

Some useful suggestions for meeting with Bereaved Parents:

- Introduce yourself to the parent(s).
- Express sympathy:
- I /We are sorry to hear about your baby; it is such a sad and difficult time for all of you.
- Refer to the baby by name, ask what they called the baby if you don't already know.
- Explain your role with regard to their other children in school/class.
- It is important for you to be sensitive and if appropriate you should discuss with the family what has happened, their immediate concerns e.g. regarding other children.
- Follow up on any immediate issues raised by the family.
- Offer to attend the baby's prayer service/removal (if this is an option)

Common Signs Of Grief In Children

- May need to tell and re-tell the story
- May be preoccupied with death
- May be afraid to be alone
- May have trouble concentrating
- May have periods of difficult behaviour
- May have periods of withdrawal
- May react as if nothing has happened
- May be sporadic in that they may be very upset but then quickly revert to normal activities
- May experience difficulty separating from their parents on arrival into school
- May become the class bully or the class clown
- May regress to bed wetting
- May have headaches / stomach aches
- May have difficulty sleeping or may have nightmares
- May reject old friends/ withdraw or act out.

The child must be allowed to express his/her emotions, concerns or worries if he/she wants to.



Carmichael House, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7.

Telephone 01 872 6996 Website www.isands.ie Email info@isands.ie

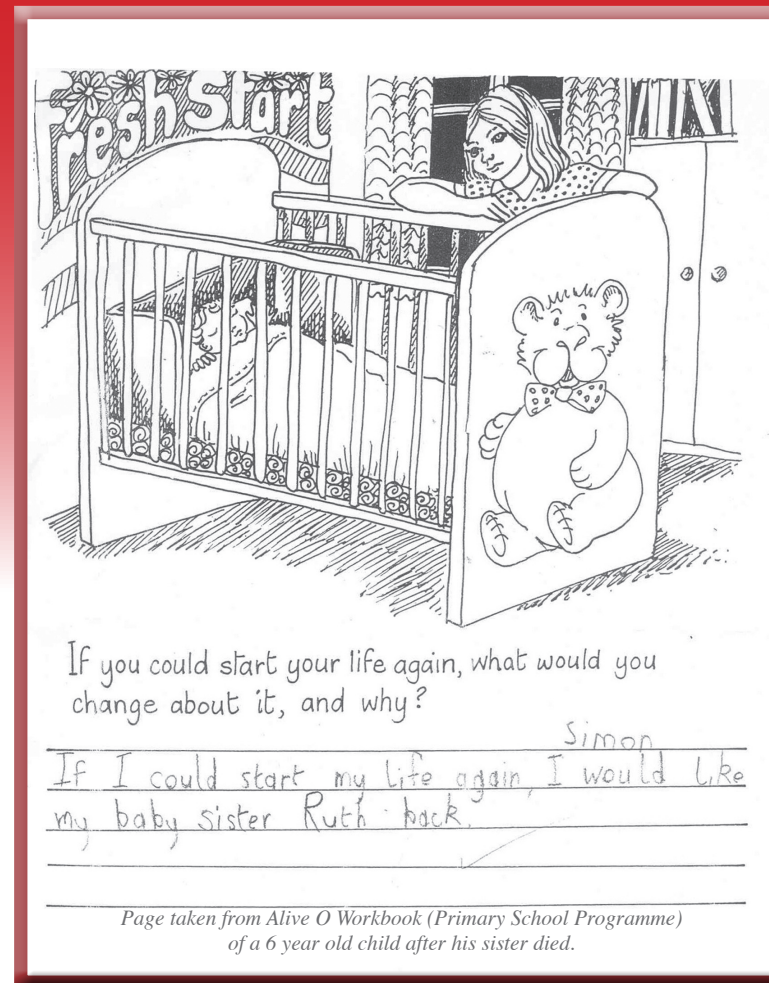
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Teachers

Parents and their experience

The death of a baby in a family is a devastating experience. Parents may be told some time in advance of the birth that the baby has already died in the womb, will die before birth, or will die shortly after birth. Coping with each of those situations is very difficult but particularly tough if there are other children because their needs have to be addressed as well as the parents. In the past it was considered bad practice to include children in the experience of death. Nowadays best practice suggests including them in all aspects of the experience of death and grief. This usually means that children will have seen, held and had photos taken with their brother or sister who has died. Some parents take their baby home overnight to allow the family to create some few memories before a funeral/ blessing or burial service

Below is an extract from our book -A Little Lifetime for Bereaved Parents & Families:

This Book, produced by ISANDS, is to help families deal with the death of a baby and is given to them in Maternity Hospitals/Units.

Telling your Children

Many parents worry about what to tell their children and how to help them when their baby brother or sister dies.

Children should be told the news as soon as possible, otherwise they may feel excluded and rejected; there is always the possibility that they will hear from somebody else. Their imagination of what is being kept from them can be far worse than the reality.

Try to give a clear, simple explanation for the baby's death in a way that is appropriate to the child's age; even young children can understand some aspects of death. You don't have to give all the details at once, they will ask more questions in their own time.

It helps children if you are open and honest. That includes saying, I don't know when that is the honest answer to one of their questions. If children discover that they have been told something that is untrue, they become confused.

It is better not to say that God wanted the baby for Himself, as the child may think that God will want them or you too. To say the baby has gone to sleep can cause children to fear sleep. Do not say "we have lost the baby", young children may take you literally and not understand.

Children don't always show their feelings immediately. It may take them a while to express their feelings, and they may still be talking about the baby and about what happened months or even years later.

Role of the School

This can present a very difficult situation for a teacher/s and sometimes it can seem easier to ignore that it has happened at all rather than addressing sensitive issues. However, a teacher can play a very important role in helping a child through a difficult and sometimes frightening experience of death and grief. It must be acknowledged that not everybody is comfortable with this area for a variety of reasons.

Our book ISANDS Guidelines for Professionals outlines various ways to help and is available from main ISANDS (Irish Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Society) Office. There is other information you might find helpful on the ISANDS website (www.isands.ie)

If some teachers find this difficult, it is important that they receive support. If they feel unable to address the topic then some individual within the school should be designated to do so.

However, a teacher can play a very important role in helping a child through a difficult and sometimes frightening experience of death and grief.

It is useful to discuss with each family what they would like in regard to sharing the news of their babies death with the school and others. Attention to the opinions and requests of the each child in the family should be respected.

Children can spread news very quickly, often the information is incorrect, exaggerated and unreliable

If a school has a home/school links teacher she/he is may be of benefit in dealing appropriately with this situation. He/she could liaise with bereaved parents and gain access to the correct information. Together they could make a plan on how best the school can serve the family in these circumstances. A plan may be drawn up on how the classmates of sibling can be informed. If there is no HSL teacher in situ then the principal or class teacher of sibling or the teacher responsible for RSE in the school could fulfil this function. Involving the class teacher is beneficial.

All teachers who come into contact with the bereaved family should be made aware of the baby's death and told how the child is being supported by the school. This would include the Learning Support teacher, S.N.A., office staff, coaches etc.