



NEONATAL UNIT



If your baby has died  
or you need to say goodbye

Information and advice for parents

## **If your baby has died or you need to say goodbye.....**

This is a deeply distressing time for you and this booklet provides some useful information you may require over the coming days and weeks.

Please don't hesitate to ask any questions, no matter how simple the question may seem. Staff will try to answer your questions as best as they can and to give you the time and space required to grieve for your baby.

### **First few hours and days:**

Initially you will be in shock and events may seem unreal and difficult to understand. Decisions you will be asked to make will seem impossible. However, please take time and discuss everything with the midwife, nurse or doctor caring for you. If no one is available to support you at this time, we will suggest that you call a partner, friend or relative.

You may find it useful to write down questions in advance of discussions with the midwife, nurse or doctor.

## **Grieving**

Grieving is an individual emotion, no two people necessarily grieve in the same way and the staff caring for you understand this. However you respond at this time it is important to create memories of your baby.

### **Suggestions which may help you:**

#### **Holding and seeing your baby**

This may be a difficult decision for you. Many parents may feel anxious about seeing their baby and others may be more comfortable with this. Again everyone is different and it is important that you do not feel pressurised to make an immediate decision. If you choose to visit your baby at a later time, staff are available to help and describe to you what your baby looks like. If this is something you would like to do, please do not hesitate to contact the Bereavement Manager 01270 273882.

#### **Dressing your baby**

If you feel it appropriate you can bathe and dress your baby. If you would like to, you can bring in clothes. You can also bring in a toy, or other special objects (perhaps a letter, family photos, drawings from siblings etc.) which will stay with the baby and be placed in the coffin.

#### **For the father**

As the father of the baby you may feel that you are there to support everyone else, however you too need time to grieve. Please don't hesitate to ask for support. You can contact your GP or one of the support groups listed at the end of this booklet.

## **Your relationship with your partner**

When you are both grieving, it may be difficult to provide that mutual support for each other; this is normal.

It is important that both of you seek support from your GP, a counsellor, SANDS, or any of the organisations highlighted at the end of this booklet.

## **Other children**

If you have other children you may feel at a loss as to how to explain what has happened. They may ask very direct questions and it is important that you are prepared for this. It is also important that your other child / children know that it is okay to be sad. Use language that is honest and easy to understand (e.g. try not to say that the baby was born asleep as they will want to know why they are not waking up, or say we've lost the baby as they may wonder why you don't go and find the baby).

Gifts for your baby to go into the coffin can be very important if you have children of any age. It can help them to say goodbye and deal with their feelings of loss at this difficult time.

## **Family and friends**

Family, friends and others may find it difficult to know what to say or do. It is important that you are open and honest, advising if you wish to talk about the death of your baby or not. Others may offer to help with every day chores, again it is important to accept their help if you would find this useful. Likewise, it is important to acknowledge that you would find it helpful if you did the chores yourself.

More information for fathers, children and family and friends can be found in your pack.

## **Photographs**

You may wish to create your own memories by taking photographs with your own camera / video. A professional photographer may also be available free of charge should you wish to use this service. The member of staff caring for you will be able to arrange this.

## **Creating memories**

Creating a memory box is a very important part of the grieving process and a very important keepsake.

If you would like to create a memory box, staff will help you do this. Suggestions for the memory box:

- Your baby's hand and foot prints
- • A lock of hair
- • Baby's name tags
- • The weight and length of your baby.



Looking at these keepsakes in the early days of grieving may be difficult, but in time they can bring comfort.

## **Spiritual care**

Whether or not you are a member of a faith group or religion, support is available for you through the Trust's Chaplains. The chaplains are available to support you in your loss, to pray with you and / or to conduct a short service of naming and blessing if required.

To speak to a Chaplain, either ask a member of staff to contact them or alternatively if you have been discharged, please phone Leighton Hospital switchboard on 01270 255141 and ask them to bleep the on-call Chaplain.

