

What Family & Friends Can Do

The death of a baby is one of the most painful experiences that any parent can have. They will need time to grieve, as they would after the death of any loved one. The parents can never replace the son or daughter that has died. The great joy and expectation of the new arrival has turned into sadness and despair.

Everyone is affected by this baby's death and our first instinct is to avoid it. We would rather not think or talk about death. The worst thing you can do is to ignore the fact that a baby has died. Being unsupported by family and friends only further isolates parents in their grief. They might mistake your silence for insensitivity or disinterest. They feel very let down. This baby mattered to them and it helps to know he or she mattered to others as well.

Be honest with your own feelings - say how upset you are at the baby's death and use the baby's name when talking. This will allow them to open up to you. You do not have to do much to help grieving people - just being there, listening or sharing tears can mean a lot.

Comments like "I am sorry about your baby", "I know this is a very sad time for you and I'd like to help" or simply "I don't know what to say" can be enough to say.

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Make Contact Send a card, flowers for the parents or a small posy or wreath for the baby's funeral.

ISANDS have an appropriate range of cards and booklets suitable for sending to parents and families to mark the baby's birth/death, anniversary and family and other occasions. You can view the collection at [Memories Collection](#) or by calling the main line number 01 8726996 for a catalogue.

Visit the hospital or home. Most parents need and want to talk about their baby. Don't be afraid to use the baby's name and ask questions if the parents feel like talking. Ask to see the baby or a photograph if the parents have one. If you find they are too sad or withdrawn and want to be alone, say you'll call again another time - and do!

Never minimise the loss of this baby even if the parents are young and are likely to have another child, don't use the cliché line "you're young, you'll have another".

This baby was special. No child can ever be replaced by another. They have lost a whole future of experience with this baby - the first smile, first steps, starting school, teenage years, and marriage

. The parents' pain will lessen but the sense of loss can last a lifetime.

Offer practical help - without interference. Provide a few hot meals or offer to do the school runs or baby-sit (if they have other children) Remember that mental and physical energy is severely reduced in the early stages of grief. Be sensitive when helping out - don't take over completely. Parents still need to feel in control of their lives. They might appreciate some help as it gives them a little time to themselves. Specific offers of help are much better than a vague "Let me know if I can do anything".

It is quite common for parents to feel "guilt" after a baby dies, this is a normal part of the grief process. Allow parents to express their guilt but don't add to it or take from it. Their feelings need to be expressed but there are no easy solutions.

Try to make time to ask them how they are coping and give them the opportunity to talk about their baby if they want to. Don't be surprised if parents repeat the story of their baby again and again; be patient and listen. Talking is therapeutic in helping to work through their grief.

Allow the parents the freedom to handle their grief in their own way. Putting up photographs, making something special to remember the baby by, wearing a locket etc. are normal ways of remembering. Do not pass judgement on the choices parents make in this regard - it was their baby.

The parents may have made preparations for the baby's arrival (e.g. clothes, Moses basket etc.). Sooner or later these may need to be put away. There is no right time to do this but it is important that the parents do it themselves in their own time.

Invite the parents out. It is amazing how many friends and relatives stop telephoning or including the bereaved parents in social occasions. If they do not feel like going out they will tell you, the choice is theirs. But do keep in touch.

As Time Goes By

There is no set time for how long grief lasts. Every individual is different. Be guided by the parents. If they want to talk about the baby, listen. If they haven't said anything for some time, don't be afraid to ask them how they are.

One of the most common complaints parents have after the death of a baby is how quickly everyone else seems to forget. The parents do not forget. Even if they appear to be getting on with their lives, they will certainly appreciate you remembering and talking about their baby.

Offer to accompany them to a Support Meeting or Service of Remembrance. Especially if it is a single parent who has lost a baby, they might appreciate company when attending "couples" gatherings.

If you are pregnant yourself, or have a young baby, you might feel awkward and may not know what to do. The best thing is to phone before visiting. Parents differ in their reactions to pregnancy and new babies. Some may be upset while others are happy to see healthy babies, and might feel hurt if you keep your child from them. It is their own baby that they miss.

Special occasions such as the baby's birthday or anniversary are particularly hard. Send a note, or call with some flowers, just to say you're thinking of them and remembering their son or daughter. It can mean a lot to parents if other family members or close friends visit the baby's grave occasionally too.

Mothers/Fathers Day is particularly difficult days to get through for parents whose baby has died but even more difficult if they do not have other children. It is important to remember that they are still parents even though their baby died. There are appropriate cards for Mothers and Fathers Day in the ISANDS

[Memories Collection](#)

All **family gatherings**, especially christenings, weddings, parties etc. will reinforce the 'feelings of loss' for the parents. Be sensitive to this and always remember to count the baby that died along with other family members (grandchildren etc.).

Support from family and friends can have a great influence on how parents cope with their bereavement. It is appreciated and remembered. Your understanding and warmth is important - even if you feel of little use.

They need you now - more than ever.