

**red  
nose**  
grief and loss



## Decisions

When your baby has died



for 24 hour support please call

**1300 308 307**

for more information visit our website

**[rednosegriefandloss.com.au](http://rednosegriefandloss.com.au)**

# Decisions

When your baby has died

You are reading this pamphlet because your baby, or babies, has died or will soon die. In the next few hours and days you will be faced with decisions that you may find difficult, especially as you struggle to understand what has happened. Support is available and we hope this pamphlet will give you information about the choices you have at this difficult time.

## Your baby has died

The death of a baby is a devastating event for a family. The normal rules do not apply. You may experience confusing and conflicting emotions. You may worry about what is normal and what to expect. Initially you may feel hesitant and scared about what your baby will look like. The staff at your hospital will be able to describe what you can expect. They can support and advise you during the birth and in the first hours with your baby.

## Spending time with your baby

Your baby has been part of your life from conception to birth. The staff can advise you about spending time with your baby in hospital. Some parents choose not to meet and spend time with their baby. Staff will accept whatever decision you make. Some families choose not to see their baby at the time of birth, but after leaving hospital decide they wish to spend time with their baby. If you are uncertain about this decision, you need to request that the hospital cares for your baby until you are ready.

## You can see and hold your baby

Don't be afraid to tell staff if you want to see and hold your baby. You may be able to bath and dress your baby, take your baby for a walk or even take your baby home for a period of time. You may want to change your baby's nappy or wrap your

baby in a blanket. Don't be afraid to do things that you would do for a living baby. It is often helpful for your other children to meet their brother or sister. You may wish to invite close relatives and friends to the hospital so they can meet your baby. This may help them to support you in your grief. You may also need to have time without your baby. Ask the staff to care for your baby when you are ready for a break.

## You can take photographs of your baby

Many hospitals have a camera and will help you take photos, or a family member may bring a camera to the hospital. Take as many photos as you wish – they may become very precious to you. Don't worry about what the photographs will look like. Some families ask a professional photographer to take photographs of their baby. The hospital may be able to recommend a particular photographer other families have used. As your baby may have some bruising on the skin, black and white photographs may be softer. Colour photographs can be converted to black and white. You may find it hard to look at the photographs, especially in the beginning, however having these mementoes can bring comfort later.

## You can create other memories of your child

In addition to taking photographs, there are many ways to ensure you have keepsakes to remember your baby. You can record your baby's length and weight. You can ask staff to do this for you. Hospitals may offer the opportunity to make plaster mouldings or prints of your baby's hands and feet or take a lock of hair.

## Naming your baby

Choosing a name for your baby may be important. This can be difficult if you are unsure of your baby's gender, but there are many gender-neutral names that can be chosen. Even if you are not required to register your baby's birth, it may help you, your family and friends to call your baby by name. Some religions offer baptism or blessings for babies who have died. There may be a social worker or pastoral care worker at your hospital who can assist you in making these arrangements. If you would like a Naming Certificate, you can contact Red Nose Grief and Loss who can provide these.



## Birth registration

States and Territories may have varying requirements around registering a birth so check with your hospital about these. In Victoria, for example, there is a legal requirement for the birth of your baby to be registered when there are signs of life at birth or stillborn when the gestation is greater than 20 weeks, or a birth weight of more than 400 grams if gestation is not known. Your health practitioners will give you the relevant documents.

## Finding a reason

You may be offered the option of having an autopsy. It is important to discuss this option and clearly state your wishes. An autopsy may give you information about the reason your baby died and this may help you plan future pregnancies. It is possible that an autopsy finds no known cause for your baby's death. Although this may be distressing, you will be able to read and discuss the autopsy report that will be forwarded to your doctor.

## Leaving hospital

Many parents find that leaving hospital without their baby is one of the hardest things to do. There are choices you can make, depending on whether or not your baby's death is to be registered. You can arrange to take your baby home with you or organise for a funeral company to take your baby into its care. Most hospitals will take responsibility for making arrangements for your baby if you choose not to do it yourself.

## Going home

You may find that going home is a difficult and confronting time. There may be reminders of your baby, such as the nursery or baby capsule. You may need to prepare yourself if well-meaning friends and family have packed these items away. Some parents find it sad but comforting to touch, see and smell the items that remind them of their baby. If having these reminders is difficult, you can put them away until you are ready. People express their grief in different ways. Many find they cry a great deal in the early days and months, but not everyone expresses their grief in this way.

## Financial assistance

In certain circumstances, financial assistance may be available from the Family Assistance Office. You can contact the Family Assistance Office on 13 61 50. It may be necessary to record your baby's birth with Medicare in order to receive reimbursement for expenses. You may need to prepare yourself for the inevitability of receiving accounts from doctors, hospitals and others after your baby has died.

## Choices about burial, cremation, funeral or memorial services

If the birth and death of your baby is not registered, you may bury your baby wherever you wish – in a place of your choice, such as the garden at home or in a cemetery, or you may have your baby cremated. If the birth and death of your baby is registered, your baby must be buried in a cemetery or be cremated. Many families decide to have a funeral or memorial service to commemorate their baby's birth and death. Making these decisions and arrangements is a special thing that you can do for your baby. It is important that you arrange the event in the way that you want.

## Choosing a funeral company

Families can make their own arrangements for burial, cremation, a funeral or memorial service, or they can engage a funeral company. Most funeral companies provide information, advice and support to families, as well as appropriately sized coffins. Photographs and videos can help you remember the event. There is no hurry to make decisions about burial, cremation and services – your hospital will be able to take care of your baby as long as you keep them informed. Costs for funerals may vary significantly. Some hospitals arrange memorial services for families. Enquire at the hospital before making your decision.



## Choosing a cemetery

Many cemeteries have special children's areas. These are often very colourful and can be a comforting place to visit. If you choose to bury your baby or keep cremated remains of your baby at a cemetery, you may be able to place a plaque and decorate your baby's grave with memorabilia. Cemeteries have different policies about this and these may impact on your choice of cemetery.

## Support when you need it

Red Nose Grief and Loss provides information and support to families whose babies die suddenly and unexpectedly from any cause. Qualified grief counsellors and trained parent supporters are available to support you through this difficult time. The service is free and available 24 hours a day.

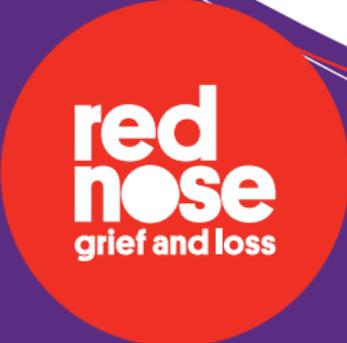
Red Nose Grief and Loss facilitates a range of support groups for bereaved families. Remember you have time to make decisions that you are comfortable with.

Your hospital can contact Red Nose Grief and Loss on your behalf or you can contact them for information or support.

24 hour

Bereavement support please call

**1300 308 307**

The logo for Red Nose Grief and Loss is a red circle containing the text "red nose" in white, with "grief and loss" in a smaller white font below it.

**red  
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grief and loss

For further information or to access  
Red Nose Grief and Loss Services

email [support@rednose.com.au](mailto:support@rednose.com.au)

visit [rednosegriefandloss.com.au](http://rednosegriefandloss.com.au)

Red Nose Grief and Loss was formerly known as SIDS and Kids