sands.org.uk/>

Community Forum: <https://sands.community/login>

Helpline: 0808 164 3332

Birmingham Sands: 07709 425 001

Birmingham Sands Email: Birmingham@sands.org.uk

Miscarriage Association

A national organisation set up by parents who have been through the pain of miscarriage.

Helpline: 01924 200 799 (Monday–Friday, 9am–4pm)

Website: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

An organisation which offers support and advice to women and their families before and after elected termination.

Website: www.arc-uk.org

Helpline: 020 7713 7486

Edward's Trust

Supports children and families through serious illness and bereavement

Website: www.edwardstrust.org.uk

Helpline: 0121 454 1705

Cruse Bereavement Support

An organisation to enable anyone bereaved by death to understand their grief and cope with their loss.

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

The Child Bereavement UK

The charity provides support and information to all affected by the death of a baby or child.

Website: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Support and information: 0800 02 888 40

Benefits Advice

If you are receiving benefits and need financial support for your baby's funeral please ask for an SF200 form from your funeral director or local job centre.

Useful contacts

Sandwell Register Office

Highfields
High Street
West Bromwich B70 8RJ

For weekends and bank holidays, please use the following number 07810 152 159 (Saturdays/Sundays 9am-1pm).

How to contact us

Bereavement Viewing Room	0121 507 4259
Chaplain's Office	0121 507 4694/4916
CARE's Office	0121 507 3464/4638

Bereavement Support

Midwives	0121 507 4395
Mobile:	07817087097 – Victoria Weaver 07790936306 – Sadaf Ahmed
Hospital switch board:	0121 554 3801
Triage:	0121 507 4181 (24 hours service)
Community midwives:	0121 507 3775, 8.30am - 3.30pm, Monday - Friday.

Sources of information used in this leaflet

Stillbirth and Neonatal death charity (Sands). (2016). *Pregnancy loss and the death of a baby: guidelines for professionals*. 4th ed. Tantamount: Coventry.

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The Centre for Maternal & Child Enquiries, (2011) *Saving Mother's Lives, Reviewing Maternal Deaths to make Motherhood Safer*. London: Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership Ltd. (8th Report).

National institute for health and care excellence (NICE) (2021). *Postnatal care NICE guideline [NG194]*. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng194> [Website accessed 09 January 2025].

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