

Returning to work after the death of your baby



Third edition, Sands 2013

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“On the day I left we all had coffee together and some people gave me things for the baby. We discussed when I’d bring him in to see them. I never dreamt that things could turn out like this.” Mum



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Thinking about returning to work

This booklet covers things you may need to think about before you go back to work. It also contains information about your right to time off, and where to find out about financial benefits you may be entitled to after the death of your baby.

The decision about when to go back to work may depend on how you are feeling, your physical health, finances, and work-related factors.

- ▶ Mothers who get paid maternity leave may not need to think about returning to work for some time.
- ▶ Fathers and partners, and mothers who don't get paid leave, may have to start work again fairly soon.

For some people, going back to work seems very daunting. It's the last thing they feel like doing. For others, the prospect of returning to a routine and having something else to focus on seems like a good idea.

Nobody can tell you the "right" time to go back to work, but it may help to talk it over with someone you trust. You may also want to talk to your GP or to someone on the Sands Helpline. Please see How Sands can help on page 17 for contact details for Sands.

Planning your return

When you are ready to think about going back to work, you need to contact your employer, if you haven't done so already, to discuss the practical details. You could also send them a copy of the Sands booklet *Information for employers: Helping a bereaved parent return to work*.

You may want to ask if you can go back to work gradually, starting with fewer hours or only a few days a week. Employers have a legal obligation to consider properly any request you make for part-time hours, though they don't have to agree. You could also ask if you can do some work from home, if this is an option for your job.

Once you have agreed a date when you will go back to work, you may find it helpful to talk to your manager or employer about how you are feeling and what might help you settle back in. You could also visit your workplace and have a coffee with your colleagues before you go back.

Before you visit or return to work, you might like to write a letter or email to your manager or colleagues about your baby. This may be easier than repeating your story to many different people later. Unless they have experienced the death of a baby themselves, most people will have no idea of how you feel. They are unlikely to realise the impact that the death of your baby has had on you and on your family.

You may want to tell them your baby's name (if you decided to name your baby), why he or she died (if you know this), and how you and your family are feeling and coping. It may also be helpful to tell them whether you want to talk about your baby. Colleagues may feel unsure whether to mention him or her unless you "give them permission". They may worry about upsetting you.

If you feel unable to write a letter or email yourself, you could ask someone to write it for you. Tell them what you would like to say and whom to send it to.

"I was really worried about going to back to work and how my colleagues would react to me. I worried that I would break down in floods of tears if I had to tell them face-to-face about what had happened to my baby. So I decided to write to them first. I am sure it helped to make things a little easier when I went back." Mum

Being back at work

The early days back at work can be overwhelming. It can be daunting to leave the security of your home. You may also be worried about how you will manage your job. If you can, it may help to start with easier, more routine tasks. Be gentle with yourself. Learn to recognise your limits. Try not to put pressure on yourself to do more than you can. Take time out if you need a break.

You may find that the routine of work is helpful, and that it is a relief to have some structure to the days and weeks. However, your life and your priorities may also have changed a lot since your baby died. Things that once seemed essential may not seem so important now. You may find it hard to feel motivated at work.

Grief is tiring; you may be surprised at how exhausted you feel. You may find it hard to concentrate and remember things. You may find that you are very sensitive to the things that people say or don't say, or that you

lack confidence about making decisions. Some parents become frustrated with themselves and anxious that they can no longer cope with work, but all these reactions are the normal effects of grief and should pass with time.

One day at a time

Grief tends to come in waves. It's normal to have good days and bad days. Some parents feel guilty if they have days when they cope well at work. But coping well doesn't mean that you no longer care, or that you have forgotten your baby.

You may worry about breaking down in front of your colleagues, but crying can be a helpful release. It may also help your colleagues to realise that you are grieving, even if you appear to be all right most of the time.

If you suddenly feel overwhelmed, take a break if you can: maybe go for a short walk or find a quiet space to be alone. You may also find it helpful to find somewhere private to talk to a sympathetic colleague, phone a family member, or phone the Sands Helpline. If things are really getting on top of you, it may be sensible to go home for the rest of the day.

"It made such a difference, just being able to talk to someone on the Sands Helpline while I was at work. It helped me to get through some difficult days." Dad

If you find that being back at work is simply too difficult, talk to your manager or employer about having some more time off. You could also talk to your GP and see if you can have sick leave.

