

Deciding about a funeral for your baby





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“Of all the plans and decisions we had started to make, we never dreamed that deciding about our baby’s funeral would be one of them.” Dad



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Introduction

The last thing that expectant and new parents dream of is having to make decisions about a funeral for their baby. For many bereaved parents, their baby's funeral is the first funeral they have had to think about, and for some it is the first they have ever had to attend. So it can be hard to know what to do and where to begin.

This booklet describes what needs to be done if you decide to have a funeral, and the choices you can make. It's based on what bereaved parents have told us they needed to know. We hope it will help you to make decisions that are right for you. It contains quite a lot of information, some of which may not be relevant to you. So we don't expect you to read it from cover to cover. Instead we suggest that you look at the contents list on pages 4-5 and choose the sections you need to read.

Making decisions when you are shocked and grieving is not easy. So please don't feel you have to make up your mind straight away. It can be hard to decide what you want. Couples sometimes find that they don't want the same things and need time to reach decisions. You may also want time to discuss your choices with other family members and close friends.

Deciding about a funeral may be especially difficult if you have had twins or more. See [Multiple births](#) on page 10.

Although you can take your time about most decisions, the hospital staff may want to know before you go home if you want the hospital to arrange the funeral. If you haven't decided, ask the staff whom you should contact when you have made up your mind.

Can my baby have a funeral?

All babies, regardless of the stage of pregnancy or the circumstances of their birth, can have a funeral. You don't have to have a funeral for your baby, but many parents find that, although a funeral can be distressing and painful, it is also an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate their baby's short life.

What are my choices?

You can have a funeral arranged by the hospital, if this is offered, or you can arrange and pay for the funeral yourself.

- ▶ Many hospitals arrange and pay for funerals for babies. A few hospitals only arrange funerals for babies who were born dead, not for those who died after birth. Some hospitals charge a small fee for arranging a funeral. See pages 11-15 for more about hospital funerals.
- ▶ If you are considering arranging and paying for the funeral yourself, see pages 16-21 for more information, what you need to do, and likely costs.

Northern Ireland Some of the options in Northern Ireland for funerals, burial and cremation are different from those described in this booklet. Your midwife or nurse will explain them to you.

Paperwork

Some paperwork is needed before a burial or cremation can take place.

- ▶ If your baby was born dead after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy, or lived for a short time and then died, the 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 form permitting burial or cremation. Depending on who is arranging the funeral, you should give this to the funeral director, to the hospital, or, if you are arranging the funeral yourself, to the cemetery or crematorium.

If you are using a funeral director, they will help you complete the additional forms needed by the cemetery or the crematorium. They will also ask you to sign a form allowing them to collect your baby from the hospital mortuary. If you are making all the funeral arrangements yourself, the staff at the cemetery or the crematorium will give you copies of the forms you need to complete and explain anything you are unsure about.

If your baby's death was referred to the coroner, the coroner's officer will ask you whether you are having a burial or cremation. For a cremation, the coroner issues the form allowing the funeral to take place; for a burial, the registrar issues the form. If there is an inquest into your baby's death, the coroner always issues the necessary document. If the hospital or a funeral director is arranging the funeral, they will get this form from the coroner's office. If you are organising the funeral yourself, you need to ask the coroner's officer how to get it. (Arrangements in Scotland if the death is referred to the procurator fiscal may be slightly different.)

- ▶ If your baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy (legally described as a “late miscarriage”), the death cannot be registered. But the funeral director, or the crematorium or cemetery, must have a Medical Certificate from the hospital before the burial or cremation can take place. This confirms that your baby was born dead and that a burial or cremation can be arranged.

If the hospital is arranging the funeral, the staff will deal with the Medical Certificate. If you are using a funeral director, they can collect the certificate from the hospital. If you are making your own arrangements, you will need to collect the Medical Certificate from the hospital to give to the crematorium or cemetery staff. The cemetery or crematorium staff will give you any additional forms and help you complete them.

Multiple births

Multiple births raise additional dilemmas and decisions for parents.

If twins or more babies have died, you may, for example, want them to share a coffin as well as a funeral.

If you have a live and possibly vulnerable baby or babies as well, it can be very hard to know whom to focus on. Dealing with grief and, at the same time, trying to stay positive about the baby or babies who are alive is difficult. But taking time to decide about a funeral that is right for you and your family is also important. In the future, knowing about the funeral of their twin or triplet may be important to the surviving baby or babies as well.

Urgent funerals

If you need to arrange a funeral very quickly for any reason, please tell the hospital staff. They will advise you about urgent registration or, if your baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks, will give you the Medical Certificate so that you can organise the funeral.

A funeral 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 made your own arrangements. It depends very much on the hospital. But there are always choices and decisions to be made. The person who discusses the funeral with you will explain these to you. If the funeral ceremony can't be as personal as you would like, you could also think about having a memorial service later on (see Memorials on page 34).

