

# Supporting children when a baby has died



First edition © Sands 2013

No part of this booklet may be reproduced in whole or part, in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without the prior written permission of Sands. All rights reserved.

Whilst every care is taken in providing information, please note that it is of a general nature and that readers should seek professional or expert advice as appropriate to their specific circumstance. Sands does not accept any liability, including liability for any errors or omissions.

All information is correct at the time of going to print: November 2013.

**Sands**

3rd Floor  
28 Portland Place  
London, W1B 1LY

**t:** 020 7436 7940  
**e:** [info@uk-sands.org](mailto:info@uk-sands.org)  
**w:** [www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)

**Helpline** 020 7436 5881 [helpline@uk-sands.org](mailto:helpline@uk-sands.org)

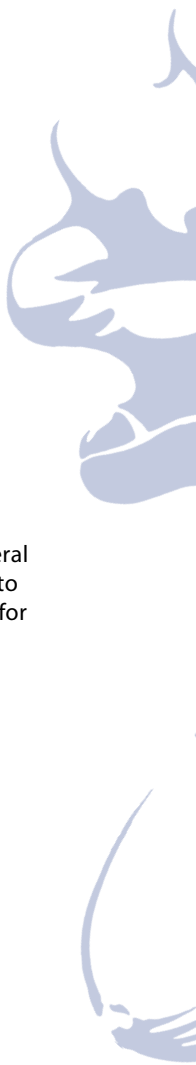
**Sands message boards** [www.sandsforum.org](http://www.sandsforum.org)

**Sands publications** 0845 6520 445 or order online at [shop-sands.org/shop](http://shop-sands.org/shop)

Registered as a charity in England and Wales (299679) and in Scotland (SC042789)

Text written by Judith Schott and Alix Henley, 2013

**We are grateful to the many parents who have contributed to this booklet.**



---

**“My son has always known that he had an elder brother. He is sad that his brother died but knows that his brother is still an important part of our family.” Mum**



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>06</b>
Telling the children	07
What to say	08
<b>Children of different ages</b>	<b>10</b>
Pre-school children	12
Primary school age	14
From age 11 to 12 onwards	15
<b>Dealing with children's reactions</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Answering children's questions</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Managing your own feelings</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Maintaining a routine</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Telling other people</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Involving children</b>	<b>23</b>
Mementoes and memory boxes	24
Funerals	24
Visiting the grave or memorial garden	25
Anniversaries and memorial services	26
Family celebrations	27

<b>Another pregnancy?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>The longer term</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Surviving children of a multiple birth and children born after your baby died</b>	<b>32</b>
When to tell them	32
<b>How Sands can help</b>	<b>34</b>
Sands support resources	35
<b>Useful addresses</b>	<b>36</b>
Other charities that can offer support	36
To prevent baby-related mailings	37
Where to get information about rights and benefits	38
<b>Notes</b>	<b>39</b>

# Introduction

The death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth is a major bereavement for the whole family. It has an impact on children who were expecting to have a new brother, sister or cousin, on a surviving child of a multiple birth, and also on brothers and sisters born after a baby has died. Children in the wider family, children of close friends, and friends at school may also be affected.

This booklet is mainly for parents. But we hope it will also be useful to other family members, friends who have children of their own, and anyone who comes into contact with a child whose baby brother or sister has died. It is based on what many bereaved families have said about helping children of all ages to cope. It focuses mainly on the needs of younger children but also includes information about older children and teenagers.

## Telling the children

Telling anyone that a baby has died or is unlikely to live is always hard. Telling children is especially difficult.

*"I had to tell our son that Mummy would be having the baby but the baby was already dead...and that Mummy and Daddy would be very sad for a while, but that didn't mean that we didn't love him. If there was ever a time that I felt my heart was going to break it was then." Dad*

Each family and each child are different. There is no one right way to talk to a child. What you say will depend on the child's age, their ability to understand, and the questions they ask. (For more about what children are likely to understand at different ages, see page 10).

In general, it's best to be open and honest about what has happened. Even very young children usually sense when something is wrong. If they are not told what it is, they may be frightened and may feel that they could make matters worse if they ask questions. They may think that something terrible is about to happen to them or to the people close to them. Fear and anxiety about their parents are likely to affect their behaviour.

If you really cannot face telling your child or children what has happened, you may be able to ask a trusted family member or close friend to tell them for you. He or she could explain what has happened and say that you are too sad about the baby to talk right now, but you love them very much and will talk to them soon.

