

Arranging a funeral for a baby

A funeral can be a time to honour your baby and celebrate all the wonderful things about them. It is a time to share their story, your memories, and sorrow, and an opportunity to acknowledge their life with family and friends. This information sheet is to help you make some decisions regarding a funeral for your baby. Knowing some of your options before you make the arrangements can help.

Selecting a funeral director

Although there is no legal requirement to use a funeral director, most families choose to use a funeral director rather than take on the arrangements themselves. Funeral directors are there to help families bury or cremate their baby in a compassionate way. Different funeral directors vary in the services they provide. It can be very helpful to get a recommendation from a friend or family member who has used a particular funeral director or to call a number of funeral directors before deciding on the one you feel most comfortable with. They can talk to you about choosing a coffin, information about burials and cremations, the burial place/cemetery and the type of ceremony you would like for your child. If cost is an issue, this can be discussed with your Care Team, who may be able to advise on possibilities for assistance with funeral costs.

What to ask a funeral director?

Below is a list of questions that may be helpful when you are choosing a funeral director:

- What assistance can be provided if I wanted to take my baby home after they have died?
- Is it possible to see my baby again? Can we have as many viewings as our family needs? Do we need to make appointments and is there a cost?
- What are the charges and which services are optional?
- What styles of coffins are available? Can I choose a special colour or decorate the coffin?
- Can a cremation take place without family present?
- What is embalming? Is it necessary? What is involved? Why would I need to think about this?
- Can I bring in our own baby's clothes or toys?
- What is involved with either burial or cremation?
- Can the coffin be open or closed?

- What about flowers and other items? Are we able to organise these if we want?
- I have some cultural and religious beliefs I would like taken into consideration - is the funeral director able to respect my needs?
- How long will it be until I can have my baby's ashes? Is help available with locating options such as urns or teddy bears to hold the ashes in?

What type of ceremony?

Every service for every baby is different. Some are formal, some are informal. Some are religious or have prescribed traditions or rituals and others have no religious or cultural rituals at all. Some are a celebration and some are a sad remembrance. Some families choose not to have a service as part of the cremation or prefer not to have a service at all. There is no right or wrong way to conduct a funeral. When planning a ceremony some things to think about include:

- What kind of service you as a family want. For example:
 - A private cremation that no one attends, with or without a service to be held at a later date
 - A reading of a children's story that you always expected to read to your baby as they grew
 - Having a slideshow with pictures of your baby's life
 - A formal service with clear rituals or everyone wearing black
 - A religiously prescribed format
- Who should speak? Examples are family members, friends, or other significant people speaking about your baby
- Is it important to have your child's siblings involved in the ceremony?
- Are activities like releasing bubbles as a final goodbye after the ceremony possible?
- Should it be a big ceremony with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances or a small family memorial?

There are many ways to conduct a ceremony that honours your baby and whatever you choose can be a unique expression of your family. There is no right or wrong and if you decide to hold a service, what matters most is that the service represents how you would most like your baby to be remembered and celebrated.

Children and funerals

Some parents worry about their children attending a funeral, especially if it is for their sibling. It can be helpful for children to attend the funeral but it is important that they are given the choice as to whether they wish to attend, as some may not.

Funerals can help children participate in the family ritual of saying goodbye. It is, however, important to explain to children what will happen at the funeral and what takes place in a burial or a cremation. If you are not sure how to have this conversation with children please speak to your Care Team as they may be able to offer some guidance and resources.

If your other children are attending the funeral, it may be helpful to organise another trusted adult to look after them. It can be hard to feel connected to your baby's funeral whilst also having to support their sibling during the ceremony. If a sibling wants to leave the ceremony, possibly because they are finding it too hard, another trusted adult can support them to do so.

Grief and funerals

Attending the funeral of your baby can be very hard and you are likely to be still feeling numb and in shock. This may still be felt even for an expected death. It can also be overwhelming to spend time with so many people who are also grieving for your baby and your loss. Sometimes it can feel as though you end up having to comfort others. Ensure that you take your time during this day, even giving yourself space away from everyone.

For further guidance regarding your feelings following your baby's death, please see the information sheet:

- Understanding your grief
- Siblings and the last days of life