Some hospitals offer both burial and cremation. In areas where the cost of graves is very high, hospitals may only offer cremation. However they may be able to arrange for burial if this is a religious requirement.

Northern Ireland Some of the options in Northern Ireland for funerals, burial and cremation are different from those described in the following pages. Your midwife or nurse will explain them to you.

Burial arranged by the hospital

If the hospital offers burial, it will be in a cemetery arranged by the hospital. Some hospitals offer parents a choice between an individual grave or a shared grave, and some only offer burial in a shared grave for all babies.

An individual grave Individual graves are most commonly offered for babies who died after birth or were born dead at a later stage in pregnancy. What your hospital offers may depend on the cost of graves in the area.

Many cemeteries have a special area for babies' graves. Most cemeteries have restrictions about what can be placed on or around a grave. Before you decide, you may want to find out what is allowed and whether there is a section set aside for babies.

A shared grave Burial in a shared grave means that several babies will be buried together, each in his or her own coffin. Some parents find it comforting to know that their baby will not be alone. Others may prefer to make their own arrangements if a shared grave is the only option that the hospital can offer.

"At first the idea of a shared grave seemed very strange. But when we thought about it, we were comforted by the thought that our baby would not be alone." Dad

The member of staff who discusses the funeral with you should be able to tell you how many babies are placed in a shared grave. Some cemeteries cover the grave with a lockable cover until it is finally closed, to ensure that it cannot be disturbed. You may want to ask the hospital staff if the cemetery will do this.

It's not usually possible to put a headstone or any kind of memorial on a shared grave. There are also likely to be restrictions about what can be placed on or around the grave. But you may be able to make your own arrangements for a plaque somewhere else in the cemetery. Although the hospital is arranging the funeral, if you would like to, you can contact the cemetery yourself to ask about memorial options. (For more about Memorials, see page 34.)

Cremation arranged by the hospital

Some hospitals offer both individual cremation and shared cremation. Individual cremation is most commonly offered for babies who died after birth or were born dead at a later stage of pregnancy. In a shared cremation, several babies are cremated at the same time.

What the hospital offers depends on the contract they have with the funeral director and the crematorium. The person who discusses the funeral with you will explain the options to you.

Will there be ashes? Most crematoria go to great lengths to try to ensure that there are ashes, however few, by adapting the cremation process for babies.

- ▶ If your baby was born at or after about 17 weeks of pregnancy and has an individual cremation, the crematorium should be able to offer you your baby's ashes. Sadly, if your baby was born before 17 weeks, it is not possible to produce ashes.
- ▶ If you want to have your baby's ashes, the hospital staff should be able to tell you whether the crematorium can provide them. If there will be ashes, ask the hospital staff to ensure that you are contacted when the ashes are ready for collection. If you won't be offered your baby's ashes, you may want to consider organising and paying for a cremation at another crematorium, or to choose burial instead. (See also page 36 for Decisions about ashes.)

- ▶ If the cremation will be shared with other babies, you will only be offered ashes if the crematorium uses a separate tray for each baby. If they don't, all the ashes from the shared cremation will be buried or scattered together in a special place in the crematorium grounds. This means that you will have a place to visit, if you want, in the years to come.

The crematorium will have regulations about what can be placed on or near the place where the ashes are buried or scattered. But you may be able to have a plaque placed somewhere else in the crematorium gardens.

- ▶ If the hospital only offers shared cremation, and the crematorium is able to offer ashes from an individual cremation, you could arrange and pay for this yourself.

A hospital funeral ceremony

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 recently. Some hospitals will also organise an individual ceremony for your baby if that is what you would prefer.

A shared funeral ceremony In most places, shared funeral ceremonies are non denominational, for parents of all faiths and none. Parents, and anyone else they want to invite, are usually welcome to attend. The ceremony may be held in the hospital chapel, or in the crematorium or cemetery chapel. The staff who discuss the funeral with you will tell you when and where the next ceremony is likely to be.

You don't have to be at the ceremony if you don't want to, but take a little time before you decide. You may want to contact the hospital chaplaincy to find out exactly what will happen before making your decision. If you plan to go, and depending on the kind of ceremony, you can usually ask the chaplain to include a special piece of poetry, prose or music. Whether you attend or not, you can send flowers. For more information see Planning the ceremony on pages 22-29.

"When the midwife mentioned a funeral, I told her that she could do as she wished, I wouldn't be going! But I totally changed my mind about 24 hours later. It's just that we hadn't got our heads around what had happened and all the things we were expected to make decisions about." Mum

An individual funeral ceremony arranged by the hospital If the hospital offers you an individual funeral, you can choose whether to ask a hospital chaplain to lead it. Many hospital chaplaincies now have religious leaders from a range of different faiths. If there is no hospital chaplain of your own faith, they will probably be able to put you in touch with someone if this is what you would prefer. Alternatively, you may want to choose a non-religious celebrant (see Who will lead the ceremony? on page 22).