## **Bereavement Manager**

The Bereavement Manager ensures families receive a high standard of care following the death of their loved one. The Bereavement Manager works closely with ward staff, doctors, chaplaincy service and other health and social care professionals to support and complement the work they do.

The Bereavement Manager is available Monday to Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm (excluding bank holidays and weekends), and can be contacted on 01270 273882 within normal working hours. If you need any advice or help outside of normal working hours please speak to a member of staff on the labour ward who will assist you, alternatively you can leave a message on the Bereavement Manager's telephone answer machine.



## **Bereavement advice/support**

Following the loss of your baby, the emotional and physical reactions can be intense and you may be surprised by the reactions that follow. These can be unfamiliar and out of character.

Some of the most common feelings are: shock and disbelief, loss, guilt, regret, injustice, envy, anger, depression, sleep deprivation, loss / increase in appetite, exhaustion, restlessness, anxiety, panic, loss of interest, tearfulness, irritability, and inability to cope. It is important that you give yourself time and space to deal with difficult emotions.

Further advice and support can be given by contacting your Community Midwife or Health Visitor.

There is also a wide range of organisations which offer support to bereaved families. Please see useful contacts list at the end of this booklet.

## **Post mortem examination/investigations**

A post mortem is like an operation that can be performed on your baby that may give answers as to why your baby died. This information may help when planning future pregnancies. This can be a full post mortem of all of your baby's body or just part of it. As this requires careful consideration a doctor will discuss this with you.

It is important for you to know that no investigation on you or your baby will take place without your consent. There may be instances where the death of your baby has to be referred to the Coroner and he / she may order a post mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death. If the coroner orders a post mortem examination it becomes a legal obligation, therefore permission from relatives / next of kin is not required. You will be advised if this happens.

## **Going home**

Leaving hospital without your baby is hard and staff will support you as much as they can. Your baby will be well cared for and treated with respect and compassion by all hospital staff. Your Midwife/Health Visitor and GP will be informed that you have gone home. Visits by your Midwife can be arranged and it is useful to book an appointment to have a check-up with your GP about 6-8 weeks after you have delivered.

You will be offered a follow-up appointment at the hospital to discuss any test results and / or post mortem results to help you plan for future pregnancies and to discuss any questions you may have.

This is usually 3 months after you have delivered to ensure that we have as many of your results available as possible.

## **Taking your baby home before the funeral**

An option you may not have considered is whether to take your baby home for a short time before the funeral. Some parents like to take their baby home and spend time with him or her either on their own or with family and friends around them. If you want to take your baby home, please ask a member of staff for advice.

Further information is available in the 'Taking your baby home from the Neonatal Unit, Leighton Hospital following a Neonatal death' leaflet which can be found in your pack.





## **Neonatal death**

(A baby is born alive but dies within 4 weeks of birth)

Following a neonatal death the Coroner will be informed and he / she will decide if the death certificate can be issued immediately or a post mortem is required.

If a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death is issued, you are required to make an appointment to register the death. An appointment can be made by either contacting the Bereavement Manager on 01270 273882 or Crewe Registry Office. It is generally expected that registration takes place within 5 working days. If the Coroner decides a post mortem is required he / she will issue all the relevant paperwork after the post mortem has taken place and advise you of how to progress.



## **Funeral arrangements**

Making funeral arrangements can be upsetting and confusing and add to an already stressful time. You may feel overwhelmed by the decisions you have to make and ill-prepared to make them. The funeral is the last thing you will do for your baby, so give yourself time to decide what the right decision is for you.

Firstly you have to decide on either a cremation or burial. You may choose to organise this independently or the hospital can help you with this.

### **Making your own funeral arrangements**

If you decide to make the funeral arrangements yourself you will first need to select a Funeral Director of your choice, they will help and advise you regarding your options and explain what is available locally.

