

Planning a funeral for your baby

Losing a child at any age is almost always one of the hardest and most difficult challenges that we could ever face in our lives. However, the last thing that many parents expect to ever experience is to have to plan a funeral for their baby. Sadly, thousands of cases of still births, sudden infant death syndrome and other infant deaths occur in the UK every year – with the UK having the highest rates in Europe. This sensitive guide aims to give you some gentle guidelines if you or someone close to you have found themselves in this situation and need some help and advice on what to do next.

The initial first steps

The most important thing to remember is to give yourself space and take whatever time you need to grieve. You should not feel pressured by hospital staff, friends or family to make a quick decision about planning a funeral. For most parents, this can be the first time that they have ever had to plan a funeral and never imagined that they would be in this position so take your time to adjust before you make any quick decisions.



Under UK law if your baby was born after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy, or was born alive at any stage of pregnancy then their death must be formally registered and they must be given a burial or cremation. If your baby was born before 24 completed weeks then the death cannot be legally registered, however the funeral director will require the Medical Certificate from the hospital before a burial or cremation takes place.

Many hospitals will help to arrange and pay for a funeral for your baby, while others may charge a fee. The hospital may discuss with you your options for a hospital funeral which may involve burial or cremation, however it depends on the hospital and in some cases cremation is the only option unless your religion dictates a burial. Depending on the hospital and the term you reached in your pregnancy you may be offered either an individual grave or a shared grave with other babies, but each with an individual coffin.

However, you are entitled to choose to plan the funeral yourself or with the help of a funeral director. If you decide to use a funeral director then they will help you to arrange collecting your baby from the hospital after signing a permission form.

Sometimes deaths are referred to the coroner's office. The coroner will ask about your funeral plans as to whether you are having a burial or a cremation. The coroner will provide you with forms allowing a cremation if you choose that option, while the registrar will issue you with the form for a burial. If there is an inquest then the coroner will provide the document for either.

It is not unusual to want to take your baby home with you before the funeral takes place. If you wish to do this then you should speak to the midwives and nurses who will be able to provide you with a form which confirms that no post-mortem has been ordered and that you are allowed to take them home. They should also provide you with some key information about what to do until the funeral.

Arranging a funeral with a funeral director

Some people will decide that they would prefer to have their own ceremony and funeral arranged externally instead of by the hospital. While you may prefer to arrange things yourself, many families find that using a funeral director can be very beneficial. Having someone to take care of the arrangements for you can give you some space to breathe and gather your thoughts in what is a very difficult time for you and your family.



A funeral director will be able to sensitively and efficiently talk you through your options and guide you through all the different aspects of a funeral from registering the death to the actual service. Hiring someone with the necessary experience, contacts and capabilities can help to minimise the stress on you, or a friend or family member who may also be grieving.

Cremation or burial

One of the key decisions that you will need to decide on will be whether to choose burial or cremation for your baby. With a burial they will be able to advise you with choosing a location. This may be a traditional cemetery burial, a burial on religious ground such as a churchyard, a family plot, an eco-friendly burial or less commonly, a burial on [private](#)



[land](#). If you opt for a cremation then they will be able to talk you through your options for retaining ashes, as this may not be possible with babies born before 17 weeks. If you do collect ashes then you will need to consider what you do with them after the service – [this article](#) talks through some of the options available to you.

The ceremony

When it comes to planning a ceremony there is no one-size fits all approach. You may decide to have a religious funeral which takes place according to the customs and traditions of your faith, or you may decide to have a humanist funeral with no involvement of religion. You may decide to have a small and low-key service with only very close family to respect your privacy, or you may decide to have a larger service with extended family and friends– it all depends on your feelings and your circumstances.

What happens at the service again depends on whether you have a religious funeral or a less traditional service. Sometimes there may be the opportunity to have readings, poems and music while in other cases you may have traditional hymns, sermons and religious readings. There may be the opportunity for you to read an eulogy but there is no obligation for you to do so.

Flower arrangements are common at funerals; however you might decide instead to ask for donations to be made to a charitable cause close to you. While with many adult funerals it is traditional to have a reception after the funeral has taken place, you may feel that this is not necessary or may be too painful for you consider, in which case you might prefer to return to your own home following the service.



Other help and support available to you

No-one should have to go through the loss of a child by themselves and there are a number of brilliant charities who can help you with advice, counselling, group meetings and professional support to get you through the terrible shock of what has happened:

Bliss - <http://www.bliss.org.uk>

Child Bereavement UK - <http://childbereavementuk.org>

Child Death Helpline - <http://childdeathhelpline.org.uk/>

The Compassionate Friends - <https://www.tcf.org.uk/>

The Lily Mae Foundation - <http://www.lilymaefoundation.org>

The Lullaby Trust - <https://www.lullabytrust.org.uk/>

Sands - <https://www.sands.org.uk/>

Walter Craven Limited

Craven lodge

Broadgreen Road

Liverpool

L13 5SG

t: 0151 228 3900

f: 0151 252 1853

website craven-funerals.com