You can discuss your choices about the ceremony with the person who will lead the ceremony. For more about the choices you can make, see Planning the ceremony on pages 22-29 and Other things to think about on pages 30-32.

Arranging a funeral yourselves

Depending on the kind of funeral you choose, there may be quite a lot to find out about and to do, so you may want to enlist the help of relatives or close friends. Choose people who understand the depth of your grief and will help you to make your own choices rather than taking over and telling you what you should do. You will find a checklist of things that may need to be done on page 38.

A funeral can be religious or non-religious or a mixture. It can be traditional or a ceremony of your own design, or a bit of each. If you have children who are old enough to take part, you may want to include them in planning your baby's funeral.

Deciding about a funeral director

Most parents contact a funeral director to help them with the arrangements. He or she will discuss the options with you, help you decide what you want and make the arrangements for you. Many funeral directors charge a reduced rate or nothing at all for a baby's funeral except for the charges they have to pay, for example, to the cemetery or crematorium.

The hospital staff may be able to give you the contact details of local funeral directors and tell you if any specialise in funerals for babies. You could also search the web for a funeral director: the Good Funeral Guide, the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF), or the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) websites are good (see Other sources of information on page 44).

Alternatively you, or a family member or friend, could call some local funeral companies to find out about the services they offer and the fees they would charge. A phone call – rather than a visit – can give you a feel for the helpfulness of the company without you having to make a commitment.

It's important to make sure that the funeral director you choose is a member of a professional body such as SAIF or NAFD (see above).

You may want to read the rest of this booklet before choosing a funeral director. Then you will know what your options are and can ask more informed questions when deciding which company to choose. Some funeral directors offer excellent care, and emotional support, which can be really helpful.

You don't have to use a funeral director: you can make all the arrangements yourselves. There is quite a lot of paperwork involved, but it isn't complicated. If you do decide to make all the arrangements yourself, your chosen cemetery or crematorium staff should be able to advise and guide you. (A few crematoria will not accept a cremation unless it is organised through a funeral director.)

Burial or cremation

You will need to decide whether your baby will be buried or cremated. If you are using a funeral director, he or she will tell you about local crematoria and burial grounds and what each offers. If you are making all the arrangements yourselves, you, or a family member or close friend, will need to investigate the options yourselves.

- ▶ **Burial** Your baby can be buried in a cemetery, a green or woodland burial site or, if you belong to a faith group that has a cemetery, in consecrated grounds.

Burial at home may also be an option, though you may want to think about how you would feel if you move away. There is no legal reason to prevent burial on private land but there are quite a few things to consider, especially if your baby died after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy. A good source of advice if you are considering this is the Natural Death Centre (see Other sources of information on page 47). They can advise you about any legal issues, as well as environmental issues such as how far a grave needs to be from watercourses and how deep it must be.

► **Cremation** Most crematoria go to great lengths to try to ensure that there are ashes from the cremation of a baby, however few, by adapting the cremation process. They should be able to offer you ashes if your baby was born at or after about 17 weeks of pregnancy. If you want to have ashes, you need to tell the funeral director or the crematorium and ask them to let you know when they are ready for collection. If you won't be offered your baby's ashes, you may want to consider burial, or to look for a crematorium not too far away that will offer you ashes. (See also page 36 for Decisions about ashes.)

Choosing a coffin

The funeral director will offer you a range of coffins. If you would prefer something different, ask: they should be able to obtain a coffin of your choice. Several companies produce coffins for babies and young children and sell direct to the public. The Good Funeral Guide website includes a useful list of companies. You also don't have to have a coffin at the funeral ceremony. You could, for example, have your baby tucked into a moses basket or a crib and then, if necessary, transferred into a coffin for the burial or cremation.

Coffins can be made of a range of substances including wood veneer, wood, cardboard, bamboo or willow. Some are much more expensive than others. Some families choose a plain white coffin and then have it decorated, or invite family and close friends to write messages on it. If you choose a woodland or natural burial ground, check with the staff there: they will have rules about the type of coffin they accept.

Help with funeral costs

If you are on an income-related benefit and your baby was stillborn or died after birth, you may be able to get a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund to help towards the costs (see Other sources of information on page 45). This is not available if your baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy (legally a "late miscarriage").

Alternatively, the Child Funeral Charity may be able to help you with funeral costs (see Other sources of information on page 44 for how to apply).

Setting a date

The funeral can be held as soon as all the arrangements have been made and the post mortem is completed, if there was one. But there is usually no need to hold the funeral very quickly, unless you have a particular reason for doing so. You may want to take time to think about what you want, and to hold the funeral when you are no longer quite so shocked. You may also, for example, want to wait for a close friend or relative who lives far away to arrive. Most funerals are held within two to three weeks.