## What to say

Young children do not usually need complicated or deep explanations. A simple and honest explanation is often enough. It's probably best to start by saying that the baby has died, even if the child is too young to fully understand what that means.

You could also tell the child the baby's sex and name if you have chosen one. You could suggest they draw or paint a picture to say goodbye to the baby.

If you want to involve them further, you could ask if they would like to come to the hospital to see the baby and to say goodbye. If you will be bringing the baby home, you could explain that this is so that the whole family can say goodbye together.

It's generally a good idea to explain that you are very sad because the baby has died and that it's OK to feel unhappy and to cry when sad things happen. It's also important to explain to younger children that you are not upset because of something they have done, and that it's not their fault. You will find more about talking with children on pages 12-15, and about showing your own feelings on pages 19.

It's important to choose carefully the words you use to explain that the baby has died. Children tend to take things very literally. Some words and phrases may confuse younger children.

Saying that the baby is "asleep" or "sleeping" may make a child afraid of going to sleep.

Using the words "lost" or "gone" instead of "died" may make a child frightened of getting lost themselves. Some children may think that if the baby is lost or gone, he or she could be found again or come back.



Saying “the baby wasn’t well” may worry a child later when he or she is ill. Instead you might say, “The baby wasn’t strong enough or big enough to live outside Mummy’s tummy.”

You may also want to think about the way a young child might react to phrases such as “the baby is an angel”, or “the baby is with the angels”. This could cause problems if, later, someone says to the child “you are an angel...” or “be an angel...”. An explanation such as “God wanted the baby to be with Him” might frighten a child who thinks that God might want him or her as well.

It’s usually better to keep things short and clear and not try to say too much at any one time. If a child wants to know more they will probably ask questions, as long as they feel it is alright to ask.

# Children of different ages

Children of different ages understand death in different ways. It's not possible to predict what each child understands and thinks, simply on the basis of their age. Each child is an individual, and is also influenced by their experience of life so far.

Just like adults, children of any age are likely to experience a range of feelings, including shock, disbelief, sadness, anger, depression, guilt, resentment and fear. These feelings do not come in any particular order or at any predictable time. Just as with adults, they may be complicated and conflicting. Depending on their age, children may not be able to put their feelings into words.

Children may also be as upset by the changes they see in their parents as they are by the death of an expected brother or sister. They may feel doubly bereaved.

---

**“My daughter and son-in-law were struggling to keep some normality in their lives. Their three-year-old son was old enough to realise that something was very wrong but couldn't understand why his Mummy looked so sad. About three months after his baby sister died, he said 'I want my Mummy back!'” Grandmother**

This doesn't mean that you should try never to show your grief. Children need to know that it's OK to cry and to feel upset, sad or angry. For example, telling children they are or should be brave or shouldn't cry may lead them to hide their feelings which can cause problems later on.

Try to reassure a child that the death was nobody's fault, and that nothing they did or thought made the baby die. Some children worry that their parents' grief means that they themselves are not good enough. Some feel angry towards the baby who died, or towards their parents. Although it's natural for children to have mixed feelings when a new brother or sister is expected, a child who felt jealous during the pregnancy and wished that the baby was not coming may feel guilty now. They may worry that it was their fault that the baby has died and that you are so sad.

Children may also fear that they or others close to them might die as well. They may be more upset than usual at being separated from their Mum, especially if she is critically ill or has to stay in hospital for some time.

## Pre-school children

Very young children are unlikely to understand completely what has happened but will react to the changes in the atmosphere around them. They are especially sensitive to changes in the people they depend on and are closest to.

Even if they know words such as dead or die, most children under the age of five or six find it hard to understand that death is permanent. Some may not react to what you tell them straight away. You may need to explain more than once.

Children of this age also tend to believe that what they think is true. This is sometimes called “magical thinking”.

*“We had told our three-year-old that his newborn sister was going to die. His Granny suggested that he do a drawing for her to say goodbye. But he still believed he could prevent her death. He said, ‘I’m a super-hero, let’s save her! Let’s take some medicine to the hospital.’” Mum*

Children of this age, and also those in the first year or two of primary school, have vivid imaginations. They may not have fully understood what they have been told and may come up with their own versions of what has happened. Try to keep listening to them and explaining things as simply and honestly as you can.

Younger children, especially, will usually focus on how the death affects them, rather than how it’s affecting you.

Younger children are also likely to find it hard to put their feelings into words. They may express their distress through changes in their behaviour.

