

Another pregnancy?

After a late miscarriage,
stillbirth or neonatal death



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All information is correct at the time of going to print: May 2016.

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

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

“This pregnancy was very different from last time. I didn’t have the luxury of enjoying it now that I know that not everyone goes home with a baby.” Mum



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Introduction

Deciding whether or not to try for another baby after a late miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death may not be easy. The decision may depend on many things, such as the mother's health, her age, the couple's relationship, and how each of them is feeling. Parents who have had IVF may need to decide whether they have the emotional and financial reserves to go through the process again.

Sadly, for some parents, there is no chance of having another baby. Sands is always here to support you. You might also find it helpful to contact More to Life (see page 28). Although this is part of Infertility Network UK, it offers online and face-to-face support to all parents who are childless through circumstance and not through choice. It also has a network of support groups.

If another pregnancy is an option for you, we hope that you will find the information in this booklet helpful, and that it will prepare you for some of the feelings and experiences you may have before and during pregnancy and when your baby is born.

How soon to try?

You and your partner may feel differently about trying again. Research has found, for example, that while fathers tended to want to start another pregnancy fairly soon, mothers often wanted to wait longer – until they felt physically and emotionally ready. However, sometimes it's the mother who very much wants to get pregnant again and the father who wants to wait a while.

"I wanted to try again from day one. I just wanted to be pregnant again. It was all I could think about." Mum

Some couples find that the death of their baby has affected their relationship and it's hard for them to feel close enough to have sex. It may be helpful to read *Sexual relationships after the death of a baby*.

There is no clear-cut evidence about the best time to try for another baby. If you are not already pregnant, you may want to consider trying to plan the pregnancy so that the birth does not coincide with the date your baby died. It's easier to celebrate a new baby's birth, and his or her birthdays in the years to come, if these don't clash with the anniversary of a baby's death. Some people also think that it is better if parents allow themselves more time to grieve for the baby who has died before starting another pregnancy.

"At first, I couldn't think of having another baby. It wasn't till I was back at work and had done a lot of grieving that I started to feel emotionally ready. We didn't really try for a baby, getting pregnant wasn't my main focus. We just thought if it happens, it happens." Mum

From a physical point of view it's advisable to wait until any scars, for example from an episiotomy or caesarean section, are completely healed, the mother's vagina is completely healed, and the cervix

(the neck of the womb) is closed again. Before then, there's a risk of infection getting into the mother's blood stream. Healing usually takes around six weeks, so most couples wait until after the mother's six week check-up before having sex again.

It's a good idea to wait for the results of any tests that were done after your baby died and also, if your baby had a post mortem, for the results. If the post mortem finds a specific problem, you can discuss with the doctors whether it is likely to affect another baby and if anything can be done to prevent this.

Before starting another pregnancy, it's also important for the mother to discuss things with her doctor if she was ill during the last pregnancy or after the birth, if she had a caesarean, or if the baby who died had a genetic disorder or other condition that might affect another baby.

"The doctors asked us to wait six months before trying for another baby as they wanted to complete some more tests. In fact it was good to wait – it gave us time to come to terms with what had happened and to grieve for our daughter." Mum

You may find that you come under a lot of pressure from some friends and family members to try for another baby straight away. They may assume that having another baby as soon as possible will "heal" your grief and enable you to move on and forget the baby who has died.

In the end, the decision about when to try again is entirely up to you. However, if you decide to wait, it's important to use some form of contraception when you have sex since it is possible to conceive quite soon after giving birth. You may find it helpful to discuss contraception with your GP, midwife or health visitor.

Pregnancy

You may not become pregnant straight away. Even if you have conceived quickly in the past, things may be different this time. This is unlikely to be due to your baby's death: many parents find that they don't always conceive straight away. However, if you have been trying for six months without success, you may want to ask your GP or obstetrician for advice.

Being pregnant – how you may feel

"It was as if I'd been in a plane crash in which someone I loved had died, and getting pregnant again was like getting back on a plane again." Mum

Any pregnancy that follows the death of a baby is likely to be an emotional roller coaster of anticipation and heightened anxiety for both parents.

"I was more emotional during this pregnancy than I was when I lost my first baby. Carrying this baby kept bringing everything back and I knew how much I had to lose." Mum

"She was pregnant...again. What should have been fantastic news filled me with sheer terror. I didn't know if I could go through this again." Dad

Some parents may try to protect themselves from being overwhelmed by fear and anxiety by distancing themselves from what is happening, either throughout the pregnancy, or until the point at which they feel their baby is safe. They may prefer to avoid any discussion of emotional issues with friends, family members, or with the staff who are caring for them.

