

A guide for parents

Saying goodbye to your baby

INFORMATION BOOKLET

If English is not your first language, or you require information in another format, then please contact our Help and Advice Service on 0800 587 6513.

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Introduction

We would like to express our sympathy to you at this sad and difficult time.

This short booklet aims to support and advise you in making the necessary practical decisions and to understand some of the feelings and emotions you may experience.

We would like to reassure you that you will be given support and time to make decisions and to be with your baby.

Staff will talk to you about the information contained in this booklet but we know that it is also helpful to have information in writing. Information will be given to you by the doctor, midwife/nurse and also by the chaplain. It is part of the chaplain's role to ensure that your wishes about a funeral are met, wherever possible, regardless of your beliefs. Staff will work together with you to try and make the journey you are now on as straight forward as possible.

This booklet deals with baby loss in widely differing circumstances so not every section will be relevant to you. Please turn to the pages that are relevant to your situation.

Loss in early weeks

Depending upon the length of your pregnancy, and the circumstances that surround it, parents may experience a vast range of emotions. There will be many questions that seem to demand answers but unfortunately not everything will be clear at this point.

Please make sure that you share all your thoughts with the midwife looking after you, or it may be that the duty chaplain will be best placed to help answer practical questions relating to funerals etc.

There are a number of alternatives that are open to parents even for a pregnancy less than 24 weeks and the chaplain will guide you more fully through these choices when they meet you. In brief terms, however, the following guidance may be useful:-

- A baby **under 24 weeks** does not legally require a funeral whereas for a baby **over 24 weeks** registration as a stillbirth must take place (see below) followed by a funeral or simple ceremony.

For many parents the opportunity to “say goodbye” to their baby is very important and City Hospitals makes every effort to help in this time. Some of the ways in which this can be done are listed below.

Loss in later weeks of pregnancy/during labour (stillborn)

Parents often find that as the weeks of development pass they bond ever more deeply with their baby. To suffer the loss of their child at this point is, therefore, an extremely painful experience emotionally. It not only impacts upon them but also upon other family members. Time spent on Delivery Suite following the birth is therefore very important, and staff will guide parents with regard to taking photographs and in considering whether to create a memory box that you can take home (including hand/foot prints and a lock of hair, if these are possible).

The chaplains are also available to offer a short blessing using any names that may have been chosen. Please ask the midwife if you wish to know more about any of these suggestions.

Loss of a baby on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

Having a baby who dies after a very short life places particular emotional demands on parents. The staff will do all they can to support you to spend time with your baby. Following baby's death you will be able to hold your baby and the staff will help with taking photographs and foot/hand prints and starting a memory box if you wish. The chaplains are available to offer Baptism or a blessing, if this fits with your beliefs.

Post mortem

Depending on the circumstances you may be wondering what caused your baby's death. A post mortem examination may be able to give you some answers to your questions about the cause of death and about the impact, if any, on future pregnancies. The doctor and midwife will come and discuss this with you and explain the post mortem procedure. Please be reassured that your baby will be treated with care and respect at all times.

If your baby has a post mortem, which takes place in Newcastle at the RVI, you will receive an appointment with your consultant a few weeks later at which the results will be discussed and you will have ample opportunity to ask questions.

Personal items left with a baby going for post mortem examination will remain at this hospital for safe keeping and then be placed with them on their return.

Registration of baby

If a baby dies before the 24th week of a pregnancy (and before birth) there is no requirement to register the birth, however it is still possible to have an individual funeral. If it is your wish to have a funeral then your midwife/doctor will be able to provide a certificate that can be used when arranging the ceremony (either burial or cremation).

If your baby is stillborn you will be given a 'medical certificate of stillbirth' to take to the Registrar's office at the Civic Centre.

Registration needs to take place whenever a baby is born alive (and subsequently dies), even if less than 24 weeks, and includes those babies born dead after 24 weeks.

You will be given a 'medical certificate of the cause of death' to be given to the Registration Service at the Civic Centre in Sunderland. **Registration of both a birth and death, are legal requirements and staff will assist parents in making sure this obligation is carried out.**

The law requires all births and deaths be notified to the Registrar **in the district where the birth or death took place.** Where necessary it is sometimes possible for registration to take place either in the hospital, or at home, but this is at the discretion of the Registrar and is usually in situations where the mother of the baby is too ill to travel to the Civic Centre.

For unmarried couples, the father must be present to register the birth with the mother if he wishes his details to be included on the register.

