

"If I could go back to just you
and me, I would hold you for
just a little while longer..."

HELLO & GOODBYE

- A HELPFUL HOSPITAL BIRTH
GUIDE FOR THE BEREAVED -

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"I'm sorry, there is no heartbeat." If you are reading this, these are words you likely just heard. From the bottom of our hearts, we are so sorry. There are few things as painful in this world as losing a child. Pregnancy and Infant Loss brings a unique set of grief. Not only will you mourn the death of someone you unconditionally love, but you will mourn the memories and milestones that will never come. After delivering your baby, you will be forced to fit a lifetime of memories with your child into one short hospital stay. We have sat down with multiple families who shared with us what they did or what they wish they had done with their child before leaving the hospital. Remember that everyone is different and no two circumstances are exactly the same. What may bring comfort to others may not feel the most appropriate for you. Feel free to choose or modify the activities that fit your circumstances the best and feels the most comfortable to you.

Hold your Baby

Before going into labor or surgery, the maternal bereavement team caring for you and your baby will likely go over any expectations and requests you have regarding the birth of your child. Hospital policies regarding pregnancy and infant loss are much more contemporary than they were just 10 years ago. Families today are encouraged to spend as little or as much time with their child as they wish. Gone are the days where stillborn babies are whisked away with family not being allowed to see or hold them. Choosing to hold and see your child is not for everyone, and that is okay too. Whatever your decision, do what YOU want and know that you can change your mind at any moment.

Skin-to-Skin

The fact that your baby has died doesn't mean you aren't able or allowed to take part in the many rituals that are common with a live birth. One such ritual you are entitled to is skin-to-skin time. Skin-to-skin is the practice of having a baby laid directly on the mother's bare chest right after birth. Having that close physical contact with your new baby is a beautiful and emotional experience for any mother, regardless of the situation. If you would like skin-to-skin time with your baby, make your expectations known to your doctor and nurses - even if your delivery is by cesarean.

CuddleCot

Ask the hospital if they have a CuddleCot or similar unit available for their families. A CuddleCot is a specially-designed bassinet that keeps stillborn babies cool so they can stay with their parents a little longer. Without a CuddleCot, stillborn babies are sometimes unable to stay with their parents for the full duration of the mother's hospital stay. To learn more about CuddleCots and why they are important, visit our [website](#).

Photographs and Video Recordings

When gathering all of your necessities for your child's birth, be sure to pack a camera. You will likely want to have photos of your baby, and you will never regret having too many photos of your child to look back on. As the months and years go by, your memories will unfortunately fade.

Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep is an organization of professional photographers that provide parents with beautiful heirloom portraits. These portraits play an important role in a family's healing process by preserving the moment to honor their child's legacy. This service is absolutely free of charge. Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep is a nationally-recognized nonprofit, and most communities big and small have one or more photographers available through their network. If you are interested in a free photography session, ask your care team if they can arrange a visit with a local photographer through NILMDTS.

Many families overlook the idea of videotaping special moments with their baby right in their hospital room. Take a moment to record videos of you talking to your baby or singing them a lullaby. Use these videos to capture not only your baby, but yourselves as well. The photos and videos that you take now will fill in the missing pieces of the memories you'll hope to always remember.

Handprints, Footprints, and Hand/Foot Castings

Much like a live birth, handprints and footprints are common practice at hospitals for families who have endured a loss. If the hospital you delivered at has not already made handprints and footprints for you to take home, feel free to ask them to do this for you. Some hospitals may even have supplies on-hand to make castings of

your baby's hands and feet with plaster of paris. These castings capture every minute detail, and the visceral feeling of being able to hold your baby's hand years later is something that can never be fully described.

Baby's First Bath

Ask your nurses if you can help give your baby his or her first bath. Your nurse should show you how to carefully bathe your baby, as their skin will be very fragile. Your nurse can lend a hand by helping you gently bathe your baby and taking photos or videos as well.

