



Sands

the next
few days

 We are so sorry that you are needing to read this leaflet. The death of a baby is a devastating experience, often with lifelong impacts.

 **Making decisions**

When a baby dies it can be difficult to think clearly, yet you are faced with many difficult and painful decisions. Because you are grieving for your baby, other people may offer to help make these decisions for you. Although it might feel impossible, try to be involved in as many ways as you can be. The next few days provide an important opportunity for you to build memories of your baby. This leaflet contains some ideas shared by other bereaved parents. We want you to know that you are not alone.

One of the most important things is not to hurry. There is no need for anything to be rushed. You now have a limited time with your baby and a limited time to create memories for yourself and your whānau/family – memories that will be important in the weeks, months and years to come.

 **Naming your baby**

Giving your baby a name can be helpful to you and may help those around you to identify with your baby. No matter how many weeks into your pregnancy you are, your baby is already part of your life. Some names are suitable even if you do not know whether your baby is a boy or girl.



Making loving memories

We never expect our baby to die. We expect to build a lifetime of memories. It is important to spend time planning the memories you can now make even though everything has changed.

Perhaps you can make a list to give to your support person so that people will know exactly what you want and expect. Although you may be feeling powerless, your support person can ensure that your wishes are met. Your wishes are the most important.

You may wish to:

- bath or sponge your baby with very salty water (a natural preservative)
- spend time with your baby at home
- unwrap your baby and look at him/her (parents have commented that they didn't see their baby naked and wish they had).



Photos

We advise you take lots of photos of your baby. Some may be for sharing, others just for yourself. We suggest photos of your baby both undressed and dressed, and close ups of your baby's face, hands and feet. If your baby has visible abnormalities, consider including these in some photos - they can often answer questions that arise later. Have photos taken of you holding your baby. Maybe you would like some photos of other whānau/family members with your baby. In some locations professional photographers will come into the hospital and take photos for you free of charge. Ask hospital staff about this. You may not want to see the photos right now, but they can become important tangible memories in the future.



Autopsy/Post-mortem

An autopsy and/or tests may help to provide answers as to why your baby died. The hospital staff will have information about this. In many instances an autopsy or post-mortem may be recommended, but is not a legal requirement. Making the choice can be very difficult, and it is helpful to talk about it with your midwife, hospital staff or the pathologist (if possible) if you are unsure. If you give permission for an autopsy to be performed on your baby, you are also giving permission for clinical photos to be taken.



Other keepsakes

Many parents collect footprints or handprints from their baby, or you may like to trace around them. In some locations, professional casters will come into the hospital and make hand and foot molds for you free of charge. You may also like to have a record of your baby's weight and length, and to keep a lock of hair, cot cards, birth cards, and your baby's blanket or clothing. All of these can become important keepsakes of the time you have with your baby. You may also wish to take your baby to a special place that has significance for you (like the beach). You are able to do this, but do be aware of the appropriateness of where you take your baby and other people's reactions to seeing a deceased baby.

Transporting your baby

You are able to transport your baby by car. The baby should be secured in a babyseat, bassinette or casket. You need a form called the Transfer of Charge of Body form (BDM 39) with you at all times in case there is an accident or you are stopped by the police. See the Sands leaflet 'Transporting Your Baby: Guidelines for Parents, Family and Whānau' in this pack.

Blessing/Naming/Baptism ceremony

You may wish to have your baby blessed or baptised or to hold a naming ceremony. Your baby can be blessed and named by your own minister, a hospital chaplain, yourselves or a friend or whānau/family member. You could choose to hold this blessing either at the same time as the funeral service or in a separate ceremony. You may wish to hold a small ceremony at home.

If you are reading this because your baby is only expected to live for a short time, you may like to talk to someone about this. You could ask your support person or midwife to contact the minister or chaplain or talk to your whānau/family.

Funeral/Ceremony

There are many possibilities and legalities for funerals/ceremonies. Your Sands contact person can be very helpful in this situation because they can often discuss some options with you. Ministers and funeral directors can also help you. In some cases, your midwife or another hospital support person may be able to assist you with some options. It is important for you to do what you feel comfortable with. (See the Sands leaflet, Your Baby's Funeral in this pack.)



Acknowledging your baby's birth/death

You might like to acknowledge the birth of your baby by placing a notice in the births and/or deaths page in your local newspaper and/or on social media. If you choose to have a private funeral, you may wish to wait until afterwards before posting a notice.

The value of this acknowledgement is that:

- you are acknowledging that the birth of this baby is important to your whānau/family
- it may be a slightly easier way to let the community know that your baby has been born and has died.



Registering the birth and/or death

You are required to register the birth of your baby if:

- your baby was born alive
- your baby was born during or after the 20th week of pregnancy
- your baby weighed 400 grams or more when born.

Death must be registered within three working days of burial/cremation if your baby has lived, even if for only a short time outside the womb. Registering the death is usually taken care of by the funeral director, but you can choose to do this yourself if you wish.

If your baby lived (maybe for a few hours or for a few days or weeks) the word deceased will appear on the birth certificate. This is to prevent any possibility of identity theft. It is not possible to receive a birth certificate for your baby without the word 'deceased' on it. If your baby was stillborn, the word 'stillborn' appears on the birth certificate.



Milk suppression

One of the difficult things for a bereaved mother to cope with emotionally and physically at this time is your body's natural process of producing milk. It seems so cruel that you haven't got a live baby, yet your body carries on as if you have. Your breasts may start to produce milk from 13 weeks' gestation. The amount of physical discomfort will vary for each individual. Fresh cold cabbage leaves inside a firm bra or binder is the most common way to suppress lactation, combined with a painkiller to reduce the discomfort. Doctors can also prescribe tablets to prevent lactation. These are effective for some women, but many find that this simply delays milk production, which can prolong the body's natural process. Ask your midwife about the medication and/or natural alternatives.



Follow-up appointment

In most cases, you will need a follow-up appointment (often with a consultant, specialist or your doctor), this is important for several reasons:

- You may need a physical check-up.
- You may be waiting for test and/or autopsy results.
- There may be things that you wish to discuss about events surrounding your baby's birth and/or death. You may have questions that you would like answered. It helps to write down any questions that you have as they come to mind and take these with you. Often when you get to the appointment, you are quite stressed and it is very difficult to recall everything.

The days leading up to a follow-up appointment can also be very stressful. This can be the time that you build yourself up in the hope that there will be some medical reason or answer to the question

‘Why did my baby die?’. Sadly, in a lot of cases there is no reason found for the death of a baby. This can be extremely difficult to understand and accept. It is important not to go to this appointment alone. Take your partner or another support person with you. The follow-up appointment is usually made before you leave the hospital. It is a good idea to phone the day before this appointment to confirm that your test results are back.



It is never too late to make some memories

- Write a letter or poem to or about your baby.
- Prepare a whānau/family tree that includes your baby.
- Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings about your baby.
- Hold a memorial service or blessing – a year, or even 20 or 30 years later.
- Plant a tree of remembrance – perhaps one that flowers around the anniversary of your baby’s birth.
- Design a memorial to place on your baby’s grave or in another special place.
- Make a photo frame, a memory box or a ceramic tile.
- Adopt a star.
- See the Sands NZ website for more ideas about memory making – www.sands.org.nz
- See the government website Whetūrangitia <https://wheturangitia.services.govt.nz/> for more helpful information

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government