Colleagues

Many bereaved parents are nervous about how people at work will react to them. Some people may say insensitive things because they are shocked, or just because they don't know what to say. Others may be very supportive and willing to listen if you want to talk.

"The thought of going back to work was actually worse than being there. It did feel strange at first but everyone was so warm and welcoming and this really helped me to settle back in." Mum

If people are insensitive or don't understand, try not to judge them too harshly. They may simply not know how to react.

There may be someone at work who is expecting a baby. Try not to feel bad if their pregnancy upsets you. This is perfectly normal. Your loss may be distressing for them too.

There may also be someone who has been on maternity or paternity leave and returns to show off their new baby. Just as it is natural for you to have mixed feelings about other people's new babies, it is natural for them to want to share their excitement.

All these situations can be really difficult. Try to be gentle with yourself and take time out if you need to.

Photographs at work

Many bereaved parents find it comforting to keep a photo of their baby on their desk or in their locker. A photo may also help colleagues to appreciate how important your baby is to you.

However, a photo may distress some people, especially if they are expecting their own baby. It is a reminder that not all babies are born healthy or alive. You may also feel upset by other people's family and baby photos. Although it is far from easy, try to understand why colleagues and friends want their photos, and try not to be too disappointed if they don't react to yours as you had hoped.

Some bereaved parents prefer not to have a photo of their baby at work. Instead they have something that symbolises their baby for them, for example, a bunch of flowers or a plant, a picture, a special ornament, a polished stone, or perhaps something with their baby's name on it.

Dates and anniversaries

Certain dates and the days leading up to them may be particularly difficult at work. These can include the anniversary of your baby's due date, and of his or her death. Many bereaved parents feel particularly sad at family festivals such as Christmas and on other occasions when families often get together, as well as on special days like Mother's Day and Father's Day.

You may want to consider booking a day's leave on dates that you know are likely to be especially difficult for you. This can take the pressure off and perhaps give you an opportunity to do something different or visit a place that has special meaning for you.

Rights and financial benefits

The following information is correct as of July 2013, but rights and benefits may change. You may want to check the websites on page 19 to ensure that you have the most up-to-date details.

What are you entitled to?

Whether you have a right to time off work or financial benefits depends on many things, including the length of the pregnancy, whether your baby was stillborn or lived for a short time after the birth, whether you are employed, and your earnings before the birth.

Financial benefits

It may seem strange and perhaps upsetting to think about claiming benefits when your baby has died. However, many bereaved families find themselves facing unexpected financial strain. So it is important to find out about all the benefits to which you may be entitled.

Maternity and paternity benefits can be complicated. They are administered by several government agencies and, in some cases, by employers.

You will find all the information you need in the Money Advice Service's leaflet *Late miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal death – A guide to the financial help available*. You should have received this at the hospital or from your community midwife or health visitor. You can also get a copy from the Sands shop or our Helpline (see page 17).

If your baby was born dead before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy

The experience and the grief that parents feel when a baby dies after 14 or 16 weeks of pregnancy can be much the same as when a baby is stillborn.

But for legal purposes, when a baby is born dead before 24 completed weeks of pregnancy, this is called a late miscarriage. Sadly, you are not entitled to maternity or paternity rights or benefits if you have had a late miscarriage. But you do still have some entitlements.

Mothers are entitled to:

▶ **Sick Leave.** Sick Leave taken immediately after a miscarriage is likely to be “protected” in the same way as Sick Leave for a pregnancy-related illness. As with other Sick Leave, you need a Fit Note (previously called a Sick Note) from your GP.

You should not be treated unfavourably for being off sick following a miscarriage, and it is good practice for your employer to record the leave separately from other Sick Leave, so that it does not count towards your sickness record. However, if you are off sick for some time, it may be arguable that this is no longer pregnancy related and you should seek advice if you are worried.

▶ **Sick Pay.** If you have had a late miscarriage, you are entitled to the same benefits as any other employee who is off sick. You will at least get Statutory Sick Pay – this is paid for up to 28 weeks, or more if your contract of employment allows it, or income-related benefits from the state.