It is necessary to telephone to make an appointment with the registrar:

**Ring (0191) 520 5553 or
to book on line at <http://www.sunderland.gov.uk>
Registration takes 20 to 30 minutes.**

The Registrar is based at:

Sunderland Civic Centre, Burdon Road,
Sunderland SR2 7DN

Current opening times are:-

Monday – Thursday 9am to 5pm and

Friday 9am to 4.30pm

The Registrar will give you a Certificate for Burial or Cremation.

- If the hospital is organising the funeral for you then please contact the chaplains (0191 5699180) to arrange the safe handover of this certificate. **Any delay in returning this document may cause problems in the organisation of a funeral.**
- If private arrangements are being made then this certificate needs to be given to the funeral director of your choice.

Planning a funeral

You may choose to make your own arrangements through a private funeral director or alternatively the hospital can make funeral arrangements for you. The choice of burial or cremation is open to parents either way.

It is helpful if parents can indicate their preference with respect to burial or cremation as soon as possible so that the appropriate forms are made available. Although cost will inevitably be a factor if private arrangements are made, many undertakers are willing to assist families at this particularly sad time, or there may be help available from the Department for Work and Pensions in the form of loans. (Parents making private arrangements may care to discuss with their funeral director the issues around the purchasing of a family grave if that seems appropriate.)

If the hospital is making the arrangements these will only be made after your baby has returned from his/her post-mortem, (see below). A hospital funeral service is normally at 9.30am and usually lasts for no more than ten minutes. We will, of course, discuss with you the form of service so that it can be as personal as possible. It is important to discuss in detail with the chaplain what form of funeral would be appropriate for your baby as sometimes the more limited hospital arrangements may not be suitable.

If you choose burial it may be at Bishopwearmouth cemetery, in the Baby Section, or at a cemetery nearer to your home. A burial service would be at the graveside only. (Parents making private arrangements may wish to discuss with the funeral director issues regarding the purchase of a grave.)

You may purchase a plaque to mark the grave which may later be replaced with a headstone, depending on cemetery regulations and the payment of any necessary fees. Cemetery regulations regarding the addition of kerbs or fences etc. do vary but in general they are not permitted even where a grave has been purchased.

At the crematorium you may chose music to be played. We do not advise trying to play music on a portable player at a graveside however.

You are welcome to bring flowers to the service. As baby's casket will be very small it is possible for one of the family to carry the baby into the chapel, or to the graveside, if you would find that helpful.

Baby may be dressed in the clothes of your choice and a toy/ photograph/letter be put in the casket with baby.

Sometimes parents choose not to attend their baby's funeral, and although it isn't actually a requirement, they should give very careful thought before taking this course.

Parents often ask about whether they can receive any ashes from a cremation. Whilst this is possible on some occasions the crematorium authority will not guarantee that this is always the case. Please speak to the chaplain if this would be an important issue for you.

Leaving Hospital

The hospital staff will inform your GP, community midwife and Health Visitor about the loss of your baby, and cancel ante-natal appointments for you. They will also tell you about the help and support you can receive when you get home.

Grieving can be very exhausting and so you need to take things easily and allow yourself time.

Everyone deals with bereavement differently and experiences a range of emotions that come and go, in what can feel like an out of control fashion. Sadness, anger, guilt, denial, emptiness, crying, lack of concentration, inability to sleep or eat can all be part of the grieving journey. Partners need to keep talking about their feelings, recognising that it is unlikely that both parents will be in the same emotional place at the same time.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. People feel what they feel. It may also help to talk to other people either family, friends or professionals.

Grief counselling is something that can be considered in due course but it is always advisable to gain professional advice as to the timing of this intervention.

Book of Remembrance and annual Memorial Service

In the Sunderland Royal Hospital Chapel there is a book of Remembrance into which you may have your baby's name placed, if you so wish. There is no charge for this, and it can be arranged by contacting the chaplains.

You may also wish to receive an invitation to the annual memorial service. Details about which will be given to you by the chaplain. This is called "Enfolded in love" and takes place around Easter time in the hospital Chapel.

Useful contacts

- Hospital switchboard: 0191 5656256
- Chaplaincy: 0191 5699180
- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS):
0207 4365881
- Miscarriage Association: 01924 200799
- Bereaved parents helpline: 0800 282986
- Registration service (Civic Centre): 0191 5205553
- Relate: 0300 1001234
- TAMBA Bereavement Support Group: 01483 304442
- Baby Mailing Preference Service: 0207 2913310
- ARC: 08450772290, 0207 7137486 (from a mobile)
- Sunderland Counselling Service: 0191 5147007

Useful websites

www.nhs.uk

www.chsft.nhs.uk

This information was correct at the time of printing. While the Trust makes every reasonable effort to keep its information leaflets up to date, very recent changes may not yet be reflected in the guidance and you should discuss this with the clinical staff at the time of your appointment.

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