If you have agreed to a post mortem examination, there may be a short delay before your baby's body is returned and the funeral can be held. Referral to the coroner – or procurator fiscal in Scotland – is not common, but if this happens 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 how long it is likely to take.

Sometimes a funeral needs to be delayed because the mother is very ill following the birth, or because a twin or triplet is seriously ill. If you are the baby's father or other relative, please talk to the hospital staff about registration (if it is required) and whether the funeral should take place or be delayed.

Planning the ceremony

Whatever kind of funeral you are having, take your time to think about how you would like to say goodbye to your baby and what would be right for you.

Who will lead the ceremony?

- ▶ If you belong to a religious organisation, you may want to ask your own minister or a member of the hospital chaplaincy to lead the ceremony. Most hospital chaplaincies have representatives of different faiths. You could contact the Institute of Civil Funerals (IoCF) or Funeral Celebrants to find a celebrant who will help you plan a ceremony with as much or as little religious or spiritual content as you want. Some funeral directors also act as celebrants. (See also Other sources of information on page 44.)
- ▶ If you don't want any religious content at all, you could contact the British Humanist Association for advice about local humanist funeral celebrants.
- ▶ You could ask a trusted relative or close friend to lead the ceremony if they feel able to.

What kind of ceremony do you want?

Religious funeral ceremonies vary a good deal. In most cases the celebrant will be willing to include what you want and will also make suggestions. In some faiths the structure is fixed and there may be less opportunity to adapt the ceremony. If the ceremony is led by an independent funeral celebrant, a humanist, or a friend or relative, you can usually plan more or less anything you want.

You may need to think about how long you want the ceremony to be. For example, at a crematorium you may want to book additional time if you think you will need it.

Whom to invite?

When an older person dies, the family does not usually issue invitations. People who hear about the death usually decide for themselves whether they should go to the funeral. But when a baby dies, other family members, friends and colleagues may feel less certain. Some may feel that they shouldn't intrude, or may simply not know how to react to the news that your baby has died or whether they should attend.

You may want a very small private funeral. However, if it is alright for more people to come, you may want to mention, when you let them know when and where the funeral will be, any special requests you have, for example, about flowers and what people should wear.

"I asked everyone to wear white clothes because I felt this reflected my baby's purity." Mum

There may be some people whom you definitely don't want to be present. For example, some parents find it hard to be around others who are expecting or have just had a baby, or don't want work colleagues to attend. You could ask a tactful relative or friend to tell them that you want to keep the funeral low key and are only inviting a few people.

If you have other children, you will need to decide whether they should come to the funeral. If they do, it's important to explain to them what will happen and to tell them that you and other people will be very sad and may cry. You might want to ask someone they know well and like, to come with them so that they have someone other than you, to explain what's going on, and to support them. You may find it helpful to read our booklet *Supporting children when a baby has died* for more about meeting children's needs.

Where will the ceremony be held?

This depends on what you want, and also possibly on the celebrant you have chosen. For example, the funeral ceremony can be held at your own place of worship if you have one, and then move to the cemetery or crematorium. If you choose cremation, the ceremony could be held in the crematorium chapel. If you choose burial, the ceremony could be held in the cemetery chapel or at the graveside. Alternatively you could start in the chapel and move to the graveside.

You may have want to have the funeral ceremony somewhere less formal, for example, in your home, in your garden, or in a beautiful place out of doors that has special significance for you.

If the land is privately owned you will need to get permission from the owner. If the place you choose is open to the public, there may be other people around so your ceremony may not be very private. There is also a small risk of a stranger photographing or filming the funeral and uploading it onto social media.

Readings

You may want to write your own poem or text. If you think you won't be able to read it out yourself, you could ask the celebrant or a trusted relative or friend to do it for you, or to be prepared to take over in case you find it too difficult. You could also ask them to write something themselves and read it out.

"We decided to write a short piece ourselves about our daughter's little life. So many people hadn't had the chance to meet her, but we wanted to tell them about her; that she had big feet." Mum

You may find it helpful to see what other parents have written. Sands has an anthology of poetry *A Gift of Words* which you can order from our shop, <http://shop-sands.org/shop/>

You or a friend or relative could also search the web for funeral poetry and readings that are relevant to your baby. For example, the Good Funeral Guide website offers suggestions for poems and readings.

Music

You may want to choose music or songs for the funeral. However, you may also want to bear in mind that whenever you hear the same music or song in the future, it could prompt new waves of grief. Music is everywhere nowadays, so you could be taken by surprise by background music in shops, lifts, restaurants, or a film, TV or radio programme.

“My only clear recollection of my daughter’s funeral was of my husband carrying the coffin, and the music. To this day, as soon as I hear the first note of the track, I’m taken back to that day.” Mum

If you want to use recorded music, the funeral director, or the staff where the funeral ceremony will be held, will tell you what format they need and, if you choose more than one piece, how each should be labelled. Many crematoria have web-based music systems so you just need to give details of the artist and the tracks you want. The staff will usually search for something for you if they don’t already have it. Alternatively you could have live music if you know or can find musicians and singers.

