



*Your Own
Special Goodbye*

*A Guide To Arranging
a Funeral for Your Baby*



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Thank you to the California SIDS Program and Donna Bell Sanders, M.P.H., for allowing the use of their materials in the preparation of this booklet.

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The impossible has happened.

“I felt really lonely and sick - like I wanted to die. I had this sick feeling in my stomach - a weird feeling of emptiness. I didn't know what to do without her. My arms ached to hold her.”

Your baby has died suddenly, with no warning. No one can tell you why. You're in a daze. You may be angry and confused. You can't believe it's true. You are feeling a deeper pain than you have ever known.

This booklet is for you and for those who will support you through these first difficult days and weeks. If it's hard to read this now, give it to a friend or family member who can help.

Over the next few days, you will be making important decisions about your baby's funeral or memorial service. This will be your special way of honoring your baby. This will be one way of giving your baby a loving goodbye.



Where do you begin?

You may wonder where to begin or who to ask about making funeral arrangements for your baby. Friends, family and clergy will want to help in any way they can. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind.

Ask a family member or friend to help you figure out what's best for you.

Together you can look over this booklet and talk about what you want to do. With this in mind, your family member or friend can call several funeral homes in your area. You may want to talk with a pastor, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader.

Once you know what is available in your area, it would be good to sit down and talk about it. It helps to have a friend say, "These are some of the things you can do. What seems best for you?"

"We sat and talked with our family before we went to the funeral home. We wrote down what we wanted. If it got hard, we could just give him the paper."



“Being together made our hearts stronger for each other. We knew there wasn’t anything we could have done.”



Take the time you need.

Making these final decisions about your baby may take some time. Usually there is no rush. If you need more time to think, take the time.

Do what is right for you.

There is no right or wrong way to have a funeral. Saying good-bye to your baby is a very personal and private thing. Ask for what you need, even if you think it won't make sense to others.

Choose a funeral director you feel comfortable with.

You don't have to pick the first person you call. Find someone you feel will support your needs and choices. Ask about costs and the special things you want done.

Be patient with yourself and with others around you.

No one can be protected from the pain of losing someone so very loved. Everyone goes through this pain in his or her own way and at his or her own pace.



It's a good idea to choose a funeral home while your baby is at the medical facility.

If your baby died unexpectedly, a medical examination will need to be done to determine why your baby died.

You will be informed of the initial results of the medical examination. However, additional tests need to be done and it may take several weeks to hear for sure why your baby died.

In the meantime, remember:

- ☞ **You didn't do anything wrong.**
- ☞ **There was nothing you could have done.**

*"My mother told me over and over -
sudden infant death syndrome
isn't anyone's fault.
You did nothing wrong.
Don't blame yourself."*



“We had a really supportive friend who just walked us through it. She helped us with the things we wanted done but just couldn’t do ourselves. And our funeral director was great. He explained our choices and said, ‘You tell us what you want.’ ”



What are your choices?

Here are some of the choices you can make. In most cases, you can choose any of these, and you can combine them any way you want. If there is something special you want done, ask your funeral director. He or she wants to help.

Do you want cremation or burial?

If you want a service, do you want:

- A funeral service?
- A memorial service?
- A graveside service?

Do you want the service to be held:

- In your home?
- At your place of worship?
- At the funeral home?
- Somewhere special to your family?

If there is a casket, do you want it open or closed?

If you want a viewing, do you want it private or public?

These choices will be described in more detail on the next pages. You don't have to find out every detail yourself. You don't have to make every decision alone.



Do you want cremation or burial?

This is a very personal choice. If you have strong personal or religious feelings about either choice, don't ignore those feelings.

When thinking about cremation:

If you choose cremation, you can decide what you want to do with your baby's ashes. Because your baby was small, the amount of ashes will also be very small. But you don't have to decide right away. You can wait and do what is best for you.

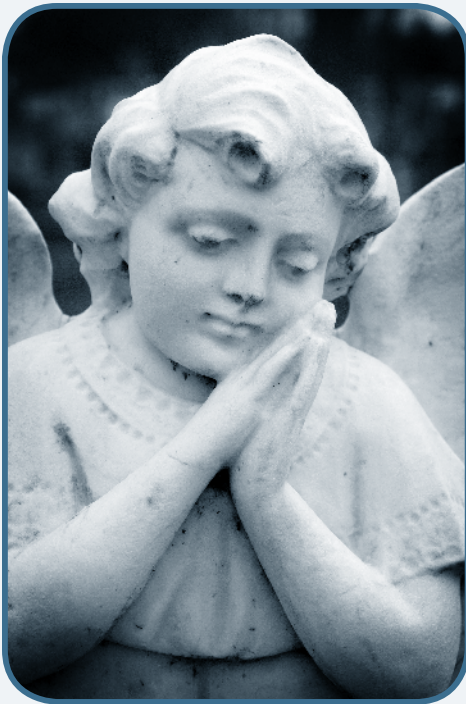
- ❧ The ashes can be buried in a small cemetery plot or put in a cemetery niche. You will need to talk with a cemetery about this.
- ❧ You can take the ashes home to scatter later.
- ❧ You can keep them at home in a special baby urn.
- ❧ Your baby's ashes do not have to be kept in a "traditional" urn. Many beautiful boxes are available and can even be engraved.

Some parents find that they want a place to visit later on. You might want to have a park bench put in or have a tree planted in your baby's memory.

"I found I needed a place to go. So we had a bench put in the cemetery in her memory. It helped to have a place to visit."



*"I wanted a burial for my baby.
But I worried that I couldn't
afford it. I worked it all out with
the funeral home. They were very
helpful in providing a service
I could afford."*



When thinking about burial:

If you choose burial, a cemetery plot is needed. In many places, the cemetery is not a part of the funeral home. A family member or friend could make these calls, too.

You can buy a family plot or you can buy a small plot just for your baby. Some cemeteries have a special section for babies.

Some parents worry about the costs of burial, knowing that cremation costs less. If this worries you, tell your funeral director. He or she may be able to help in some way. Most cemeteries can help you make a payment plan. Family and friends also may be able to help with such expenses.

Some parents wonder about headstones. You can wait and decide about this later. When your baby is buried, a marker with your baby's name is placed on the grave. A headstone may be put on any time later. Then you will have time to think about what you want on the headstone.



What kind of service do you want?

A funeral service is held before the burial or cremation. A memorial service usually is held afterwards.

The type of service you choose depends on your family's needs and beliefs. Some families have both.

Some parents prefer to have a private service as soon as possible. Others would rather wait for awhile.

Where do you want the service held?

The memorial or funeral service can be held at the funeral home, your own church or synagogue, your home, the gravesite or some other special place. Some parents are comforted by being in their place of worship. Other parents would rather use the funeral home. Some parents choose a garden or park.

Think about the place that would be best for you.

"We delayed our service so out-of-town people could come. It helped to wait. We could talk with our pastor about what we wanted in the service."



“I had a chance to say good-bye and hold our baby at the hospital. My husband had been out of town, so he was able to hold him and be with him at the funeral home. But we didn’t want an open casket at the funeral. That would have been too hard on us.”

“I was looking at her, touching her, I couldn’t leave her. She looked really beautiful in the casket. It helped people having it open. It helped them understand that nothing had been wrong with her.”

Do you want an open or closed casket?

Many parents wonder about having a special viewing of the baby and about having an open or closed casket. This, again, is a personal choice.

For many people, seeing the baby seems to be a needed part of saying good-bye. This can be done in many ways. There could be:

- ☞ A public viewing for family and friends a day or so before the funeral.
- ☞ A private viewing for you and close friends and family just before the funeral.
- ☞ An open casket at the funeral.

Seeing the baby at the funeral can be a real comfort for some parents. For others, seeing and holding the baby at home or in the hospital meets their needs.

Do what is best for you.



Make your good-bye your own.

There are so many ways you can make your baby's funeral special. Here are some things other parents have done or wish they could have done.

- ❧ Bring flowers from your garden.
- ❧ Arrange for a spray of flowers for your baby's casket.
- ❧ Choose a special outfit for your baby.
- ❧ Dress your baby yourself or have a friend dress your baby for you.
- ❧ Write a letter to your baby and include it in the casket.
- ❧ Have pictures taken at the funeral by a friend or the funeral home.
- ❧ Ask for a photograph to be taken of yourself with your baby.
- ❧ Keep a lock of your baby's hair.

"My aunt read a beautiful poem at the service. It meant so much to us."



*“We have no pictures of him.
I would have liked to have had
pictures taken. Even at the funeral,
that would have been good.”*

*“At our daughter’s funeral service
we arranged to have balloons for
everyone to release together after the
service. The balloons were placed
behind the casket during the service.
It looked so pretty and special.”*



- ∞ Make a footprint or handprint.
- ∞ Choose a special verse, prayer, song or lullaby for the service.
- ∞ Place a toy, blanket, or something special to you in the casket with your baby.
- ∞ Bring your baby book or photographs of the baby with you to the service.

You may want to hold your baby one more time before the funeral. This might be important if you haven’t been able to hold your baby since he or she died. Ask the funeral director about this if it is important to you.

Remember, nobody has ever gone through your grief. Do what you need to do, even if others might think it strange.



Do you have traditions?

Your family's traditions may be very important to you. Tell your funeral director about them.

For example, because of your tradition, you may not want your baby's body embalmed. Embalming does not have to be done. If you do not want it to be done, tell your funeral director.

Some families may want to take the baby home for a special time of family prayer. Talk to your funeral director about how this can be done if this is important to you.

There may be other things important to you and your family. Talk to your funeral director about what you want. Most of the time, your traditions can be honored.

"We were able to have family members sing some of our favorite hymns at the funeral. It was comforting to have our family be involved in the service."



*“We both wanted our sons
to be there. They were always
by his casket during the funeral.
It really helped them, I think.”*



What about our other children going to the funeral?

We would all like to protect our children from the pain of death and sorrow. But it can be good for children to go to the funeral if they want to. The funeral gives children a way to say good-bye and show their love for their baby brother or sister. Some children feel better if they can give some small gift – a drawing, flower or small toy – to the baby.

Ask a family member or friend to be with your child and explain what is going on. Your child’s questions can be answered in a simple, loving way that suits his or her age.

Going to the funeral may help your child feel more secure and part of the family. But you know your child best. Going to the funeral is one way for your child to say good-bye. There are other ways you can help your child show these feelings.



How do we deal with the costs of the funeral?

For many families, any unplanned expense presents real problems. Dealing with your baby's death is hard enough without having to cope with money worries. But there are ways to have a lovely service without spending beyond your family's means.

☞ **Let your funeral director know what your situation is.**

Your funeral director can suggest ways to have a beautiful service at a low cost. Payments can often be made over time, if needed.

☞ **There are services the funeral home provides that your family can do instead.**

Ask your funeral director what those services are. Some may be things your family would like to do.

“Different funeral homes may have different charges for the funeral of a baby. You need to talk to more than one. It's okay to check around. It's okay to change your mind.”



Here are the basic steps for getting help:

- ☞ Talk with your trusted friends, family members or clergy about what you want. You don't have to deal with every detail. Ask for help.
- ☞ Ask a friend or family member to help make the needed calls.
- ☞ Call several funeral homes. Find out what can be done and how much it costs. If you plan to bury your baby or your baby's ashes, you may need to call cemeteries.
- ☞ Support groups may be helpful to you. Ask the funeral home or hospital staff for a reference to an appropriate support group.



Remember, this funeral is to help you through the most difficult loss of your life.

☞ You can do what you need to do.

☞ You can take your time.

☞ You can follow the wisdom of your tradition and heritage.

☞ You can go your own way if you need to.

Ask friends, family, clergy and your funeral director for help in getting what you need to make this your own special good-bye.



Do you have any questions?

Do you want to know where to get help?

Here are some people you can call:

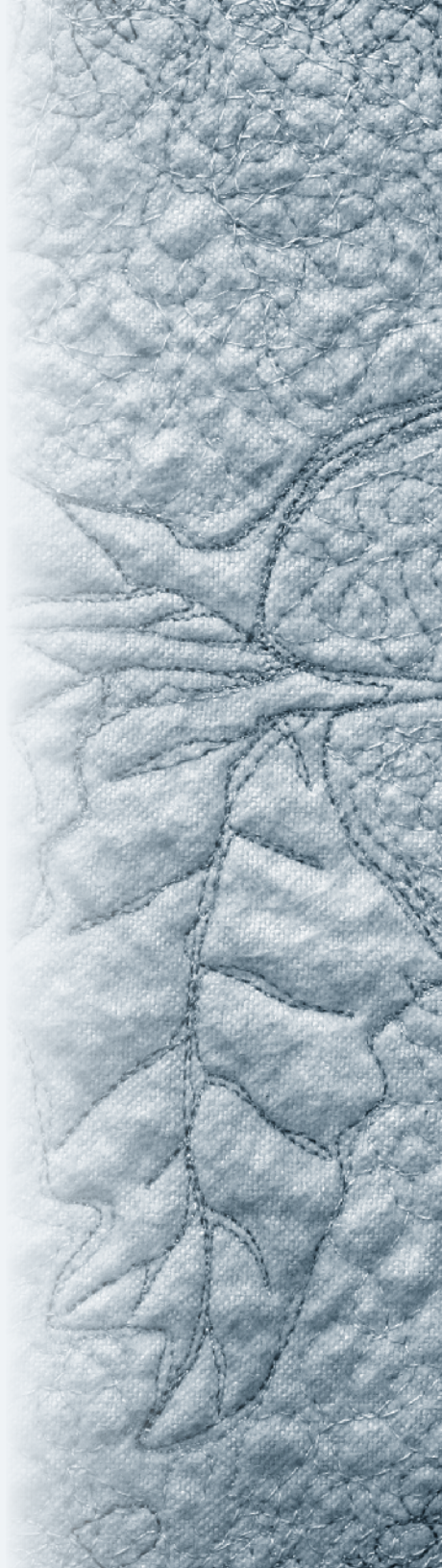
North Dakota Department of Health Division of Family Health
701.328.2493 or 800.472.2286

North Dakota Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Program
701.328.2784 or 800.472.2286

A funeral director in your community

For statewide information, referral and crisis management,
call the 2-1-1 HELP-LINE at 800.472.2911, or visit www.mhand.org.





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