

Surviving till birth

Somewhere there is a field
of lovely Forget Me Nots,
Delicate blooms for lives lost too soon
Echoing *forget Me Not*



When a baby has died

No matter how deep your grief and how great your pain, remember that you are not alone. First Candle, as well as others who have traveled this road before you, are here to help you through the difficult time following the death of your baby.

When a baby is stillborn, hopes and dreams are shattered and lives are forever changed. Initial feelings of shock and confusion are combined with questions:

What happened?

Why me?

Many times, the lack of answers to these questions adds to the overwhelming feelings of grief and helplessness.

These intense emotions are real and a normal part of grieving. Grief is a process of trying to cope with your loss and make meaning out of life without your baby. Grieving is not easy. It is long, unpredictable and requires a lot of patience. But it is necessary if you are to work through the pain toward healing.

Whether you have just learned that your baby has died or you have delivered a stillborn baby, you are most likely overwhelmed and in shock. Decisions are difficult. We hope the information contained in this brochure will provide you with information you may not be aware of and, in some small way, help you with those decisions.

We understand that cultural beliefs can vary. Please use this information in a way that fits with your beliefs and feels comfortable to you.

Time to say goodbye

Having time to say hello before you say goodbye can be a very important first step as you try to make sense out of what has happened. We encourage you to request a quiet place where you and other family members can spend as much time with your baby as you need.

Seeing your baby may make his or her death more real and can help you as you grieve. Naming your baby can help you view your baby as part of the family. Involve brothers and sisters if you have other children. Consider grandparents, friends and other family members as well.

Many parents find it comforting to hold and rock the baby. Others find comfort in making memories with things like photographs, foot and hand prints, locks of hair, etc. Many hospitals offer photography services, but consider having family, friends or an outside photographer take pictures and video if this is what you want. As you slowly heal, these memories can help keep your baby alive in your heart and in your family.

Dress and bathe your baby if this fits with your beliefs. If there were special outfits you were looking forward to dressing your baby in, or other special items, have someone bring them to the hospital. Do not worry about what others say or think, this is your special time. Quiet your mind and listen to your heart. .. there are no right or wrong choices.

Whatever your needs,
do not be afraid to ask.
You and your baby
deserve this time.



What about an autopsy?

If there is no obvious reason for your baby's death, you may want to consider an autopsy, placental exam or other test to help you find out why your baby died. The information gathered is helpful for many reasons. It may provide answers or insight to some of your questions, like "Why did it happen?" and "Will it happen again?" Even if all of your questions are not answered, there may be comfort in knowing that as much as possible was learned about your baby. With your permission, this information can be shared with researchers to help other babies in the future.

Policies regarding autopsies can vary from hospital to hospital. This may be why more than 50 percent of stillbirth deaths remain unexplained. If you are not offered an autopsy and would like one, ask to talk with a social worker. He or she can explain to you what your options are.

Agreeing to an autopsy does not prevent you from spending time with your baby or choosing to have a funeral, memorial service, cremation or burial. Most parents find that having this information is valuable as they try to deal with the impact of their loss and begin to move forward.



**Please know that
your baby will
be treated respectfully.**

Funerals & Memorials

Planning a service to remember your baby can help you grieve and let your family and friends share in your grief and comfort you. As difficult as it may be, try and be an integral part of planning this service. Remember, there are no right or wrong choices, simply do whatever gives you and your family the most comfort.

If the cost of burying or memorializing your baby is a problem, talk with your funeral home director. There may be assistance available to you.

Remember to ask about support services.

Many hospitals have trained staff, including nurses, social workers and clergy that can help you and your family.

Ask for a list of resources available in your community.

With your permission, the hospital staff can also share your information with others in the community who are available to help.

Many brochures, books, videos and other materials are available to help parents and families through this difficult time. The Internet can also be a great source of support from the comfort of your own home. In addition to resources provided by your hospital or doctor, CJFirst Candle can help connect you with support groups, peer support and other resources to help you on your grief journey.

With each rising of the moon
and setting of the sun...

Forget *me* not.



Going home

Leaving the hospital can be difficult. You may have a sad and empty feeling leaving without your baby. Seeing the nursery you had prepared or items that your friends and family had lovingly bought will be very hard too. Sometimes well-meaning family or friends will want to remove these items before you come home. Let them know your wishes. Many parents find it helpful to go through the baby's things together, at a time when they feel ready.

Seeing close friends and family for the first time may be hard. Seeing pregnant mothers and babies can also be painful. Your loss is so new, be patient with yourself. Know that in time the pain will lessen, but holidays and anniversaries of your baby's expected due date, birth date or death date can bring new waves of grief.

You may experience a wide range of emotions, from shock and numbness to anger and guilt. These are all normal feelings. It is nature's way of protecting you until your mind and body is ready to cope.

Talk with family and friends. Be honest and let them know how you feel. Cry when you need to. Don't hesitate to get professional counseling if you think it will help.



Coping with grief

It is important to remember that grief takes time. Be patient, take life one moment, one hour, one day at a time. While you may never 'get over' the death of your baby, you can learn to live with your loss. Healing is an ongoing process, it does not happen overnight, but it will happen.

Following are a few suggestions that can help you survive some of the difficult times:

Take care of yourself Eat well. Get plenty of rest. Stay well physically so that you can continue to heal emotionally.

Express yourself in a way that fits who you are. Talk about your baby, your feelings, your fears, your grief. Keep a diary, write a journal, create a flower garden or other special project that has meaning to you. These things can help the overwhelming grief that comes with keeping feelings bottled up inside.

Explore available resources. There are many books, articles, poems and videos that can provide information, guidance and support. There is a wealth of information on the Internet as well.

Build a support network. This may be your family, your friends or your faith community. You may want to contact a support group for parents who have experienced a similar loss, to share your story and feelings and to learn from others who have also "been there".

Try and be understanding of your partner's needs. There may be times when it's difficult to comfort each other. Being sensitive to your partner's needs and finding others you can lean on during difficult times can help.

You are not alone

CJ FirstCandle and its national network of members and partners are here to help. It is our goal to make sure that grieving families receive compassionate grief support and have access to the most current information and materials available.

Grief counselors are available at 800-221-7437. If it is difficult for you to make the phone call, have a friend or family member call.

Our services are available to anyone affected by the death of a baby. Many parents find comfort in peer support. CJ FirstCandle can help connect you with another parent who has had a similar experience and is willing to help.

CJ FirstCandle is also deeply committed to supporting research and advocacy efforts that will address stillbirth issues and help find ways to prevent stillbirth.

**Remember, you are not alone.
We are here to light a path through the
darkness toward hope and healing . . .
please let us know what we can do.**



Where do I go from here?

We hope this brochure has been of some help or comfort to you in the midst of your devastating loss. First Candle has created a Stillbirth Grief section on our website to provide guidance and answers to some of the more pressing questions you will no doubt have in the coming days. Bereaved parents who have been where you are share their personal experiences on topics such as funerals and memorial services, what to do with memorial contributions and where to go for support.

www.cjfirstcandle.org

Photography services

Most parents tell us that photos taken at the hospital are among their most cherished memories. **Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep** is a national network of photographers who provide their services free of charge. You can locate a photographer near you at www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org.



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Saving babies. Supporting families.