Flowers

You can choose whether or not to have flowers on or with the coffin. If you use a florist and want flowers for the coffin, tell them what size the coffin will be.

You can also decide whether or not you want other people to send flowers. If you do, you will need to tell them where they should be sent. Flowers are usually sent to the funeral director, or to your home if you are arranging the funeral yourselves. Or you could ask people to bring flowers to the ceremony instead.

After the funeral you may want to take some of the flowers home, so that you can press and keep them. You may also want to keep any message cards that are sent with the flowers.

Candles

You may want to light candles before or during the ceremony. If you do, check beforehand with the crematorium or cemetery that this is allowed.

“After carrying in their baby’s coffin, the parents lit a large candle to represent the light that their little daughter had brought into the world. During the ceremony, they and the baby’s brothers each lit their own candle from the baby’s candle. At the end of the ceremony, one of the brothers blew out his baby sister’s candle. Then the family tucked a blanket around the coffin before everyone left the chapel.”

Independent funeral celebrant

Releasing balloons or doves or butterflies

Some parents have written messages, attached them to balloons and released them after the ceremony or at the graveside. However, there are some environmental concerns about balloons. Information and guidelines on best practice is available on the National Association of Balloon Artists and Suppliers' website (see Other sources of information on page 44). An alternative could be releasing butterflies or doves, blowing bubbles or hiring a bubble machine. You or a friend or relative could search the web for "bubble machines", "butterfly release" or "releasing doves".

Photographs

Some parents get a friend or relative they trust to take photographs before, during and after the funeral ceremony. If you want this, it's important to tell the person taking the photos exactly what you want and don't want, and when you do and don't want photos taken. You might, for example, want a photo of the coffin or of the person carrying it into the ceremony, of the flowers, and of the people who come to the ceremony and to the gathering afterwards. Photos can provide you with precious mementoes and remind you of the people who came to honour your baby and to support you. It may seem impossible to imagine now, but memories of the funeral can fade with time, and this in itself can be upsetting.

If you want photos or a video of the funeral ceremony itself, check first with the celebrant, the funeral director and any staff involved in the funeral that this will be acceptable. It is normally possible as long as the funeral is only for your baby and is not shared with others.

A printed order of service

You, or a relative or friend, may want to produce an order of service containing the words and music that will be used. You could have a photo of your baby on the front, or a symbol that has meaning for you such as a flower or butterfly. You and the other people who attend will be able to keep the order of ceremony as a precious memento of your baby.

Some funeral directors have a range of designs for you to choose from. You can then add photographs and text. There may be a small charge for this.

If you are inviting people to meet up afterwards (see A gathering after the funeral on page 33), you could include the address and directions to the venue in the order of service.

Donations to charity

As well as, or instead of, sending flowers, you could suggest that family and friends who want to, make a donation to Sands or another charity. We can provide donation envelopes for you to use at the funeral. Some parents have created personal websites for their baby or set up an “In Memory Fund” dedicated to their baby in order to raise money for Sands. You could use the Much Loved website (see Other sources of information, page 46) to set up a memorial page which allows people to donate to Sands in memory of your baby.

If you would like to help raise money for Sands in memory of your baby, please visit the Get Involved section of our website, or contact our Fundraising Team fundraising@uk-sands.org Tel: 0845 6520 448.

Other things to think about

Taking your baby home

Some parents decide to take their baby home before the funeral. There is no legal reason why you should not do this unless a coroner or procurator fiscal has ordered a post mortem.

If you would like to take your baby home, tell the 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. The staff should also give you information about keeping your baby as cool as possible. Some hospitals and some funeral directors have cold cots which can help to keep the baby cool and you may be able to borrow one for your baby.

If the hospital is arranging the funeral, the staff will tell you when to bring your baby back or when to take him or her to the funeral director. If you are arranging the funeral yourself, you can keep your baby at home until it takes place.

Preparing your baby for the funeral

Depending on the stage of pregnancy at which your baby was born and on his or her condition, 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, where the stitch lines will be. These will be covered when the baby is dressed and wrapped.

Alternatively you could ask:

- ▶ the hospital staff to help you to wash and dress your baby, or to do this for you.
- ▶ the funeral director to wash and dress your baby.
- ▶ members of your religious community who are experienced in preparing bodies for a funeral to help you, or to do it for you.

"I brushed his hair and put him in the new cardigan I had bought him. I got to do all the things I'd looked forward to doing, it was my chance to show him all the love I had." Mum

Depending on your baby's size and condition, you may want him or her 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, a letter or a poem. Some parents keep an identical outfit, blanket, toy, letter or poem as a keepsake. However, if you choose cremation you should ask the funeral director or crematorium what can be put in the coffin with your baby. There are strict health and safety rules about emissions from crematoria.