"I didn't want to love the baby I was carrying. I was so afraid that she would die as well and I knew I wouldn't be able to cope with the pain." Mum

Some worry that wanting another baby somehow means that they are being disloyal to the baby who died, or that they won't be able to love the new baby.

"I was terrified that I wouldn't want him when he was born and I felt so guilty. I couldn't tell anyone. They all thought I was looking forward to having a beautiful new baby but all I could think about was our son who died two days after being born." Mum

Finding a balance between being optimistic and trying to cope with your own overwhelming anxiety is hard. It may also be hard for you and your partner to listen to each other's fears. You may want to protect each other and to avoid adding to each other's stress. However, trying to hide your anxiety and fear is likely to add to the stress you are feeling.

If one partner has experienced the death of a baby in a previous relationship, feelings and anxieties can be particularly complicated. Anyone in this situation may find it helpful to talk to our Helpline so that they have an outlet for their fears.

Either or both of you may also find it helpful to talk to your midwife, GP or health visitor, or to other bereaved parents who have been through the same experience. You can always contact the Sands Helpline or your local Sands group if there is one near you, or you could think about getting some counselling. Some Sands groups run meetings specifically for parents who are expecting another baby.

"I had counselling during my pregnancy. It was a safe place to voice my fears. I could talk freely about my stillborn daughter and not just about my bump." Mum

Telling other people

Understandably, many parents are cautious about telling other people about a new pregnancy straight away and prefer to wait until it's well established, perhaps after the first scan or later. Or you may decide to tell a few people early on and to tell everyone else when the pregnancy starts to show.

Many people assume that a new baby will heal the parents' grief for the baby who died. However, bereaved parents know that each baby is unique and that another baby cannot possibly replace the baby who died.

"When we told people I was pregnant again, you could almost hear the collective sigh of relief from people who thought that everything would be alright now and that we would forget our daughter." Mum

It may be very difficult to talk to anyone about how you are really feeling. You may find that most people expect and very much want you to be happy and to "move on". If you express any anxiety or doubt, many people will automatically offer reassurance. All this can be extremely isolating and hard to deal with.

You may sometimes decide just to go along with other people's assumptions. But if the people who matter to you don't understand, you might want to suggest that they read our booklet *For family and friends*.

If you have other children

Children whose brother or sister died around the time of birth may worry that this baby will die as well. They may also react to your anxieties even if these are not discussed. 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 help make sure everything goes well this time. But try not to make any promises about things you cannot control.

A child's 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 could 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.

Another 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.

Antenatal care

Some mothers choose to go back to the same maternity unit because they know and trust the staff there.

“Going back to the same hospital was quite comforting. I’d had very good care there. I knew quite a lot of the staff and I knew my way around.” Mum

Others prefer not to go back to the same unit because it brings back vivid memories of their baby’s death, or because they have lost trust in that unit and its staff. If you feel this way, ask your GP to refer you to another hospital. If there isn’t one near enough, you could at least ask to be under the care of a different consultant and a different team of midwives.

Your pregnancy is likely to be described as high risk because you have had a baby who died. Many parents find this reassuring as it means that staff will ensure that you receive extra care and attention.

“I enjoyed the routine of visits and checks. It became part of my schedule. I had scans every two weeks, which were very reassuring. I wished I could move into the hospital as I felt we were safe there.” Mum

It’s a good idea to write a list of any questions or concerns before you go to each appointment. This will help you to remember what you want to ask or tell the staff. Because it’s hard to listen and to remember what people say when you are anxious and stressed, you may find it helpful to ask someone else to go with you to your appointments.

It's also very important for your own peace of mind that you tell the staff when you are anxious or concerned about anything during the pregnancy, including when you just need reassurance. Some parents worry about "being a nuisance" and wasting people's time. Please don't! Most doctors and midwives say that they would much rather know when parents are worried so that they can discuss any specific fears and check everything carefully.

"I had monthly scans and that was amazing. Without them I don't think I could have remained so level headed. The first two weeks after each scan were fine. Then I'd start panicking until I'd had the next one." Mum

Although being monitored carefully during pregnancy is reassuring, it can also be helpful to be reminded that everything could go well this time.