▶ **Compassionate Leave** and **Time Off for Dependants**. If you are not sick, your employer may give you Compassionate Leave or Time Off for Dependants (TOFD). You are legally entitled to TOFD in certain circumstances, but your entitlement to Compassionate Leave depends on your contract of employment and your employer's policy.

Fathers or partners may be entitled to:

▶ **Sick Leave** and **Sick Pay**, **Compassionate Leave** or **Time Off for Dependants** from your employer.

A mother's female partner has the same rights and entitlements as a father.

If your baby was stillborn after 24 completed weeks of pregnancy OR if your baby was born alive at any stage of pregnancy and then died

Mothers are entitled to:

▶ **52 weeks' Maternity Leave.** You should normally have told your employer that you were pregnant before the 24th completed week of your pregnancy.

If you gave birth before your Maternity Leave started, your leave starts the day after you gave birth.

Mothers may be entitled to:

▶ **Maternity Pay** from your employer, **Maternity Allowance**, or income-related benefits from the state.

Fathers or partners may be entitled to:

▶ One or two consecutive weeks' **Paternity Leave** from your employer. You should normally have informed your employer that you planned to take Paternity Leave before the 24th completed week of the pregnancy.

▶ **Sick Leave** and **Sick Pay**, **Compassionate Leave** or **Time Off for Dependants** from your employer.

A mother's female partner has the same rights and entitlements as a father.

See page 19 for sources of more information about rights and benefits.

More information and support

Sands has a wide range of support services available for parents, other members of the family, grandparents, and other children. Many people 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.

The following pages include further details of Sands support resources and contact details of other charities and organisations that may be helpful to you following the death of your baby.

How Sands can help

Sands is a national charity offering emotional support and practical help when a baby dies during pregnancy, at birth or shortly afterwards.

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 it is needed, 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, especially grandparents and other children. Many people 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 us 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 local to you?	helpline@uk-sands.org
Do you want information and books to read?	www.uk-sands.org
Do you want to email us for general information?	info@uk-sands.org
Do you want to make a donation or fundraise?	fundraising@uk-sands.org
Do you want to talk to someone in Sands head office?	020 7436 7940
Do you want to write to us?	Sands, 3rd Floor, 28 Portland Place, London, W1B 1LY

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 order these from our website or by phone, as well as our *Always Loved Never Forgotten* memory boxes, our books for children and other resources.

Sands booklets

Another pregnancy – for parents whose baby has died

Deciding about a post mortem - Information for parents

For family and friends: how you can help

Information and support for grandparents

Information for employers

Mainly for fathers

Returning to work after the death of your baby

Sands support services

Saying goodbye to your baby

Sexual relationships after the death of your baby

Supporting children when a baby has died

When a baby dies before labour begins

To order online please go to www.uk-sands.org/Shop

Where to get more information about rights and benefits

Money Advice Service

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

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk.

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

"Late miscarriage / Stillborn / Died shortly after birth"

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 Select **Benefits**

Northern Ireland: 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

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

Useful addresses

Other charities that can offer support

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 bereaved families.

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

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavement.org.uk

Supporting families when a child dies and when a child is bereaved.

Support and information: 01494 568900

Email: support@childbereavementuk.org

Miscarriage Association

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 200799 Email: info@miscarriageassociation.org.uk

TAMBA Bereavement Support Group

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

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

Helpline: 0845 203 0405 Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

To prevent baby-related mailings

Baby Mailing Preference Service (MPS)

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

Notes

About Sands

Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity, was founded in 1978 by a small group of bereaved parents 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 practical help. Sands today 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 with trained befrienders
- ▶ Online forum and message boards enabling bereaved families to connect with others
- ▶ Website and a wide range of leaflets, 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 undertake a comprehensive programme of training, workshops and talks for health professionals based on the Sands Guidelines which 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

In spite of medical advances, the shocking reality is that each day in the UK there are eleven babies who are stillborn and six who die within the first 28 days of life. Through our Why17? campaign, we are raising vital funds for research, while challenging government to address these individual tragedies as a matter of urgency and 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.

Contact Sands:

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

t: 020 7436 7940

e: info@uk-sands.org

w. www.uk-sands.org

Support:

t: 020 7436 5881

e: helpline@uk-sands.org

Sands message boards:

www.sandsforum.org