"My close friend had bought our daughter a gorgeous pink bunny rabbit. The day before the funeral she bought an identical one, so we could keep one for ourselves and give the other to our daughter in her coffin. The bunny still means so much. We hug it sometimes." Mum

Bringing your baby to the funeral

There are various choices you can make, partly depending on where your baby is before the funeral:

- ▶ If your baby is at the funeral home or the hospital, you can ask the funeral director to bring him or her. If you don't want a hearse, you could ask if your baby could be brought in an ordinary car. Some funeral directors have cars that are specially adapted to carry a small coffin and have space for the family.
- ▶ You could collect your baby from the funeral director yourselves and take him or her by car to the ceremony. If you will be travelling by minicab or taxi, check first that they will agree to transport the coffin.
- ▶ If your baby is at home until the funeral, you could take him or her yourselves by car. Again, if it's a minicab or a taxi, you need to check.
- ▶ The funeral director, if you use one, could carry the coffin in for the ceremony. You could also carry the coffin in yourself, or ask a relative or friend to do this for you.

A gathering after the funeral

Once the funeral is over, you may just want to get back to the privacy of your own home, perhaps with one or two people you are especially close to. Alternatively you may want family and friends to gather for a cup of tea and perhaps something to eat.

A gathering after the funeral requires a bit of organisation and some decisions. It's probably best if you can make most of the decisions yourself, so that it is right for you. But you might want to ask a relative or friend to make most of the practical arrangements for you and to manage the food and drinks etc during the event.

You may want to have the gathering at your home. Or you could ask a relative or friend to invite everyone. You could also book a private function room in a local hotel and ask them to provide tea, coffee and light refreshments. Meeting in a pub may not be a good option, as too much alcohol can cause problems when people are sad and emotional.

You don't have to do anything special at this gathering. It's just an opportunity for people to be together. You might want to provide a book so that people can write down their thoughts and feelings about your baby and about the funeral. This would give you another keepsake, a reminder of the people who came to your baby's funeral and whose lives were touched by his or her death.

Memorials

Memorial books Many hospitals, and all crematoria and cemeteries, have a memorial book (often called a Book of Remembrance). You could have your baby's name entered into one or more of these. Crematoria and cemeteries may make a small charge for this.

A commemorative plaque You could also have a commemorative plaque at the cemetery or crematorium. There will usually be a charge for this and there may be restrictions about where the plaque can be placed. Increasingly, crematoria and cemeteries have a special section set aside for memorials to babies and very young children. Again there may be restrictions about what can be placed there. You may want to contact the crematorium or cemetery office to find out more about what you can have. Or a funeral director may be able to give you a brochure from the cemetery or crematorium.

You could also have a plaque at a Sands garden. There are several Sands gardens around the UK and you can contact the Sands Helpline to find out if there is one near you (see page 40 for contact details).

A headstone If your baby is buried in an individual grave, you may want to choose a headstone. There are many companies that supply headstones specially designed for babies and young children. You could search the internet, or ask the funeral director or the staff at the cemetery about companies that supply headstones. If your baby is buried in a churchyard, there may be additional rules about the size and design of a headstone and inscriptions. The minister will be able to advise you.

A memorial service You could hold a memorial ceremony some time after the funeral. You will need to find a celebrant (if you want one) and a venue and you will need to design the ceremony. See Planning the ceremony on pages 22-29 for ideas about what you could include.

If there are ashes after the cremation, you don't have to make a quick decision about what you would like to happen to them. The crematorium or the funeral director will keep them until you decide, though they are only obliged to keep them for a maximum of five years.

Decisions about ashes

There are several options:

- ▶ The crematorium could bury or scatter the ashes in a special place in the crematorium grounds. The crematorium will have regulations about what can be put on or near the place where the ashes are buried or scattered. But you may be able to have a plaque placed somewhere else in the crematorium gardens.
- ▶ You could scatter them yourself, perhaps in a place that is special to you.
- ▶ You could have the ashes buried in a cemetery or a memorial garden.
- ▶ You could scatter or bury the ashes in your garden, but you may want to think about how you would feel about leaving them behind if you move away.

If you want to scatter the ashes on private land, you should ask the landowner's permission. Choose a place that is likely to remain accessible to you and that won't be developed.

If you want to scatter the ashes on water, Environment Agency regulations require you to ensure that everything that goes into the water is biodegradable. You could scatter flowers or petals with the ashes, or place the ashes in a biodegradable urn.

Ashes should not be scattered:

- ▶ within one kilometre upstream of any drinking water supply
- ▶ from a bridge over a river used by boaters or canoeists
- ▶ anywhere close to a marina, anglers or bathers.

You don't have to scatter or bury the ashes. If you want to keep them, there are urns designed specifically for babies' ashes. Or you can keep the ashes in a container that has a special meaning for you. There are also frames that have a compartment at the back to hold ashes behind the photograph – search for “photo frame ashes”. There are also companies that sell “cremation jewellery” such as pendants, key rings or charms that can hold a small amount of ash.