"Early on in my pregnancy, a midwife who knew my story gently asked me about breastfeeding and explained the importance of skin-to-skin contact with my baby. This was a completely new thought. I had got so focused on having checks and scans that I had lost sight of the fact that I would have a baby to care for. Her positive attitude and her assumption that all would be well this time were amazing and very helpful." Mum

Some maternity units run special clinics or drop-in sessions for bereaved parents who are expecting another baby, in addition to the usual antenatal clinics. Mothers can go along to these whenever they feel they need support or reassurance. If they have particular worries, the staff at the clinic may offer to arrange for them to have another scan or to see the consultant.

Other parents choose not to have extra checks or extra appointments, as this can cause extra stress in its own way. This is fine too; find a balance that works for you, your partner and your midwife.

“My midwife reassured me that I could make an extra appointment whenever I wanted to. The receptionist was lovely and slotted me in whenever I asked. I found that, knowing this, I rarely needed to. I preferred to trust that all will be well this time. I found going for tests made me more anxious.” Mum

Marking your notes

Many maternity units offer to mark the front of the mother’s hospital notes with a special sticker. This helps to ensure that all the staff who see you know immediately that you have had a baby who died. It saves you having to explain what has happened, and helps the staff understand how you may be feeling.

“Lots of the staff who looked after me knew what had happened last time so I didn’t have to keep explaining and going over everything again and again. I was really upset when I saw a doctor who hadn’t read my notes and asked if this was my first baby.” Mum

If your notes are not already marked with a sticker and nobody asks you about this, you could ask for it to be done. Many hospitals use the teardrop stickers that can be ordered from Sands.

Special dates

Many parents feel especially anxious as they approach the stage that the pregnancy had reached when their baby died. If this is how you feel, tell the staff. You could ask them to do extra checks on your baby during this time if you would find this helpful.

Many parents also feel renewed grief around the anniversaries of their baby's death or due date. This can be particularly difficult if you are pregnant again or have just had another baby. The mixture of grief for the baby who died, and hope mixed with anxiety for the new baby can be very confusing and upsetting. You may want to tell your midwife the dates of these anniversaries. You may also want to organise extra support for yourself at these times and perhaps take special time out so that you can grieve.

Preparing for your baby's arrival

For most parents, planning a nursery and choosing clothes and equipment for an expected baby are an enjoyable and exciting part of pregnancy. But when a baby has died it can be really difficult to feel confident enough to make preparations for another baby. Some parents also feel that it is tempting fate to do so.

However, you will need to pack a bag to take to the hospital and it's a good idea also to make some other preparations. Most women go home very soon after giving birth, and shopping with a new baby is not easy.

If you no longer have any of the things you bought before, or if your baby died before you had started to buy things for him or her, you will need to start from scratch. Some shops will allow you to choose and reserve items till your baby is born. But if you can't face making big decisions about a cot, buggy or stroller, you could just get the basics to start with. This might include some clothing, nappies, a crib or Moses basket and some bedding. You will also need a baby carrier that can be used as a car seat for your journey home.

Baby equipment is expensive, so if you still have the clothes and equipment you prepared for the baby who died, you may decide to use some or all of it. Although it can be very hard, it's a good idea to look through these items before your baby is born to make sure that everything is clean and ready for your return from the hospital. You may want to do this as a couple, or to ask an understanding relative or friend to help you. Or you may choose to do it by yourself, perhaps a bit at a time. You could decide to replace one or two items, or to buy something special for the baby you are expecting. If you had prepared a nursery you may want to make some changes or perhaps redecorate.

"To help myself get used to the idea that I may be having a living baby boy, I bought a blue sleep suit and hung it up in our room where the Moses basket would go, to remind me to think positive." Mum

Antenatal classes

Many bereaved parents find it hard or even impossible to attend ordinary antenatal classes. But if your baby died before you had completed a course of antenatal classes, you may have missed out on important information about birth and what to expect afterwards. You could ask the midwives if they can offer you individual sessions.

If you decide to go to ordinary antenatal classes, you may find it very difficult to be with parents who are full of expectation and excitement and haven't thought about the fact that sometimes babies die.

"They were all so positive and happy and I felt I had to act the same way. It was exhausting because inside I was grieving for my daughter and worrying that this baby could die too." Mum

It's important to tell the class leader beforehand that you have had a baby who died. This will help her to understand what you may be feeling. It's also helpful to tell her whether you want the other people in the class to know or not.

