



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

What happens next

Information for parents after
the death or stillbirth of a baby

This booklet aims to help you through the next few days and weeks. You may not want to read it all in one go but refer to it in the days ahead.

We would like to say how sorry we are for the loss of your baby. We appreciate what a sad and difficult time this must be for you and your family.

As parents you will be feeling many different emotions and this is quite normal. Talking about how you feel can sometimes help although you may not feel comfortable talking to close relatives and friends about this. If you would like to talk to someone, ask your midwife to contact the Bereavement Midwife who will be able to help you with the practical arrangements and may be contacted once you have gone home.

Saying goodbye to your baby

Just as you should be welcoming your baby into the world you suddenly have to say goodbye. It is often hard to believe that such a terrible thing has happened to you and it is not unusual to feel numb and confused about what needs to be done.

The midwife caring for you will ask if you would like to see and hold your baby. Parents who have chosen to spend time holding their baby are usually pleased they did so. Your baby can be bathed and dressed in your clothes or those provided by the hospital. We can take photographs of your baby if you wish, using your camera or the hospital's. We normally give you a memory card with photos of your baby so you can choose how to share and keep these memories. You will be given plenty of time with your baby. However, if you do not feel ready to see your baby as soon as he or she is born, it is still possible to see them later on and at any time up until the funeral. If you have

been discharged from the hospital, you can contact the Bereavement Midwife at the hospital on 07500 123912. You may contact us urgently on 0118 322 7215 (Delivery Suite).

You may have questions to ask about why this has happened to you. The doctor caring for you will discuss this with you.

Post mortem

A post mortem is an examination by a pathologist after death. This would normally be carried out at Oxford as this is a specialist centre with a pathologist who deals with illnesses that affect small babies. You would need to give your signed consent for a post mortem to be carried out. There is no rush – take time to talk about it together and with other family members. If your baby's death was sudden and unexpected, you will have many concerns. Why did it happen? Could I have done something to prevent it? Will I be able to have another baby? The post mortem examination may help to give some of the answers.

The doctor caring for you and/or the bereavement midwife will discuss and explain the post mortem to you as there are different types of examination.

If you feel that a post mortem is not appropriate or too upsetting for you, the placenta can be examined at the RBH and a sample of it can be sent for genetic studies to Oxford. After the examination, the placenta will not be returned to the Royal Berkshire Hospital unless you request it at the time of delivery. The placenta will be disposed of as clinical waste. This is normally done with all deliveries. These tests may be useful in our discussion and help you make decisions should you wish to have another baby.

If you consent to this examination, your baby will be away for approximately three working days, e.g. from Friday returning Tuesday or Wednesday (this can be longer if further examination is

recommended). Please be aware that the results can take up to 12-13 weeks to come back.

Registration

All babies born alive or after 24 weeks of pregnancy need to be registered. If your baby was stillborn, your midwife will give you a stillbirth certificate in a sealed envelope. This should be given to the Registrar of Births and Deaths within 42 days. There is a special register for stillborn babies and you can ask to have your baby's first name written above the surname if you wish. You can also ask for a registration certificate to keep.

Parents who are not married at the time of their baby's birth and who want the father's details to appear in the certified entry should ask the registrar to guide them.

Most parents contact the registrar within the first week of baby's death as without the certificate from the registrar, funeral arrangements will be delayed. It is preferable to telephone (in office hours) in order to make an appointment to register the stillbirth at Reading Registration Services located at the Civic Offices, Bridge Street in Reading.

If your baby died shortly after birth you will be given a death certificate in an envelope. This must be taken to the registrar within five days.

You must register both the birth and death of your baby and you will receive a birth and death certificate. A husband may register the birth and death of his baby. However, if you are unmarried, the baby can only be registered in the partner's name if both parents are present at the registration.

Babies miscarried before 24 weeks are not required by law to be registered. You may as parents want to recognise your baby's death. We at the hospital can arrange a certificate if this is your wish. In order to do so, please contact the Maternity Bereavement Team at the hospital on 07500 123 912.

The funeral

We hope the following information will help you with the practical arrangements you need to make for your baby's funeral and remembrance.

A funeral can be almost anything you want it to be. For many parents it is a way of saying goodbye to their baby. We suggest you take time to decide what is right for you to honour and mourn your baby. Below are a few suggestions that you may wish to consider. We are here to give you as much help, advice and support as you need.