Checklist – arranging the funeral yourselves

Using a funeral director

- ▶ **If you decide to use a funeral director** he or she will guide you through what needs to be done and the choices you can make, and will make all the arrangements with the crematorium or cemetery.
- ▶ **If you decide not to use a funeral director** you will need to make all the arrangements with the cemetery or crematorium and deal with the paperwork. You will also need to make decisions about everything that is listed below.

Obtaining the necessary documents

- ▶ From the registrar if your baby was stillborn or died shortly after birth.
- ▶ From the hospital if your baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks.

Deciding about burial or cremation

- ▶ **Burial** - in a cemetery, consecrated ground, a green burial site or at home.
- ▶ **Cremation** - check whether the crematorium will try to ensure that you are offered ashes after the cremation is completed. If yes, decide whether you will want to bury, or scatter, or keep the ashes. This decision can wait if you prefer.

Deciding on a funeral ceremony

- ▶ Decide what sort of ceremony you want.
- ▶ Choose someone to lead the ceremony. If you choose a religious representative, a humanist or an independent funeral celebrant, he or she will help you to design the ceremony. Otherwise you will need to design it yourself.
- ▶ Whom to invite.
- ▶ Where the funeral ceremony will take place.

Making decisions about:

- ▶ a coffin.
- ▶ preparing your baby.
- ▶ transport to the funeral and who will carry the coffin into the ceremony.
- ▶ readings.
- ▶ music.
- ▶ flowers.
- ▶ candles.
- ▶ photographs.
- ▶ a printed order of ceremony.
- ▶ donations to a charity.
- ▶ whether you want to have a gathering after the funeral: if yes, where it will be held and what refreshments do you want to offer.
- ▶ whether you want a memorial for your baby. This decision can wait until you are ready.

How Sands can help

Sands is a national charity offering information and emotional support when a baby dies before, during, or shortly after birth.

17 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth every day in the UK, and each year we support thousands of families whose babies have died.

At Sands there are people who understand what it's like, because many of us have been through this devastating experience ourselves.

You may not want anything from us right away. We are here to help whenever you feel you need it. That may be now or in a few weeks, months or even years.

As well as supporting mothers, fathers and same sex partners, we are also here to help other members of the family and the many other people who may be touched by a baby's death, including friends, colleagues and health care staff. All are welcome to contact us for support and information.

Do you want to speak to someone on our Helpline?	020 7436 5881
Do you want to email the Helpline for support?	helpline@uk-sands.org
Do you want to connect with others whose baby has died?	www.sandsforum.org
Do you want to find out about a Sands group near you?	helpline@uk-sands.org
Do you want to know about our other support booklets?	Please see page 41
Do you want to see what's on offer at our shop?	www.shop-sands.org/ shop/
Do you want to know more about what we do?	www.uk-sands.org
Do you want to make a donation or fundraise?	fundraising@uk-sands.org
Do you want to write to us?	Sands, 3rd Floor, 28 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LY

Sands support resources

If you would like more information on any of the subjects we have mentioned, please see our current list of Sands booklets below. You can read or download copies of our booklets on the Support section of our website www.uk-sands.org or you can order copies from our online shop www.shop-sands.org/shop or by calling 0845 6520 448.

Sands booklets

When a baby dies before labour begins

Saying goodbye to your baby

Deciding about a post mortem: information for parents

Deciding about a funeral for your baby

Mainly for fathers

Supporting children when a baby has died

Sexual relationships after the death of your baby

Information and support for grandparents

For family and friends: how you can help

Returning to work after the death of your baby

Information for employers: helping a bereaved parent return to work

Another pregnancy? After a late miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death

Long ago bereaved

Useful addresses

Other charities that offer support

Bliss - the special care baby charity

www.bliss.org.uk

Support, advice and information for families of babies in intensive care and special care, including in situations of loss and for future pregnancies.

Helpline: 0500 618 140 Email: hello@bliss.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Supporting families when a baby or child dies and when a child is bereaved, including support in another pregnancy.

Support and information: Freephone 0800 02 888 40 or 01494 568900

Email: support@childbereavementuk.org

Miscarriage Association

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Support and information for those affected by pregnancy loss, including support in another pregnancy.

Network of support groups and telephone contacts throughout the UK.

Helpline: 01924 200 799 Email: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk

TAMBA Bereavement Support Group

www.tamba.org.uk/bsg

Support for families who have lost one or more children from a multiple birth, including support in another pregnancy.

(Part of the Twins and Multiple Births Association – TAMBA)

Helpline: 0800 138 0509 Email: staceywills@tamba.org.uk

Winston's Wish

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Help and support for bereaved children and young people up to the age of 18.

