

What to do when your baby has died, or is going to die.



Irish
Neonatal
Health
Alliance

A Checklist for Bereaved Parents

Many bereaved parents can feel numb and shocked if their baby has died or may die soon after they are born, and they can struggle to make decisions or think of the questions that they would like to ask their midwife.

We have produced this checklist to help. You might like to think about answers to these questions, so that you can express your wishes to your midwife and other relevant staff in the hospital.



- ☐ Consider requesting that your hospital's **bereavement alert symbol** be placed on your healthcare record and door of your room, so that when staff see the symbol, they will be made aware that you have experienced a bereavement or are anticipating a bereavement.
- ☐ You might like to ask if there is a **private room** available for you to use before and after delivery of your baby, so that you can have as much privacy as possible during delivery and afterwards. You might also consider requesting that only essential staff are present at delivery to facilitate you having as much privacy as you need.
- ☐ You might think about **naming your baby** and informing staff of their name, so that your baby's name can be noted in your healthcare record (staff can then see the note at handover and refer to your baby by name).
- ☐ Think about **whether you would like to see and hold your baby** after delivery. Many bereaved parents worry about what their baby who has died will look like, particularly if he or she has died sometime before delivery. Talk to your midwife if you have any concerns. Your midwife could, for example, take a photograph first of your baby and support you with deciding about seeing and holding him or her.
- ☐ Think about **who you might like to meet your baby** and consider inviting them to meet him or her. This will be their opportunity to say hello and goodbye to your baby too. You might also like to think about who you would also like to invite to be photographed with your baby such as siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. If you have any concerns about who to ask, talk to your midwife.
- ☐ You might like to ask hospital staff to **take photographs of your baby** when he or she is born or soon after delivery. If you are not sure that you want photographs, hospital staff can take some and keep them for you, so that you can ask for them later if you feel ready. You might also like to ask staff to sensitively take some videos of you and your family carrying out activities with your baby such as singing a special song to your baby or reading a story to them.
- ☐ You might like to talk to your midwife about the **possibility of making feet and hand ink imprints** of your baby and your midwife may be able to provide you with ink sheets to do this.
- ☐ Think about **gathering keepsakes** of your baby to place in a memory box such as scan images, a lock of hair, blanket, cot card, medical records, identification bracelet, sympathy cards, photographs of you being pregnant.
- ☐ If your baby is expected to die soon after delivery, you might like to make memories now while they are still alive such as a **recording of their heartbeat** at your next scan.
- ☐ Think about **what you might like to include in your baby's coffin**, for example, a photograph of you and your family and / or a note to your baby. You might consider buying two keepsakes for your baby such as two teddies - one for you to keep and one to go in your baby's coffin.
- ☐ You might like to light a **scented candle** during your time with your baby and later light it in their memory - the scent will remind you of your precious time with them.

- ☐ Think about keeping a **journal** of your time with your baby and the activities that you did with him or her as a precious keepsake.
- ☐ You might like to talk to your midwife about a **post-mortem**.
- ☐ Think about whether you would like to bury or cremate your baby and the kind of **ceremony** you would like. You might like to discuss these options with your midwife and hospital chaplain.
- ☐ Consider sending a **birth announcement**, which remembers the loss of your baby.
- ☐ It might be helpful for you to talk to your local family doctor, a **professional counsellor** and / or join a **support group** of bereaved parents after the passing of your baby or while you anticipate the death of your baby.

**Most importantly -
do what is right for you
and your family.**

The Irish Neonatal Health Alliance
Baby Loss Gown Project
and **Baby Loss Knits Project**
can provide you with the gift of a beautiful custom-made gown and / or knits for final photographs and burial services of your baby.

You might like to ask your midwife to see a selection of Baby Loss Gowns and Knits, so that you can choose some for your baby to wear or you can contact us directly (see our contact details below).

Here are some additional things to think about if you have experienced loss in a multiple pregnancy.
If you have a surviving baby / babies:

- ☐ You might like to use the **Butterfly Alert Symbol** which indicates that a baby, on whose cot it is displayed, is the survivor of a multiple pregnancy. Your midwife can offer this to you, and it can be downloaded from www.inha.ie/family-info/. Consider asking for the symbol to be 'clipped' to your healthcare records and the healthcare records of your surviving baby / babies.
- ☐ Where one or more babies has died before delivery, and you are continuing your pregnancy so that your surviving baby / babies can grow some more, think about asking your midwife to have **one-to-one breastfeeding classes and antenatal classes** as it may be difficult at this time for you to meet other parents who have not experienced loss.
- ☐ Think about talking with your doctor if you are worried about the **health and wellbeing** of your surviving baby / babies so that they can offer you reassurance.
- ☐ Consider asking staff to try to place your baby / babies in a ward or bay where there are no other sets of twins / triplets as it may be painful to be surrounded by twins / triplets and to see their 'special twin / triplet status' being celebrated. If this is not possible at the time, you might like that an **alternative cot space** is offered to you as soon as one becomes available.
- ☐ Consider giving a **keepsake** to each baby such as a teddy or piece of jewellery. The keepsake could be buried with the baby / babies who have died, and your surviving baby / babies could retain their keepsake as a treasured memento.

Other suggestions if you have experienced loss of a twin(s) or triplet(s):

- ☐ Consider taking **photographs and videos** of your babies together, with both parents holding the babies, and photographs of the babies' hands touching. You might like to also take photographs of yourself pregnant.
- ☐ You might like to ask your midwife if it is possible to make ink **feet and hand imprints** of your twins / triplets on the same sheet of paper. Your midwife may be able to provide you with ink sheets.
- ☐ Consider gathering **keepsakes** of babies such as scan images, a lock of their hair, blankets, cot cards, medical records, identification bracelets and congratulations and sympathy cards. You might like to create a memory box for each baby.
- ☐ The Irish Neonatal Health Alliance Baby Loss Gown Project and Baby Loss Knits Project provide bereaved parents with the gift of a beautiful custom-made gown and / or knits for final photographs and for burial services of their baby. You might consider choosing **matching items** for your babies to wear for remembrance photographs.
- ☐ You might like to ask your midwife if **testing** of your babies is possible to find out if they are identical and to find out why one or more babies has died? Your midwife can discuss with you whether testing is possible.
- ☐ If more than one of your babies has died, you might find it comforting for them to share a **funeral** and be buried or cremated together in the same coffin. If one baby has died and it is expected that another baby is going to die soon as well, you might delay the burial or cremation, so that the babies can be buried or cremated together. You might also consider postponing burial or cremation of a baby if it is going to coincide with other important events such as surgeries for your surviving baby / babies.

More information

These checklists are not exhaustive. We have produced a selection of booklets which will offer you further guidance and which can be found at www.inha.ie or you can contact us by email: info@inha.ie or call us on mobile: 085 1920 602.



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