If you make friends with some of the others in the class, you may decide to tell them. If so, you also need to ask them not to tell the rest of the class, unless you decide that you want everyone to know.

Labour and birth

Your antenatal appointments are a good opportunity to discuss labour, to tell the staff how you feel about giving birth and to talk about any particular worries. Depending on how your pregnancy is progressing and on what happened when your baby died, the doctors may advise having an induction before your due date or recommend a caesarean section. The staff should answer your questions and tell you what to expect if you have not been induced or had a caesarean before.

Some parents find it helpful to visit the unit and labour ward beforehand, in order to prepare themselves for when they will be there during labour and birth.

Writing a birth plan

It's a good idea to write a birth plan. This will help the staff who look after you to know what is important to you so that they can try to avoid anything that would bring back painful memories. Start by stating that you have had a baby who died, so that they know about your loss.

You should be able to choose who will be with you in labour, the type of pain relief you would prefer, the positions you want to try and what you want to happen when your baby is born. If you are having a planned caesarean you can usually choose to have one person with you in the operating theatre, unless you have a general anaesthetic.

You may want to think about whether there is anything particular that you want or don't want staff to do during the birth or when your baby is born. Some parents have very specific requests because they want this birth to be as different as possible.

“In my birth plan we asked that, when my baby was delivered, he was put straight onto me, without being cleaned or weighed. I desperately needed to see him and hold him before anyone else. After a few minutes they weighed him, but I am forever grateful that I had those first precious moments with him.” Mum

A birth plan is like a wish list. If all goes smoothly, your wishes should be carried out. However it’s always important to remain flexible just in case things don’t go quite as you planned: for example, if you or your baby need extra medical help or treatment.

Meeting your baby

“I felt disconnected during the labour and just couldn’t believe that everything would be OK.” Mum

Many parents find it hard to believe that everything will be alright until they hear their baby’s first cry and hold him or her in their arms.

“After he was born they needed to do loads of checks as he was only 36 weeks. I really couldn’t breathe until they handed him back to me. That’s when I got that rush of happiness.” Mum

Some worry that their new baby will remind them of the baby who died.

“I knew she was a girl so I had prepared myself for her being very different from my son. But when they put her in my arms it just blew me away because she was exactly like my son. I wasn’t prepared for that and the first few moments were horrible. Asleep she is identical, but when she’s awake she is herself.” Mum

For many parents, meeting their baby is entirely positive.

"I had been worried that I might confuse him with my first baby and feel very sad when he was born. But I didn't. He was a different baby." Mum

"When he was born it was incredible to feel his warmth against my skin, to hear his voice and to feel him move." Mum

Life with a new baby

Having a new baby is an emotional roller coaster at the best of times. When you have had a baby who died, the arrival of another baby can bring a range of complex emotions. You may be happy that your baby is here, but at the same time feel renewed grief for the baby who died. Your emotions are likely to be compounded by lack of sleep and the demands that a new baby makes on any parent.

“My partner was disconnected during my pregnancy, but now our son is born, his dad looks at him every day and cries. He’s a lot more emotional now than I am. This baby has really brought his grief out.” Mum

The reality of parenthood can be a shock to parents who have not coped with the demands of a new baby before.

“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 as our daughter. It wasn’t fair to assume he would have been easier to look after.” Mum

Others are so delighted to have a healthy baby that they welcome the demands that he or she makes.

“At postnatal group meetings, when others were moaning about sleepless nights, I just smiled because it was so amazing and wonderful to have a live baby, even if it was hard work.” Mum

Life with a new baby can be a shock for children as well. An older 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.

Some parents find that it takes time to adjust to their new baby. They may worry that they don't feel the same for their new baby as they do for the baby who died. They may fear that they will never love this baby as much. These feelings are common, but usually fade with time.

"For the first few weeks I was just going through the motions, though I didn't tell anyone. All I could think about was that he wasn't the baby I wanted. Then one day he smiled at me and I fell completely in love with him." Mum

Many parents naturally feel very anxious about their new baby's wellbeing and find that they need lots of advice and reassurance.

"It made me a more cautious parent – when we had our son, I was up and down the stairs like a yoyo checking that he was alright." Mum

Don't feel that you have to hide how you are feeling from your GP or health visitor. They understand that your previous experience is almost bound to make you much more anxious. It's particularly important to tell them and ask them for help if you continue to feel overwhelmed or are finding it difficult to cope.