### **Hospital contract funeral arrangements**

The hospital can offer to arrange a basic funeral, with burial or cremation, on your behalf. We will be able to give you the full details of the funeral directors the arrangement is with and options available. If you choose cremation, there may only be minimal ashes (but usually there are no ashes) you will have the option of having these returned to you or they can be scattered in the Petal Garden at Crewe Cemetery by crematorium staff.

The option of a service at Crewe Crematorium is available but there will be a fee which you would be liable to pay, this is a charge stipulated by the Crematorium and not the hospital. This can be discussed with either the Bereavement Manager or staff on the labour ward.

## **Maternity and paternity rights**

You may be entitled to full maternity / paternity rights following a Neonatal death (regardless of how long baby lived).

## **Going back to work**

If you are in employment it can be very difficult to decide the 'right' time return to work. If your baby was registered, you are entitled to full maternity pay and maternity leave.

## **Getting back to work – suggestions:**

- Simply call into work for a short time to see manager / colleagues
- Work reduced hours – phased return to work
- Be aware of your emotions and accept that it is OK.

## **Stopping baby-related post**

Prior to the birth of your baby you may have subscribed to a number of baby related services who may send you information related to babies over the coming weeks and months.

Please contact Mailing Preference Service (MPS) for further information. This is a free service. Alternatively we can complete the leaflet with you as these are available in your pack.

## **Ways to remember your baby**

- A memory box
- Having your baby's name written in the Book of Remembrance which is kept in the hospital chapel and can be viewed at any time. The book is taken each year to our annual memorial service which you are welcome to attend
- Memorials – for example, planting a tree, special bench, plaque etc. in your garden
- Finding a special place where you can reflect
- Naming a star
- Special decorations at Christmas
- Having a specific piece of jewellery
- Making a donation/fundraising for a charity
- Attending Leighton Hospital's Baby Memorial Service – an invitation to the service will be sent to you nearer the time
- Lighting a candle or releasing a balloon on anniversaries.





## **The future**

Once all investigations have taken place and results are available (some of which could take 3 – 4 months), you will be offered an appointment to see your Consultant Obstetrician or Paediatrician.

## **Further support**

Recognising that your feelings and emotions will be changeable for some time it is important to seek support either from family, GP and / or other professionals.

## **Future pregnancy**

If you become pregnant again, it is important to know that this can be a time of very mixed emotions. Please contact your midwife as soon possible, as they can either support you and / or refer you to specialist organisations.

## **Useful contacts**

Bereavement Manager, Leighton Hospital  
Direct Line: 01270 273882

Bliss - The Special Care Baby Charity  
[www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)  
Tel: 0808 801 0322  
Email: [hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)

Child Bereavement UK  
[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)  
Tel: 01928 577164  
Email: [support@childbereavement.org](mailto:support@childbereavement.org)

Child Death  
[www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)  
Helpline: Freephone 0800 282 986

Community Midwives  
Direct Line: 01270 612177 / 612141

Lullaby Trust  
[www.lullabytrust.org.uk](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk)  
Helpline: Freephone 0808 802 6868  
E-mail [support@lullabytrust.org.uk](mailto:support@lullabytrust.org.uk)

Neonatal Unit  
Tel: 01270 612282

Sands Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity  
[www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)  
Tel: 0808 164 3332  
Email: [helpline@uk.sands.org](mailto:helpline@uk.sands.org)

Saying Goodbye  
[www.sayinggoodbye.org](http://www.sayinggoodbye.org)  
Tel: 0845 293 8027  
Email: [support@sayinggoodbye.org](mailto:support@sayinggoodbye.org)

TAMBA Bereavement Support Group  
[www.tamba.org.uk/bsg](http://www.tamba.org.uk/bsg)  
Tel: 0800 138 0509

Winston's Wish  
[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)  
Tel: 08088 020 021



## Notes

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**This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask your midwife.**

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