For example, they may want to go back into nappies, start bed-wetting again, or insist on going back to a bottle or dummy. Some become more clingy and reluctant to let their Mum or Dad out of their sight. They may become more dependent on their favourite blanket or soft toy for security and comfort. They may also become more demanding, aggressive or have temper tantrums.

Some children become more fearful and have problems with sleeping or nightmares. Eating patterns may change, and some children have physical symptoms such as tummy aches. Illness is more common in children after a death in the family, and some children become more accident prone.

It is common for children to express their feelings through play, drawing or painting. This can give you an idea of what your child is thinking and feeling as well as giving them an opportunity to let off steam. Sometimes children can be remarkably matter of fact.

*“Some time after our baby died, my young son was playing Mummies and Daddies with a friend and I heard him say, ‘Let’s play all the babies have died.’” Dad*

What a child says can give insights into what they think and believe. Children can also be very blunt.

*“We met a pregnant woman in the school playground and my son said, ‘Is your baby going to die?’” Mum*

Some children talk to the baby who has died. This is quite common and is something that many bereaved adults do too – but usually silently or when they are unlikely to be overheard.

## Primary school age

Much of the previous section also applies to younger primary school age children.

Children over the age of five or six gradually start to realise that death is permanent and that everyone dies eventually. They may worry about their own death and the deaths of the people they love.

Children of this age may sometimes go for hours or even days without mentioning the baby or referring to what they have been told. They may ask a question and then run off to play. This doesn't mean that they aren't upset. Focussing on other things helps a child to cope with the intensity of what they are feeling and what is going on around them. Try to make sure they have opportunities to play and have fun, to be noisy and lively, and to let off steam.

Some children deal with their anxiety about death by giggling and making jokes. This doesn't mean that they don't care or that they aren't affected by what has happened. It's just a way of dealing with tension and stress.

## **From age 11 to 12 onwards**

Teenagers are naturally preoccupied with the physical and emotional changes that they experience as they develop and grow up. They are working out who they are and what it means to become an independent person. They may have mood swings and may want to be treated as an adult despite sometimes behaving childishly. At the same time, they still need and want their parents' support. Teenagers are often very affected when a baby brother or sister dies around the time of birth. Some may have looked forward to a new baby while others were unhappy about the prospect. Most teenagers do not want to think of their parents having a sex life, but a pregnancy makes it very obvious that they do.

Most teenagers need boundaries, even if they rebel against them, and it's harder for parents who are grieving to set and keep to these. Some teens may react to what has happened by becoming more independent. Others may feel that they should be strong for their parents, and may suppress and even ignore their own feelings for fear of causing additional pain and distress. They may also feel that they ought to take over some of their parents' responsibilities. It's important to try to reassure them that you don't expect or want them to step into your shoes or to look after you. They need to know that they don't have to be strong for you, and that it's perfectly alright to have fun and to let off energy and spend time with friends.

As ever, it's important to keep listening to and talking with teenagers. They need to know that, although you are sad, you still want to hear what's going on in their lives and how they are feeling. However, some teenagers may be uncomfortable talking about feelings to their parents. They may find it easier to talk to and ask questions of other adults whom they know and trust. Some may want to call our Helpline – see page 34 for contact details.

# Dealing with children's reactions

With patience, understanding and support, most difficult behaviours resolve over time. If they persist or increase, you may want to consult your GP for help and advice. It can be particularly difficult to find the energy to be patient and understanding when you are grieving yourself. You need to decide what seems best and how much you can manage. If you can, it may help to ask a trusted family member or friend to look after your children for a few hours when you have run out of patience or need time alone.

It's also important to make sure that your children do not feel excluded. However difficult this is for you, they need to know that you are there for them.

If a child finds it hard to say what they are feeling or what they need, it may be helpful for them to have a way of letting you know when they need an extra cuddle or a talk. Together, you could pick a special toy, make a special "time to talk or hug" voucher, or choose a special word that your child can use to let you know when they are feeling upset and need some time with you.



# Answering children's questions

Children may want to ask questions straight away, or at apparently random times later. They need to know that it's alright to ask you questions about the baby or they may simply stop asking. Whenever possible, try to answer immediately and as simply and truthfully as you can. This will help them feel able to ask about other things they want to know or don't understand.