Other people's reactions

As mentioned previously in this booklet, many people may assume that now that you have a healthy baby, everything will be alright. As a result, parents can feel that they must hide their sadness and other negative feelings since everyone is longing for them to be happy again. People may also say things that are very hurtful, for example, suggesting that your new baby is somehow a replacement for the baby who died. You may want to explain that, although you are happy to have a healthy baby, you are still very sad about the baby who died, and that both babies will always be very important to you.

“Getting pregnant again doesn't remove the pain of losing a baby. Our first baby will always have a place in our hearts, but I just appreciate every second with this baby.” Mum

As time goes by

“Our son is a constant reminder of our daughter and how she missed out on life. Whatever progress he makes is bittersweet as she never got to do any of the things he is learning to do.” Mum

As time goes by you will meet people who don't know that you had a baby who died. They may ask you how many children you have. This is always a difficult question for bereaved parents. It may feel easier just to talk about your living child or children. But many parents hate to leave out their baby who died, and want people to know that he or she was and still is important to them.

“When I'm asked how many kids I have, I say one. I don't say two unless I want to give that person a piece of my heart.” Mum

At some time in the future, you will need to think about if, when and how to tell your child that he or she had an older brother or sister who died. You may find it helpful to read our booklet *Supporting children when a baby has died*.

We hope you have found this booklet useful. If you would like further information and support, or to talk to a bereaved parent who has gone on to have another baby, please contact the Sands Helpline.

How Sands can help

Sands is a national charity offering information and emotional support when a baby dies before, during, or shortly after birth. We support anyone affected by the death of a baby for as long as it's needed.

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.

Do you want to speak to someone on our Helpline?	020 7436 5881
Do you want to email the Helpline for support?	helpline@uk-sands.org
Do you want to connect with others whose baby has died?	www.sandsforum.org
Do you want to find out about a Sands group near you?	helpline@uk-sands.org
Do you want to know about our other support booklets?	please see page 27
Do you want to see what's available at our shop?	www.uk-sands.org/shop
Do you want to know more about what we do?	www.uk-sands.org
Do you want to make a donation or fundraise?	fundraising@uk-sands.org
Do you want to write to us?	Sands Victoria Charity Centre 11 Belgrave Road London, SW1V 1RB

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 or you can order copies from our online shop www.uk-sands.org/shop or by calling 0845 6520 445.

Sands booklets

When a baby dies before labour begins

Saying goodbye to your baby

Deciding about a post mortem: information for parents

Deciding about a funeral for your baby

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? After a late miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death

Long ago bereaved

Useful addresses

Other charities that offer support

ARC

www.arc-uk.org

Support for parents who experience a late miscarriage or loss after 24 weeks following a diagnosis of fetal anomaly (parents who continue with the pregnancy and those who end the pregnancy).

Helpline: 0845 077 2290 or 0207 713 7486 via mobile

Email: info@arc-uk.org

Bliss - the special care baby charity

www.bliss.org.uk

Support, advice and information for families of babies in intensive care and special care, including in situations of loss and for future pregnancies.

Helpline: 0500 618 140 Email: hello@bliss.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Supporting families when a baby or child dies and when a child is bereaved, including support in another pregnancy.

Support and information: Freephone 0800 02 888 40 or 01494 568900

Email: support@childbereavementuk.org

Miscarriage Association

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Support and information for those affected by pregnancy loss, including help during another pregnancy.

Network of support groups and telephone contacts throughout the UK.

Helpline: 01924 200 799 Email: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk

More to life

www.infertilitynetworkuk.com/more_to_life/about_us_mtl

Support for involuntarily childless couples.

Helpline: 0121 323 5025 Email: admin@moretolife.co.uk

Winston's Wish

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

Other useful addresses

Baby Mailing Preference Service (MPS)

www.mpsonline.org.uk/bmps

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

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

Tel: 020 7291 3310 Email: bmps@dma.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.

We believe many babies' deaths could be prevented with better care and information. We raise vital funds for research to understand why babies die and how to save lives. We also campaign to make addressing the tragedy of too many baby deaths a government priority nationally.

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

Enquiries:

t: 020 7436 7940

e: info@uk-sands.org

Write to us:

Victoria Charity Centre

11 Belgrave Road

London, SW1V 1RB

Website:

www.uk-sands.org