Making your own arrangements

You can make your own arrangements with a funeral director. Once you have registered the death or stillbirth of your baby the registrar will give you a certificate. You must then contact the funeral director of your choice to arrange the service and complete your paperwork. Most funeral directors do not charge for their services under such circumstances. However, there may be charges if you choose to bury your baby in a family grave. Reading Cemetery, Henley Road, Caversham do not have special infant graves but it may be possible to arrange in your local cemetery or churchyard. There are also some 'natural' burial grounds, some of which offer burial free of charge.

Whatever you decide, allow yourself plenty of time to discuss this and to try and visit the cemetery. The Crematorium at Reading Cemetery may be contacted on 0118 937 2200. They will arrange a visit which may help you make your decision.

If you decide on a cremation, you will need to let the hospital know in order for them to arrange the papers which will be sent to your funeral director.

A hospital arranged funeral

If you feel you would prefer the hospital to organise a funeral, the hospital can arrange and pay for a basic funeral for your baby with a local funeral director. If the hospital arranges the funeral, the baby will either be buried or, with your permission, cremated.

The hospital uses a special area at the local Reading Cemetery for all baby funerals. Your baby will have his or her own coffin with a name plaque on and will be buried in a communal grave with up to 16 other babies. Once the grave is properly finished there will be natural settlement of the ground (which can take up to 18 months). There will be a brass tree placed on top of the grave with spaces for a plaque with your baby's name on, which you can arrange with the crematorium directly if this is your wish. There will also be a small, designated area on the grave for memorabilia for your baby. Each funeral is individual. If you wish, the Maternity Bereavement Team can arrange for the hospital chaplain to conduct a small service in the chapel or at the graveside. If you prefer, a friend or family priest may conduct this. It might be that you do not wish to have a service and would prefer some quiet time during the burial.

You may prefer not to be present at the funeral. If so, we will inform you of the day it will take place or afterwards, if this feels right for you.

Cremation

Alternatively, the hospital can arrange a simple cremation. This takes place at the Henley Road Crematorium and can, if you wish, involve a service with the hospital chaplain or your own priest/religious leader or person of your choice.

You will need to sign a form giving permission for the hospital to arrange the cremation. Once you have registered your baby you will need to either post or hand in the green certificate given to you by the Registry Office to the hospital or funeral director. The baby's ashes can be scattered in the 'Garden of Remembrance' at Reading

Cemetery or, at your request, can be collected by you at a later date. Please be aware that there may be few ashes to collect.

For babies less than 24 weeks we offer a shared cremation if you do not wish to have a formal funeral.

Your baby will be transferred to the hospital mortuary and be placed in a coffin with other babies of a similar size and a blessing will be performed by the hospital chaplain after which the coffin is transferred to the West Berkshire Crematorium, where the cremation will take place. Please note that there will be no individual ashes due to the shared nature, and there will be no time/date available for when the shared cremation occurs.

The ashes will be scattered in the Garden of Remembrance at the crematorium.

Spending time with your baby

During your stay in hospital you can spend as much time as you need with your baby. Many parents wish to go home as soon as possible after the birth to be with their family and friends. You may also wish to take your baby home. Please discuss this with Delivery Suite staff or the Maternity Bereavement team if this feels right for you. It may be that you wish to take the baby home for a few hours and then return your baby to the hospital, or you may wish to spend longer with your baby at home and make arrangements with funeral directors directly. If taking your baby home does not feel right for you then visiting or spending time with your baby after discharge from hospital is possible. Ideally this takes place on the Delivery Suite, Monday to Friday between 9am and 3pm. This may be possible at the weekends under special circumstances. Please be aware that the unit may be particularly busy at these times. As parents you may want to bring in clean clothes for your baby to be changed into or a small personal item – e.g. small toy or family photo. You must make an appointment

by contacting the midwife in charge or the ward clerk on the Delivery Suite – telephone 0118 322 7215.

When you have decided on your baby's place of rest and the date of your service your baby will be moved to the funeral directors. This will usually be three days before the event.

The hospital wants to help and support you during this sad and difficult time following the loss of your baby.

Memories – other ways to remember your baby

Your baby can have a naming or a blessing conducted by the hospital chaplain whilst you are still in hospital. The chaplain says a short prayer and asks if you wish to give your baby a name. The name is recorded on a card and sent to you by post.

The hospital chapel has a special 'Book of Remembrance' for all of our babies and parents can write a poem or add a picture of their baby if they wish. The book is always open at the current date but you can visit the chapel and read their entry at any time. As the Book of Remembrance is kept secure in a glass case, you may need to go to the nearby reception desk in order to get the key.