Many parents worry about what and how much to say. On the whole it's best to be honest, and to keep your answers as short and clear as you can. If a younger child asks why the baby died, they may be satisfied if you simply say, as suggested on page 9, "The baby wasn't strong enough or big enough to live outside Mummy's tummy." or "The baby's body wasn't working properly and the doctors couldn't fix it."

When they are ready for more information they will usually ask more questions. With an older child, you may want to explain what went wrong in a bit more detail. If no cause is found, you could simply say, "Sometimes we don't know why things happen".

Children are naturally curious about death as they are about many other things. They may ask questions about the funeral, why the baby was buried or cremated, what it feels like to be dead, what happens to the body, where the baby is, and whether he or she will grow up there.

A question such as, "What happens when you die?" may raise complex issues about an afterlife. How you answer will depend on the age of the child and on your own beliefs. If you don't have any religious or spiritual beliefs, or if you and your partner have differing beliefs, you could explain that people have different views about death and about what happens afterwards. Nobody can be quite sure, but we do know that the person who has died doesn't feel anything and doesn't need their body any more. That is why there is a funeral and a burial or cremation.

If a child's question triggers your own tears and sadness, tell them why you are upset, say that it's not their fault, and explain that it's OK to feel sad. You could also reassure them that you do want to talk to them about the baby and answer their questions, even though you are sad.

Explaining death to children is hard, especially when you are shocked and grieving. Later on you may wonder if you should have said and done things differently, but you can only do the best you can at the time.

One way to help younger children understand death and dying is to read them books for children that deal with these issues. We stock a number of children's books. You can order these by phone or on our website.

# Managing your own feelings

*“You can’t hide a sad face.” Mum*

Many parents worry about the effect that their own grief and preoccupation will have on their children. However, trying to hide your feelings is very difficult and may confuse your children. They are likely to sense your unhappiness and to react to it anyway.

Being open and honest about how you feel helps children to express their feelings and realise that it’s alright to feel sad and upset.

*“Children can learn that you can go through sadness and tragedy and become happy again.” Mum*

At the same time, it’s important to try to find a balance. When parents are totally immersed in their own grief, children may bottle up their own feelings to avoid adding to their parents’ distress, or may behave badly and become more demanding. Children may also hide their feelings if the adults around them are very controlled and keep their own feelings to themselves. This can cause problems later when these feelings surface again, as they nearly always do.

*“A couple of weeks after our second son was stillborn, our two-and-a-half-year-old said out of the blue, ‘This house is too sad for me.’ We realised that we needed to get some support and do things differently. We gave him a big hug and said that it was sad, but that we would be happy again soon. After that we tried to ensure that his life went on as normally as possible.” Mum*

Children need normality, space and support to get on with their lives as far as possible and there are bound to be times when you simply cannot provide this. It may be possible to ask a trusted family member or friend to look after your child on a regular basis. That way you can have some time for yourself and your child can have a break and some fun.

Family or friends may also be able to help out if a child's behaviour becomes especially difficult to deal with. It's hard at the best of times to be patient and calm with a child who is aggressive, demanding or having frequent temper tantrums. These behaviours can overwhelm parents who are struggling with their own grief. Having a break and letting someone else take the strain for a bit may help all of you through a very difficult time. Although your children need your attention and need to feel valued and loved, you also need time for yourself.

Getting ongoing support is another important way to enable you to support and care for your child or children. You may want to call our Helpline or look at our website to find out if there is a support group near you. You can find contact details on page 34.

# Maintaining a routine

Although it may be tempting to take a more relaxed attitude to your child's normal routine, trying to stick to things such as the time your child usually eats or goes to bed gives a sense of security. Rituals such as a bedtime story can help maintain some sense of normality. Sending your child to his or her childminder, nursery or school gives you a break and offers your child some continuity, stability and a happier atmosphere.

*"My five-year-old had just started school when the twins were born. One of them died soon after the birth. He was really sad at home but going to school gave him a break and allowed him to have fun with his friends. It also gave me space to grieve. You need to have time for the kids and time for yourself." Mum*

However, some children may be worried or frightened about what is going on at home while they are away. They can also feel lonely and isolated. You could think about keeping them at home for a couple of days. When they do go back, it's important to tell the people who will be responsible for your child that their baby brother or sister has died and what the child has been told.

# Telling other people

People who have any kind of responsibility for your child or children need to know that their baby brother or sister has died. This can help teachers, childminders and other people who spend time with them to understand and make allowances for any changes in behaviour or loss of concentration. If you have a young child, it's helpful to explain what you have said to him or her and the words you have used. This should ensure that your child is not confused by different explanations of what has happened. Knowing what has happened can also alert teachers to watch out for any signs of teasing or bullying by other children.

