




Sands

your baby's  
funeral

 Your baby has died, and suddenly you are faced with making arrangements for a funeral at a time when you expected to be celebrating a birth. The decisions that must now be made can seem overwhelming alongside your pain and shock.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information to assist you with the decisions that need to be made.

The most important thing to keep remembering is that this is *your baby* and you have the right as parents to do what you feel and believe is most appropriate for you. Take your time – do not rush. **Remember it is okay to change your mind.**

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### **Family and friends**

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Close family or friends may feel they are helping you by offering/and sometimes taking over the decision making. Their suggestions and practical guidance may be helpful, but it is important that they accept that this is your baby – in the long run, it will be more beneficial for you to make as many of the decisions as you are able. Making decisions is a part of parenting your baby.

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### **Support people**

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It is important to have people around you who will allow you to decide what is best for you and support you through this time.

A funeral can be one of the most important ways that you can do something practical for your baby. It can be the time when family and friends (if you choose to invite them) can gather together to focus on your baby and acknowledge your grief.



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## Legal requirements

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You are required to register the birth of your baby, and bury or cremate them in a registered place, if:

- your baby was born alive and subsequently dies
- your baby was born after the 20th week of pregnancy
- your baby weighed 400 grams or more when he or she was born.

If your baby was not born alive before the 20th week of pregnancy and weighed less than 400 grams, you are not legally required to bury your baby in a cemetery or have your baby cremated. You may bury your baby in a place of your own choice. However, remember that burying your baby in, for example, a private garden may cause problems later if you move house and therefore have no grave you are able to visit. Alternatively, you can still choose to have your baby buried at a cemetery or have your baby cremated.

**Note:** If you do bury your baby in a private place, it is essential that the body is buried at **least 1 metre (approx. 4 feet) deep** in an area unlikely to be disturbed.



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## Registering the death

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Death must be registered within three working days of burial or cremation if your baby has lived, even if for only a short time outside the womb. Registering the death is usually taken care of by the funeral director, but you can chose to do this yourself if you wish.



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## Spending time with your baby

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You may choose not to allow anyone except yourselves, or maybe very close family, to see your baby. This is a personal decision. You should do what feels right for you.

Often, other people's misconceptions of the significance of your loss are because they don't realise exactly who you are grieving for. They have only seen you pregnant, they haven't seen your baby, and therefore the baby isn't real to them. Meeting your baby may help these people understand and hopefully be more understanding of you and your feelings. It may help them accept the need for you to talk about your baby.

Some parents choose to leave their baby in a bassinette for the funeral service (and in private, place their baby in the casket before travelling to the cemetery or crematorium). This allows those at the service (eg, family, friends and possibly work colleagues) the opportunity to meet your baby if they haven't already and to accept that you are grieving for a real person.



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## How long before the funeral takes place?

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There is no hurry to have your baby cremated or buried. It is important that you take as much time as you need to work through the decisions that must be made.

It is **very** important that the mother is not left out of the decision making. If the birth was physically difficult (eg, caesarean, great blood loss, etc.) she may need time to recover sufficiently before she is physically able to attend to these decisions and have input into the funeral arrangements.

You may choose to take your baby home before the funeral; this may be for several hours or days, depending on the condition of your baby. Alternatively, you may choose for your baby to stay at the funeral home. Remember, this is your baby and you have every right to make these decisions.



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## Who organises the funeral?

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You may choose to organise the funeral yourselves or engage the services of a funeral director.

Many bereaved parents find it a relief to allow a funeral director to guide and help them in the organisation of the funeral. Some parents may choose to make the arrangements themselves, with the help of family and/or friends.



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## Cremation

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If you choose to have your baby cremated, you will be given the ashes in a simple plastic container unless you have arranged an alternative one of your choice. Take your time in deciding what you would like to do with the ashes. Some options are:

- Keep the ashes in a special container, scattering the ashes over gardens or somewhere special of your choice that you will always have access to.
- Have the ashes buried at a cemetery or crematorium with a plaque marking the spot. Ask your funeral director or the sexton of your local cemetery or crematorium what the options are.
- Bury the ashes and plant a tree over them.
- Place a plaque in a separate place to the body or ashes, eg, on a garden chair.

These are just **some** options.

Before you make the decision to have your baby cremated, it is important for you to know (especially if you want to scatter the ashes) that the amount of ashes will depend on the size of your baby. For very small babies, there may be almost no ashes.

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## Burial

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Once you have chosen a cemetery, check with the sexton (person in charge of cemetery) or your funeral director about the burial options available.

Options may include:

- a special stillborn area
- a special children's cemetery, set aside solely for the burial of babies/children
- burial with a relative/in an existing family plot
- burial in a plot that can then be used as a family plot for further family members who die.

Check whether you are able to have a headstone and/or plant over the burial plot if these are your wishes.

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## Where can the service take place?

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If you are legally required to bury or cremate your baby in a registered place (see Legal requirements), the burial or cremation must take place at a cemetery or crematorium. The service itself can take place in a variety of places (in your own home or garden, in a church, at the graveside or crematorium, funeral directors' rooms or chapel, hospital chapel or another place that is special to you).



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## The funeral service

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The funeral service will play an important part in the grief process. It is an opportunity for you to join with family and friends in expressing your love and sorrow for your baby. A baby's funeral is particularly difficult because you are saying goodbye often before you had a chance to say hello.

There is no 'correct' format for a funeral service, but some things you may want to include are:

- music that is meaningful to you (pre-recorded, sung at the service or played on instruments)
- flowers
- rituals, eg, lighting of candles, placing special things in the casket with your baby
- planting a special plant
- filling the grave in yourselves (check if this is possible first)
- personal statements, eg, yourselves, a family member or a close friend speaking.

You might also want a printed order of service, which can include copies of songs, readings and/or poems. This can simply be photocopied sheets – you may include your own decorations, siblings' drawings or a photo. This provides a 'memento' of the occasion. Ask someone to take photos of the casket and the service. Maybe you would like the service videoed. Whilst this suggestion may seem odd, photos and videos provide mementos that may be very important to you in the months to follow.



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## Who transports your baby?

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You can drive your baby to and from any destination (eg, from the hospital to your home, from your home to the funeral). It may be necessary to transport your baby between

cities/towns; you can do this by car if you wish. If the baby is being flown by plane, the hospital or funeral director will make the arrangements. Sands has a separate information sheet about transporting your baby that you may find helpful. Be aware that you do not have to transport your baby yourself; a funeral director can organise everything for you.



## Expenses

Unfortunately the financial cost of the funeral and other related costs must be met by the bereaved parents. A funeral director will be able to provide you with cost estimates if you ask. You can compare prices if you wish. Some funeral directors charge little or nothing for a baby's funeral.

If you have difficulty meeting the cost of your baby's funeral, you may be eligible for a funeral grant from Work & Income NZ (WINZ). This grant is income and asset tested. You must complete an application form, which is available from your local WINZ office or a funeral director. If your baby was stillborn, you will need to provide a copy of the birth certificate. If your baby lived, you will need to provide a copy of the birth certificate and a copy of the death certificate. Copies of the birth and death certificate are obtained through your hospital or doctor. If you already receive a benefit, then contact your case manager, who will be able to tell you if you are eligible or not. It is advisable to check if you are eligible before you make funeral arrangements.

The grant is usually paid directly to your funeral director.