

- they feel like it; ask questions, when the questions come into their heads. They will also expect to get answers. Talking when you think there is a need to talk does not usually work so well.
- Older children will sometimes be reluctant to talk about the baby. They can understand the full extent of the death of their brother or sister and they will be going through their own grief. They may not want to upset their parents by talking about the baby. It is good for them to express their feelings and sometimes they may prefer to talk to a close relative or friend.
- Some children want to care for you as well as be cared for. Try to accept their love and support without asking them to be brave or grown up.
- Children need to understand how you are feeling (sad, upset, angry, irritable) and why. They need to know that you loved the baby, that you are missing the baby, and that the baby won't come back. They also need to know that you love them, and that you are not sad, upset, angry or irritable because of them.
- Many parents find it extremely hard to support and care for their children while they are feeling so low and in need of support themselves. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and family friends can all help.
- It's important to talk to your child's teacher. It can help if children have the chance to talk in school about what has happened, and also if other children are helped to understand. There may be times when your child needs someone to turn to at school, such as a close friend or teacher.
- Sometimes parents don't get the chance or perhaps decide not to bring their other children to see the baby. These children will still have feelings of grief and they may feel angry because they were not included. Try to explain why it was not possible for them to see the baby, and help them express their feelings.
- Even after some time has passed you may help your child to make some memories. You could do something special together as a way of remembering. Perhaps you could both make up an album of photographs, flowers, cards, or drawings that your child has done. You could help them plant a tree or some flowers for the baby. Including them in this way can help them in their grief.



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(Leaflet Telling Your Children)

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Why will no one tell me?

What's happened?

Where's my mammy gone?

Why is granny staying?

Why can't I go with them?

Where is my new baby brother or sister?

Why do I feel scared?

What's happening now?

Why is mammy crying?

Why will no one tell me?

*These are a few of the questions asked by
some children.*



*Telling Your
Children*

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.

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.

Involving your Children

It is particularly important that your children come to see you in hospital and assure themselves that you are all right. They may have been worried about you – all children sense sadness and tension, and they usually know when something is wrong. It helps your children if you involve them in everything that is happening, and this includes bringing them to see their brother or sister. This may be a difficult decision for you but it will help them understand what has happened.

Every family is different. The choice of how you involve your children when your baby dies is yours alone. The Hospital Staff will guide and support you with your choice. Don't be afraid to discuss your concerns with them.

The following are some points for you to consider:

- Children of all ages should be given the choice to see or hold the baby if they want to.
- If the child does not want to see the baby, ask if he or she would like to see a photograph.
- Children who have spent time with their baby brother or sister will have real memories to help them through their grief.
- Your child might have a toy or gift to give to the baby; this helps

them to feel part of what is happening.

- Children can help pick or buy flowers for the baby's funeral.
- Older children may like to take an active part in the funeral by participating in readings, music and poetry.
- If you have children at school, it is important to remember to inform the teacher/school what has happened. If you do not feel up to this right now, you could ask a relative or friend to do so.

You can also download a leaflet from this website for your son/daughter's Teachers which might be helpful to the Teacher/School as they may not have experienced a loss of a sibling before.

You can also download a leaflet for your son or daughter from this website. Please read through it first to make sure you are comfortable with what it says.

Children and Grief

Children's reaction to death depends on their age and stage of development. Even very young children often understand much more than adults may realise. They will be aware of your sadness and distress even if you try to hide it. Older children will have a clearer understanding of what death means and their experience of grief is similar to that of an adult. It is important for parents to realise that sometimes their own grief leaves them unable to help and support their children. It may help them to talk to a relative or friend.

- Many children feel guilty that their brother's or sister's death must somehow have been their fault. Sometimes children don't say that they feel responsible but they may become very anxious and unhappy. It's hard for them to explain the death to themselves in any other way. They may remember saying at some time, "I don't want this baby", or "I wish the baby would go away". They need to know that thoughts like these cannot cause a baby's death. They may need a lot of reassurance about this.
- It will help if you can talk to them about why your baby died, and if there is no known reason, explain this honestly.
- Children need reassurance that they are not going to die, and that their normal, everyday life can go on. Some think that death may be infectious or 'catching' and become very fearful, especially if they get something like a cold or a stomach upset.
- Children can switch their feelings on and off. They can be sad one minute and happy the next – but that doesn't mean their feelings are not genuine or just as intense as yours.
- Children need to be able to show their feelings when they want to, talk when