It's a good idea to make sure that your child's GP knows that your baby has died. Knowing what's going on in the family can help doctors to assess any symptoms or illnesses that your child may develop.

You may also want to tell the parents of younger children's close friends so that they understand if your child's behaviour or mood changes. If they have not discussed death with their own children before, they may need time to think about what to tell them. It may be helpful to suggest they read this booklet.

At best, the parents of your child's friend may offer to help by inviting your child to play or to tea. However, some adults may decide to keep their distance in order to "protect" their own child. This can be very painful, especially for your child who may find it difficult to understand why they can't see their friends. Your child may need lots of reassurance that it's not his or her fault. It's probably best to be honest and say that some grown-ups aren't very good at talking about sad things like death, so they keep away.

# Involving children

These days most families include their children in what happens after the death. This helps them to be sure that they are loved and important. Even if they are too young to remember later what happened and what they did, you will be able to discuss it with them in the months and years to come. Provided you present these as normal things to do after a death, your children will usually feel quite comfortable doing them.

Some parents decide not to involve their children because they want to protect them from the pain they themselves are feeling. However, it is not possible to protect them completely, and knowing what is happening and being involved is usually better for children than feeling left out.

*“I know now, that if I had to do it again, I would make different choices. Since our daughter died, my son has asked a number of times why we wouldn’t let him visit me in hospital or come to the funeral. All I can say is that it was to protect him, but in all honesty it was to protect myself too. But I have to remember that the choices were made during a time of such incredible acute pain and fog that we could not think things through.” Mum*

There are several ways in which you could involve your children and help them feel part of what is happening around them.

## Mementoes and memory boxes

Many parents collect mementoes such as photos, hand and foot prints, copies of scans, a lock of hair, cot tags and name bracelets. These can be stored in a memory box or book. Brothers and sisters might want to add something of their own to the box or book. Depending on their age, they could do a drawing or painting, or write a poem or a letter. Some children might want to give the baby a cuddly toy which could be placed in the coffin or kept in the memory box. An older child might want to help make a memory box for the family or to make one themselves. The Sands *Always Loved, Never Forgotten* memory box includes two small teddies and a hand-made card. You can order a memory box from our online shop.

## Funerals

If you are planning the funeral yourself, or having a hospital funeral, you may want to involve older children in decisions about things like music and flowers. If you decide to have your child or children at the funeral and if they want to come, it's a good idea to explain beforehand what will happen so that they know what to expect.

Depending on your child's age, it may be important to remind them that the baby's body doesn't work any more and that he or she cannot feel anything. Otherwise the idea of burial or cremation is just too frightening. You could explain that the baby's body will be put into a coffin and that, after the service, the coffin will either be buried in a special place called a grave in a cemetery, or will go into a special burner at the crematorium. You could also say that there will always be a place, for example the cemetery or memorial garden, where the whole family can go to remember the baby.



If you are not sure exactly what will happen at the funeral, you can ask the funeral director or, if the hospital is arranging the funeral, a member of the hospital staff.

It may also be helpful to explain that a funeral is a special time to think about the baby and say goodbye. That means that people will feel especially sad and may cry.

You may want to ask a relative or close friend to be at the funeral to look after your child or children so that you don't have to worry about them and can concentrate on the service for your baby.

Some children may not want to come to the funeral, and some parents decide not to have very young children at the funeral. Instead, they do something as a family later on to remember the baby. For example, they may light a special candle or visit the cemetery or memorial garden.

If your baby is cremated and you are offered any ashes that remained after the cremation, you may want to include your children when you bury or scatter them in a place that you can revisit whenever you want to.

## **Visiting the grave or memorial garden**

If you visit your baby's grave or a memorial garden, you may want to take your child or children with you. Some places have restrictions about what can be placed on the grave or in the memorial garden. For example, they may not allow items such as balloons, soft toys, pictures or wind chimes. It's a good idea to find out in advance about any restrictions in order to avoid disappointing a child who wants to bring something special for their baby brother or sister.

## Anniversaries and memorial services

Important dates, such as the anniversary of the date when the baby died or was due to be born, can be especially sad for parents. It's helpful to tell children in advance about these special days, so that they know that you may be sad again for a while.

Children's behaviour and ability to concentrate may get worse before the anniversary, even if it hasn't been mentioned. So it's a good idea to tell childminders, teachers and other care providers that an anniversary is coming up. You may need to do this each year as this information may not get passed on.