Angel Gown

Angel Gowns are baptismal gowns made from donated wedding dresses specifically for babies who have passed away. These gowns are lovingly crafted by seamstresses and then donated to hospitals for babies to be baptized and/or buried in. Ask your care team if they know how or where to find a gown. They may already have several on hand.

Baptism

Most hospitals have a Chaplain on staff who is available for your spiritual needs. Chaplains are ordained ministers who are also able to perform baptisms for your child. The ceremony is typically short in length and can be done from the comfort of your hospital room. You can also ask a nurse or family member to take photos and videos of the ceremony.

A lock of Hair

If your baby has enough hair, take a pair of scissors and carefully cut a lock of their hair to place in their baby book. Ask your nurses for a small ziplock bag to preserve the hair and keep it together.

Visitors

While you are intensely grieving the death of your baby, those closest to you are likely mourning with you. Consider allowing close family and friends to visit you in the hospital to meet your baby. This may provide closure for those who are grieving alongside you. If you wish, take photos of your visitors with your baby to include in their baby book as a reminder of all the lives they have touched.

Do you have other children? It may be important for you and your family to have your children meet their youngest sibling. Allowing your children to visit and form a bond with their new brother or sister will allow them to grieve as well and may provide them with closure. Make the decision based on what YOU feel is right for your family and your situation.

Lastly, remember that YOU decide who you want to visit you during this emotional time. It is your right to request no visitors, and to set boundaries on who is allowed to visit and for how long. Do what feels right for you, and what will allow you to make the most of your time with your baby.

Blanket & Outfits

During pregnancy, many families prepare a nursery and fill it with several items in preparation for bringing home their baby. If you have any special items, bring them to the hospital. Those items may be a baby blanket, a selection of outfits, or a stuffed animal. These will make for very special keepsakes when your time in the hospital comes to an end. These items associated with your baby will give you something tangible to hold when you are longing for that connection.

Finding Sentimental Items

For families who don't have any items from home to bring to the hospital, find sentimental items at the hospital that may hold a special place in your heart. For our family, that item was a bottle of Johnson & Johnson baby lotion. Our care team used this lotion on our daughter to keep her skin soft, and to this day we associate that scent with her. For you, it could be the hospital blanket that your child was wrapped in or the knitted hat your baby received after birth. You may choose to keep the hospital bracelets that mother and baby wear during your hospital stay, or purchase something from the hospital gift shop that reminds you of your little one. Don't be afraid to ask your care team if there is something you would like to keep - many items in a hospital setting are single-use and may be disposed of anyway after you leave.

Newspaper

It is customary with a live birth to buy the local newspaper on the day your child was born. Consider doing the same for the birth of your baby. It may seem pointless in the moment, but as time passes and your

grief has settled, you may find it therapeutic to read through the pages and see what the outside world was doing on the day your baby was born.

Sibling Gifts

The exchanging of gifts between new siblings is a common practice among many families. Just because your baby has passed away doesn't mean you have to cancel this tradition. Have your other children present a gift to your baby and vice versa. Just like grown-ups, children grieve too. Allowing your other children to give and receive gifts may give them a sense of closure and make a great bonding opportunity for them and their new sibling. Gifts for your baby could be a burial outfit or a stuffed animal. The gift that an older sibling receives can be anything the child is currently interested in. This will also give your other children a tangible item to hold onto when they want to feel close to their sibling.

Give & Take

We have listed several different ideas for things you can do with your child or things you can take home, but also consider giving something to your baby that is from you. When it was time for our family to say goodbye, we could not bear the idea of our child being left alone. We had two tiny teddy bears: one that we gave to our baby to be cremated with, and the other for us to cherish. Painfully aware that we would never see our child again, we chose to cut locks of our own hair to also be cremated with our baby. This was a symbolic act to show that despite death and distance, we are always together in love and spirit. On that day, a small piece of us went to Heaven with her.

These are just a few of the many ways in which other families who have had a loss chose to commemorate the moments they shared with their babies. The time you have been given with your child, however limited, is yours and yours alone - and no one on Earth can or should tell you how to use it. We hope that the suggestions contained in this eBook will inspire you to find your own special ways to bond with your baby.