

be hurtful to grieving parents - it makes it seem like their baby never existed. Sometimes people think that it's comforting to say things like 'you can always have another baby' or 'perhaps it was for the best', but these comments can be also be hurtful. But offering practical support and being prepared to listen patiently to parents talk about their grief can help them through this difficult time. Parents can also ring SANDS, (02) 9906 7004, a support group for parents who have experienced the death of a baby or a miscarriage. The Translating and Interpreting Service on 131450 can help you make the call. Counselling is also available at community health centres.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

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When a Baby Dies

Of all babies born, approximately one in every hundred will be stillborn or die soon after birth. This can be a devastating experience for parents, and often the first question they ask is why? Sometimes the cause is a birth defect or a complication of labour, but usually the cause is unknown,

When a baby dies, many parents want a chance to see their baby, spend time with it and hold it. Hospitals are usually able to allow this. and to offer to take photographs, a lock of hair and their child's handprints and footprints for parents to take home. To some people this may seem very unusual (and some parents choose not to do these things), but parents who do decide to see their baby say it helps to have memories of their child and to have the chance to say goodbye.

"I'm glad I spent some time with my baby," says a woman whose baby died shortly after birth. "It helped me to know him a little and made me feel as if he was part of of my life."

A minister of religion can advise on the practices which are appropriate to the parents' religion, or parents can ask a bi-lingual midwife at the hospital, or an ethnic health worker for advice..

Hospitals in NSW try to do everything they can to help parents during this difficult time. A woman who has lost her baby is usually cared for in a private room and, if she's producing milk, a doctor, nurse or midwife can advise on how to stop the milk. The woman's partner and her family can visit at any time and, in some hospitals, it's possible for her to have a relative or friend stay overnight.

If a baby dies before 20 weeks of pregnancy it's known as a miscarriage and it's not necessary to fill in a form or arrange a funeral. However, if parents would like their miscarried baby to be blessed by a minister of religion or to be buried, they should ask their doctor, midwife or social worker. When a baby dies after 20 weeks of pregnancy it's called a stillbirth and, in NSW, parents need to arrange a funeral and register the baby's birth - these are things that a hospital social worker can help with. However parents don't have to attend the funeral if it's inappropriate for their culture or religion. If there are any special cultural practices that are important for the baby while it remains in hospital, parents should tell the social worker (interpreters can be arranged if necessary).

After the woman has left hospital, a midwife can visit her at home. Parents are also welcome to go back to the hospital and see the social worker if they would like to talk to someone about their loss.

People don't always realise that the grief parents feel for a baby who died before birth or who lived only for a short while can be as overwhelming as the grief felt for a close relative they had known for years. It's normal for a woman and her partner to feel profound grief at this time, even for a miscarriage, and it's important for relatives and friends to try and understand this. Grief is a very individual feeling and men and women may find they have different reactions and needs at different times. Sometimes feelings of grief don't appear immediately after the loss but at a later time.

If you know someone whose baby has died - or who has had a miscarriage - there are things you can do help. Don't be afraid to ask how the parents are feeling, to talk about the baby and mention its name, if it has one. This is better than avoiding the subject and acting as if nothing has happened - this can