Hospital memorial service

A Remembrance service is held in the chapel bi-annually for all our babies, supported by the Willows Support Group. You will be sent an invitation to the next service or you can find details and updates on the Willows website. Many parents find this is a very good way of remembering their loss, along with other parents who have shared the same tragedy.

There are significant times of the year which are individual to you, where you remember those who are no longer with us and you may want to remember your baby at these times. It may be helpful to you to plant a special tree or a shrub in memory of your baby, or to keep a photograph or lock of your baby's hair in a locket. You could also buy

a special little box to keep together all the reminders of your baby and it may help you to go through this from time to time in the future.

As this may be your first experience of loss you should make sure you take time to think about, understand and talk over your feelings. It is important to reach decisions together and this cannot be done quickly. If you are alone, it may help to talk over the way you feel and what you want to do with someone you feel comfortable with and who will support you.

If you have any queries or concerns about anything regarding your baby's death, please contact the Bereavement Midwife on 07500 123912/rbft.bereavementmidwives@nhs.net.

Follow-up appointment

You will be offered an appointment to come back to the hospital to see a consultant to discuss any tests arranged, and the baby's post mortem report from Oxford if you asked for this examination to be done. These tests do take time and so it will be at least eight weeks before you receive this appointment, which can be emailed or posted to you depending on your preference.

This is an opportunity for you and your partner to have discussed results and get advice for the future. If you do not want an appointment, or need to reschedule it, please let us know as soon as possible. We will write to your GP with all the results and advice so you could see him / her at a later date.

If you have not heard from the hospital after eight weeks, please contact the Bereavement Midwife on 07500 123 912 (answerphone)/rbft.bereavementmidwives@nhs.net.

We do hope this information has helped you at this difficult time of loss. We are willing to talk with any parents at any time.

Feedback about your care

The Maternity Bereavement Team will offer you a SANDS feedback form called the Maternity Bereavement Experience Measure (MBEM). This aims to enable parents whose baby has died the opportunity to feed back about the care they received. This feedback will be used to inform best practice and service improvements locally. It can be provided to you around the time of your follow up by paper or electronic copy. Do not feel you have to complete this, it is there for you if you feel you would like to use it.

Review of your care

If you have sadly lost your baby after 22 weeks of pregnancy, the hospital may complete a review of your care using the Perinatal Mortality Review Tool (PMRT). The Maternity Bereavement Team will advise you if this particular review is appropriate to the circumstances of your loss and if it is, will ask if you have any questions or concerns you would like included in the review. This review will be shared with you when complete. When a baby dies before, during or after birth, the hospital (or hospitals) where the mother and baby were looked after should review the care the mother and baby received. This is called a hospital 'perinatal' or 'neonatal' review and is when a clinical team looks through the mother's and baby's hospital notes to understand events that led up to the death of the baby. It is different to a coroner's investigation or inquest.

Useful contacts

RBFT Maternity Bereavement Team

07500 123912

rbft.bereavementmidwives@nhs.net

Antenatal Results & Choices

<http://www.arc-uk.org/>

0845 077 2290 or 0207 713

7486 via mobile

Child Bereavement Trust

www.childbereavement.org.uk

0800 02 888 40

CRUSE

www.cruse.org.uk

0844 477 9400

01344 411919 – Bracknell

01635 523573 – Newbury

SANDS (Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society)

www.uk-sands.org

020 7436 5881

Bracknell/Finchampstead Register Office

Time Square, Market Street

Bracknell RG12 1JD

01344 352000

Newbury Register Office

Shaw House

Church Road

Shaw

Newbury

01635 279230

Reading Register Office

Civic Offices,

Bridge Street,

Reading RG1 2LU

0118 937 3533 (0118 937 3737

– out of hours)

Wokingham Register Office

Civic Offices

Shute End

Wokingham RG40 1WH

0118 974 6554

Easthampstead Park Crematorium/Cemetery

South Road

Bracknell RG40 3DW

01344 420314

Mays Lane Cemetery

Mays Lane

Earley nr Reading

0118 986 8995

Pangbourne Hill Cemetery

Pangbourne
0118 984 1118

Reading Crematorium

All Hallows Road
Caversham RG4 5LP
0118 937 2200

St Michaels

The Rectory
Routh Lane
Tilehurst RG30 4JX
0118 942 7331

Shaw Cemetery

Shaw Hill
Newbury RG14 2EQ
01635 40096

Shinfield Cemetery

Grovelands Road
Shinfield RG7 1DP
0118 974 6000

Greenacres Woodland Burials

www.greenacrescelebrate.co.uk
01494 872158

Henley Natural Burials

www.henleynaturalburials.co.uk
01600 716438

Willows Support Group

www.willowssupportgroup.co.uk/
www.facebook.com/thewillowssupportgroup/

Information about bereavement support

This information has been written to answer your queries and reduce any worries you may have. We have asked women who have had late miscarriages or stillbirths for their advice when writing this leaflet. After the loss of a baby, people grieve in different ways. Quite often couples and families reach different stages at different times. This is normal. There are organisations which can provide advice and support if bereaved parents ask for it.