Helpline: 0845 203 0405 Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Other sources of information

Bereavement Advice Centre

www.bereavementadvice.org

Practical information and advice on what needs to be done when someone has died and on funerals. Will find answers to less common questions, for example, taking ashes abroad.

Helpline: 0800 634 9494 Email: info@bereavementadvice.org

British Humanist Association

www.humanism.org.uk

Information about humanist funeral ceremonies and a list of humanist funeral celebrants.

Helpline: 020 7324 3060 Email: info@humanism.org.uk

Child Funeral Charity

www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk

Provides help with funeral costs. Takes referrals and applications for financial support from professionals who have knowledge of the bereaved family and their circumstances. (See also Funeral Payment from the Social Fund below.)

Tel: 01480 276088 Email: enquiries@childfuneralcharity.org.uk

Funeral Celebrants

<http://funeralcelebrants.org.uk>

Antiphonal Ltd, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London, WC1N 3AF

Lists accredited civil funeral celebrants who will respect people's wishes, beliefs and values, whether religious or non-religious.

Tel: 0845 355 0953 Email: Use form on website

Funeral Payment from the Social Fund

Available if you are claiming benefits due to low income.

You can claim at any time up to three months after the funeral.

England, Scotland and Wales

Online: www.gov.uk/funeral-payments

(download and fill in form SF200 and take it to your local Jobcentre Plus)

Tel: 0345 606 0265 (Mon to Fri, 8am to 6pm)

Northern Ireland

Online: www.nidirect.gov.uk/funeral-payments

(download and fill in the form and take it to your local Social Security Office or Jobs and Benefits Office.)

Tel: 0800 085 2463 (Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

The Good Funeral Guide

www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk

Independent, not-for-profit source of information and guidance on everything to do with organising a funeral.

Tel: 01527 595 358 / 07557 684 515

Email: charles@goodfuneralguide.co.uk

Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM)

www.iccm-uk.com

The ICCM sets standards of service for burial and cremation authorities and their staff through its Charter for the Bereaved, and will answer questions from the public about cremation and burial.

Tel: 020 8989 4661 Email: julie.callender@iccm-uk.com

Institute of Civil Funerals

www.iocf.org.uk

Lists accredited civil funeral celebrants who will respect people's wishes, beliefs and values, whether religious or non-religious.

Tel: 01480 861 411 (Mon to Fri, 10am to 2pm)

Email: info@iocf.org.uk

Much Loved

http://sands.muchloved.org/g_home.aspx

A memorial website charity helping bereaved people to create their own personalised and free online memorial in memory of a loved one.

A memorial website charity helping bereaved people to create their own personalised and free online memorial in memory of a loved one.

The link above is to a special Sands page.

National Association of Balloon Artists and Suppliers (NABAS)

www.nabas.co.uk/about-balloons

Provides guidelines and code of conduct for balloon releases.

Tel: 01989 762204

The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)

www.nafd.org.uk

Tel: 0845 230 1343 Email: Use form on website

The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF)

www.saif.org.uk

Tel: 0845 230 6777 or 01279 726 777 Email: info@saif.org.uk

The Natural Death Centre

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

Offers free information about arranging a funeral, including green and woodland burial sites and burial at home. Has a list of natural burial grounds. For burial at home, search for "private land burial".

Helpline: 01962 712 690 Email: contact@naturaldeath.org.uk

About Sands

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, was founded in 1978 by a small group of bereaved parents who were devastated by the death of their babies, and by the total lack of acknowledgement and understanding of the significance and impact of their loss.

Since that time, we have supported many thousands of families whose babies have died, offering emotional support, comfort and information. Today Sands operates throughout the UK and focuses on three main areas of work:

We support anyone affected by the death of a baby

Bereavement support is at the core of everything we do. Some of the services that we offer include:

- ▶ Helpline for parents, families, carers and health professionals
- ▶ UK-wide network of support groups run by trained befrienders
- ▶ Online forum and message boards enabling bereaved families to connect with others
- ▶ Website and a wide range of booklets, books and other resources.

We work in partnership with health professionals to try to ensure that bereaved parents and families receive the best possible care

We offer resources and a comprehensive programme of training, workshops and talks for health professionals that give practical guidance on how to meet parents' needs and provide good bereavement care.

We promote and fund research that could help to reduce the loss of babies' lives

The UK has one of the highest rates of perinatal death in the developed world. The shocking reality is that, in spite of medical advances, 17 babies are stillborn or die under one month old every day.

We raise vital funds for research and campaign for the government to address this situation as a matter of priority.

We depend on the extraordinary energies of our supporters to raise the vital funds that we need to deliver the wide range of services that we offer.

If you would like any further information or support please contact us or visit our website.

Support:

t: 020 7436 5881

e: helpline@uk-sands.org

Enquiries:

t: 020 7436 7940

e: info@uk-sands.org

Write to us:

3rd Floor, 28 Portland Place,
London, W1B 1LY

Website:

www.uk-sands.org