*"Our son certainly has a significant change in behaviour each year in the run up to the anniversary of our daughter's death. The school has commented on this and has it noted on his records." Mum*

Many parents mark anniversaries by lighting a candle, baking a birthday cake for the baby or visiting a special place, such as the baby's grave or memorial garden. Children can be involved in any of these activities.

You may also want some time on your own. Planning ahead and asking a friend or family member to have your child or children for a while ensures that they are cared for while you have time to remember your baby.

## **Family celebrations**

Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Passover, Mother's day and Father's day, and other times when families gather together to celebrate, can be a time when the baby is especially missed. Family birthdays, and especially those of a surviving twin or triplet can also be upsetting. Some families do something special to remember their baby on these occasions, such as lighting a candle for the baby or choosing a special decoration together. Others hold a fundraising event in aid of Sands.

# Another pregnancy?

The decision to try again is very personal. Sometimes there are medical or personal reasons why another pregnancy is not an option. However, children may ask when you are going to have another baby. An honest answer is best, whatever the child's age. How much you say will depend on your child's age and on your own feelings.

Pregnancies that follow the death of a baby are often very stressful and worrying for parents. Children too may be frightened that this baby will die as well. They may also react to their parents' anxieties even if these are not discussed.

These feelings and reactions come on top of the normal mixed feelings that any child may have at the prospect of a new addition to the family. Some children may fear that their negative feelings about a new brother or sister may make this baby die as well. It's important to tell children that what they think or feel cannot make bad things happen to other people.

Trying to find a balance between optimism and overwhelming anxiety is hard. Getting support for yourself during and after the pregnancy is important, not just for you and your partner, but also for your children. Depending on your child's ability to understand, it may help to say that it's natural for everyone to be worried because the baby died last time. You could also explain that the midwives and doctors are taking extra care of you and the baby to make sure everything goes well this time. But try not to make any promises about things you cannot control.

A new pregnancy sometimes prompts a child to ask more questions about what happened last time and why the baby died. Although this can be very hard for you, it's a good opportunity to check that what a child remembers and understands is accurate.

Your child may be very anxious to see the new baby when she or he is born to make sure that this time, everything is alright. However, when the baby comes home, the reality of having a new brother or sister who cries and seems to take all their parents' attention may not be quite as wonderful as they imagined. They are likely to experience the normal mixture of positive and negative feelings that children have when a new baby arrives.

# The longer term

As children grow and develop their understanding of death increases. Sometimes a child grieves again and shows a deeper understanding as he or she gets older.

*“At five, my son cried a lot when his sister died shortly after birth. By the time he was eight, he had forgotten how sad he had been. That year, when we lit candles at a special family occasion, he was very sad and said, ‘This is the first time I have cried about our baby dying.’” Mum*

As they get older, children may want to talk about their baby brother or sister and may ask more sophisticated and thoughtful questions about what happened, about death, and about what happens when someone dies. Some may want to take a larger part in anniversaries, others may not want to be involved any more.

*“We used to let off balloons on the anniversary of our first baby’s stillbirth, one for each year of his life had he lived. We always did this as a family. But when my second son was six he got extremely upset and said it felt like losing his brother all over again.” Mum*

Although parents never forget the baby who died, and wouldn’t want to, their own feelings may also change over time. Intense grief may lessen and periods of normality increase, although significant dates such as anniversaries and family celebrations can still be hard. However, some parents continue to find it hard to focus on day-to-day life.

*“After our son was stillborn I found it very hard to cope with our rather boisterous and demanding daughter. I kept thinking of our perfect baby and imagining how easy it would have been to look after him. But then I realised that if he had lived, he would have been just as demanding. It wasn’t fair to assume he would have been perfect.” Mum*

If, after about six months, you are still focussing mostly on the baby who died and finding it difficult to care for and enjoy your other child or children, you should seek support and help from your health visitor or GP. Getting help for yourself is important for both you and your child or children.

Some parents react to the death of their baby by becoming more protective of their other children. This is understandable but, over time, too much protection can limit and frustrate children. As they get older, children naturally want to become more independent.

Protection can feel like restriction, so it may be better to be honest about how you feel and to talk with them about letting them have more independence. Gradually giving them more independence will give you time to adjust and manage your own anxieties about their safety.

# Surviving children of a multiple birth and children born after your baby died

## When to tell them

As with any sensitive topic, it's usually better to explain as early as possible, whenever the opportunity arises. If, from time to time, you talk about the baby who died and use his or her name, your child will grow up knowing that they had a baby brother or sister. If you display photos of the baby, and involve your child in anniversaries or memorials for your baby, this becomes a normal part of your child's life. It offers opportunities for them to ask questions and for you to tell them what happened.

*"My son has always known that he had an elder brother. He is sad that his brother died but knows that his brother is still an important part of our family." Mum*

Older children who discover later that they had a baby brother or sister who died, especially if this was their twin or triplet, may feel shocked, upset or angry that they were not told earlier. Some may not trust you to tell them other important things.

*"If they didn't tell me about my twin, what other secrets are they keeping from me?" Surviving twin*



It's common for adults who discover that they had a twin or were one of triplets or more, to say that they always felt there was something missing from their lives. Children who have always known that they were one of a multiple birth can at least understand the reasons for these feelings and know that they are justified.

If you have not yet told your child about the baby who died, try to find an opportunity to tell them as soon as you can. What you tell them will depend on their age and level of understanding. You may find it helpful to read pages 12-15 for information about what children of different ages understand about, and pages 17 and 18 for suggestions about what to say and how to answer a child's questions.

How a child reacts to the important information that they had an older brother or sister who died, or that they are one of a multiple birth and that their twin or triplet died, will depend on their age and personality. Over the next few months or years, they may experience the range of feelings that are common after a death. Some older children or even adults, especially those who were born as one of a multiple birth, may also feel guilty about being alive when their baby brother or sister didn't survive. They may welcome reassurance that they are especially loved and valued and that their parents couldn't imagine life without them.

We hope that you have found the information in this booklet useful. If you would like more information or would find it helpful to talk to someone, you can phone our Helpline or contact any of the organisations listed on pages 36 and 37.

# How Sands can help

Sands is a national charity offering information and emotional support when a baby dies before, during, or shortly after birth.

17 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth every day in the UK, and each year we support thousands of families whose babies have died.

At Sands there are people who understand what it's like, because many of us have been through this devastating experience ourselves.

You may not want anything from us right away. We are here to help whenever you feel you need it. That may be now or in a few weeks, months or even years.

As well as supporting mothers, fathers and same sex partners, we are also here to help other members of the family and the many other people who may be touched by a baby's death, including friends, colleagues and health care staff. All are welcome to contact us for support and information.

<b>Do you want to speak to someone on our helpline?</b>	<b>020 7436 5881</b>
<b>Do you want to email the Helpline for support?</b>	<b><a href="mailto:helpline@uk-sands.org">helpline@uk-sands.org</a></b>
<b>Do you want to connect with others whose baby has died?</b>	<b><a href="http://www.sandsforum.org">www.sandsforum.org</a></b>
<b>Do you want to find out about a Sands group near you?</b>	<b><a href="mailto:helpline@uk-sands.org">helpline@uk-sands.org</a></b>
<b>Do you want to know about our other support booklets?</b>	<b>Please see page 35</b>
<b>Do you want to see what's on offer at our shop?</b>	<b><a href="http://www.shop-sands.org/shop/">www.shop-sands.org/ shop/</a></b>
<b>Do you want to know more about what we do?</b>	<b><a href="http://www.uk-sands.org">www.uk-sands.org</a></b>
<b>Do you want to make a donation or fundraise?</b>	<b><a href="mailto:fundraising@uk-sands.org">fundraising@uk-sands.org</a></b>
<b>Do you want to write to us?</b>	<b>Sands, 3rd Floor, 28 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LY</b>

## **Sands support resources**

If you would like more information on any of the subjects we have mentioned, please see our current list of Sands booklets below. You can read or download copies of our booklets on the Support section of our website [www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org) or you can order copies from our online shop [www.shop-sands.org/shop](http://www.shop-sands.org/shop) or by calling 0845 6520 448.

### **Sands booklets**

*When a baby dies before labour begins*

*Saying goodbye to your baby*

*Deciding about a post mortem: information for parents*

*Mainly for fathers*

*Supporting children when a baby has died*

*Sexual relationships after the death of your baby*

*Information and support for grandparents*

*For family and friends: how you can help*

*Returning to work after the death of your baby*

*Information for employers: helping a bereaved parent return to work*

*Another pregnancy: for parents whose baby has died*

# Useful addresses

## Other charities that can offer support

### **Bliss - the special care baby charity**

**[www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)**

Support, advice and information for families of babies in intensive care and special care, including bereaved families.

**Helpline: 0500 618 140    Email: [hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)**

### **Child Bereavement UK**

**[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)**

Supporting families when a child dies and when a child is bereaved. **Support and information: 01494 568 900**

**Email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org)**

### **Miscarriage Association**

**[www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk](http://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk)**

Support and information for those affected by pregnancy loss. Network of support groups and telephone contacts throughout the UK.

**Helpline: 01924 200 799    Email: [info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk](mailto:info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk)**

### **TAMBA Bereavement Support Group**

**[www.tamba-bsg.org.uk](http://www.tamba-bsg.org.uk)**

Support for families who have lost one or more children from a multiple birth. (Part of the Twins and Multiple Births Association – TAMBA)

**Helpline: 0800 138 0509    Email: Use the form on their website**

## **Winston's Wish**

**[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk)**

Help and support for bereaved children and young people up to the age of 18.

**Helpline: 0845 203 0405    Email: [info@winstonswish.org.uk](mailto:info@winstonswish.org.uk)**

## **To prevent baby-related mailings**

**Baby Mailing Preference Service (MPS)**

**[www.mpsonline.org.uk/bmpr](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk/bmpr)**

Free site where parents can register online to stop or reduce baby-related mailings of samples, advertisements etc.

**Address: DMA House, 70 Margaret Street, London, W1W 8SS**

**Email: [bmpr@dma.org.uk](mailto:bmpr@dma.org.uk)**

## Where to get information about rights and benefits

### Money Advice Service

For an up-to-date summary of financial benefits, go to:

**[www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk](http://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk)**

In the "Search this site" box enter one of the following phrases:

*"Late miscarriage / Stillborn / Died shortly after birth"*

**Money Advice Line: 0300 500 5000** (English) or **0300 500 5555** (Welsh)

### Government websites

These UK government websites contain more detailed information about the different benefits to which you may be entitled and how to claim them, as well as links to downloadable claim forms, email addresses, telephone numbers etc.

**England, Wales, Scotland: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)** Select **Benefits**

**Northern Ireland: [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)** Select **Money, tax and benefits**

Enter what you are looking for into the search box at the top of the page and click on **Go**.

For most benefits you can also phone or visit your local Job Centre or JobCentre Plus (in Northern Ireland: Jobs and Benefits Office, or Social Security Office).

### For more help and advice on employment or financial issues

#### Working Families

**[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)**

A campaigning charity which supports and gives a voice to working parents. Gives financial and other advice over the phone or by email.

**Freephone helpline: 0800 013 0313**

**Email: [advice@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:advice@workingfamilies.org.uk)**

# Notes

# About Sands

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, was founded in 1978 by a small group of bereaved parents who were devastated by the death of their babies, and by the total lack of acknowledgement and understanding of the significance and impact of their loss.

Since that time, we have supported many thousands of families whose babies have died, offering emotional support, comfort and information. Today Sands operates throughout the UK and focuses on three main areas of work:

## **We support anyone affected by the death of a baby**

Bereavement support is at the core of everything we do. Some of the services that we offer include:

- ▶ Helpline for parents, families, carers and health professionals
- ▶ UK-wide network of support groups run by trained befrienders
- ▶ Online forum and message boards enabling bereaved families to connect with others
- ▶ Website and a wide range of booklets, books and other resources.

## **We work in partnership with health professionals to try to ensure that bereaved parents and families receive the best possible care**

We offer resources and a comprehensive programme of training, workshops and talks for health professionals that give practical guidance on how to meet parents' needs and provide good bereavement care.

## **We promote and fund research that could help to reduce the loss of babies' lives**

The UK has one of the highest rates of perinatal death in the developed world. The shocking reality is that, in spite of medical advances, 17 babies are stillborn or die under one month old every day.

We raise vital funds for research and campaign for the government to address this situation as a matter of priority.

We depend on the extraordinary energies of our supporters to raise the vital funds that we need to deliver the wide range of services that we offer.

**If you would like any further information or support please contact us or visit our website.**

### **Support:**

t: 020 7436 5881

e: [helpline@uk-sands.org](mailto:helpline@uk-sands.org)

### **Enquiries:**

t: 020 7436 7940

e: [info@uk-sands.org](mailto:info@uk-sands.org)

### **Write to us:**

3rd Floor, 28 Portland Place,  
London, W1B 1LY

### **Website:**

[www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)