This hospital does not refer families to organisations for bereavement counselling because everyone has differing needs and lives on different timescales, so we ensure you have the information to make contact when or if you need to. It is important to know that:

- Everyone is sad.
- Some people like to talk.
- Some others feel the need to 'do'.
- Some just like to reflect quietly.
- Many are angry, at themselves, at their partners, at healthcare professionals.

Organisations who may be able to help

SANDS are a stillbirth and neonatal death charity. They operate throughout the UK, supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby, working to improve the care bereaved parents receive, and promoting research to reduce the loss of babies' lives. They have;

- A helpline.
- Local groups – there are ones for Berkshire, West Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon.
- An online community.

- A family support pack, which has booklets for fathers; for when your baby dies before labour; saying goodbye; supporting other children you may already have; for grandparents; for other family and friends; and coping at Christmas. All of these can be downloaded free of charge.

Reading Lifeline is a local charity. Their website is www.mustardtree.org. They provide counselling but advise that the waiting time can be up to eight weeks, although you can then have 10 free sessions.

The Willows Support Group at www.willowsupportgroup.co.uk
The Willows was formed in 2008 by a group of parents who wanted to share their experiences with others who would understand. These parents with the support of the Royal Berkshire Hospital set up an informal group of 3-4 parents who could share their stories with other parents who understood. The Willows meets regularly and has provided vital support for parents who have been through and continue to suffer the loss of a baby. The group also has a Facebook page. Willows are also supporting the new Rainbow Pregnancy Group for couples expecting a baby after loss, which has specialist staff providing support and advice for expectant parents away from hospital settings.

For those parents who prefer to read, rather than talk, there are increasing numbers of bloggers online who talk about life after the loss of a baby, from both a woman's and a man's perspective. All of these sites listed can be accessed without asking to join.

Instagram:

@dear-orla a page from Michelle Cottle, an NHS clinical psychologist, whose first baby girl was stillborn, and who, after her second baby, developed postnatal depression as she found parenting very much

harder than she had thought. She is now well, and back at work. Michelle has launched a new page [@from_the_other_chair](#) [@feathering_the_empty_nest](#) from Elle Wright whose baby boy became very ill within a few hours of birth and died three days later. [@navigatingthewilderness](#) is good for advice and stories on mental health support after baby loss. [@therearenowords2017](#).

[@ben_and_breaking_the_silence](#) has added a list of blogs discussing life after loss at their site.

Blogs: www.hannahpontillo.com for 'Dads Grieve Too', a series of short pieces from bereaved dads about their experience of loss.

Podcasts: 13 March 2018 Fisher Price and the author Giovanna Fletcher presented a podcast called 'Happy Mum Happy Baby' with Elle Wright ([feathering_the_empty_nest](#)) and Michelle Cottle ([dear_orla](#)). This is available at the Apple Store.

A search engine tool at www.thepictame.com, using the search term [#neonataldeathawareness](#) takes you to a webpage where you might find other bloggers, Instagrammers and links that may strike a chord for you.

For those who want to do something for other families, while some find joining in sponsored events in memory of their baby to raise funds for the Willow Group or SANDS healing, others might be interested in the non-profit organization Upon Butterfly Wings (UK) are delighted to receive handmade clothing or keepsakes such as knitted teddies to give to parents, or bereavement services looking after families, who have lost babies from as early as eight weeks onwards.

www.uponbutterflywings.org.uk

This booklet has been written to guide parents who have sadly lost a baby while under the care of the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

The staff of the Maternity Unit and a number of parents have helped to put this information together.

We hope this information will help you make the right choices about how you will say goodbye to your baby.

Donations to the Stillbirth Fund have made it possible to publish this booklet. We would like to thank all the parents that have given so generously to the fund.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Written May 2001 Revised: October 2018 (A Wood & J Siddall)

Reviewed May 2020

Review due: May 2022

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

London Road

Reading RG1 5AN

0118 322 5111 (switchboard)

www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk