

Creating memories

When someone we love dies, we often share memories and stories of them with other people. We may treasure certain objects that remind us of them and of the times we had together.

When your baby has died around the time of birth, you may only have a few memories of him or her. You may also have very few physical mementoes. Hospital staff now offer parents opportunities to create memories and to collect mementoes that will help them to remember their baby. Although you may feel unsure about what is suggested, many parents have told us how precious photographs and other items can be, especially in the years to come. Having things to show family members and friends may also help them to understand what the death of your baby means to you. The staff caring for you will suggest a range of things you could do to create these memories. Take the time to think about what is right for you. If, for any reason, you don't want to do what they suggest, please tell them. You may also have other ideas about what you want to do. If your baby died in the neonatal unit, you may already have had time to start doing some of the things that we mention here.

Naming your baby

Most parents decide to name their son or daughter. This gives your baby his or her own unique identity and can make it easier to talk about him or her. Some parents decide not to give their baby a name or to continue to use a nickname that they used during the pregnancy.

When a baby is very premature, it can be very difficult for staff to determine the sex straight away, in this case, you may prefer to wait until the sex can be confirmed by a specialist or at post mortem, before choosing their name. Or you could decide to choose a name that is suitable for both a boy and a girl.

Seeing and holding your baby

If your baby lived for a short while, or was admitted to a neonatal unit, you may have held and cuddled your baby before he or she died. If your baby died before or during the birth, the midwife or nurse will usually ask if you would like to see and perhaps hold him or her.

The idea of seeing and holding your baby may seem very odd or frightening, especially if you have never seen a dead person before. But for many parents, the time they spend with their baby becomes their most precious memory and an experience that they would not have missed for the world. If you want to see your baby and no one has suggested it, just ask the staff caring for you.

Some parents decide not to see their baby. Or one partner wants to see the baby while the other does not wish to do so. This is a very individual decision and neither

of you should be under any pressure to see your baby if you don't want to. The most important thing is for each person to decide what feels right for them.

If you are not sure about seeing your baby or are anxious about how your baby will look, you could ask the staff caring for you to tell you what he or she looks like. You could ask to see a photograph of your baby first. You could also ask the midwife or nurse to wrap or wash and dress your baby before you see him or her. Even babies with a visible abnormality can be carefully wrapped or dressed so that the abnormality is not obvious.

However, if your baby died quite a long time before the birth, his or her appearance may have been affected. If this has happened the midwife or nurse will discuss this with you when your baby is born. If you are not sure if you want to see your baby, you could see just his or her hand or foot.

If you decided not to see your baby but have now changed your mind, just tell the staff caring for you, if you are still in hospital. If you are at home, ring the labour ward or the contact number you were given before leaving the hospital. The staff can then arrange for you to see your baby. This will usually be in a special room for relatives in the mortuary. Bear in mind that your baby's appearance will change with time.

Washing and dressing your baby

If you would like, and depending on your baby's size and condition, you may be able to wash and dress him or her yourself. You could also ask the midwife or nurse to do it for you. You may want to bring something from home for your baby to wear. If your baby is very small, the hospital will usually be able to provide you with suitable clothing; most units keep a stock of extra small clothes. If your baby is too small or delicate to be dressed, the midwife or nurse can wrap him or her in a tiny shawl or a similar garment. Féileacáin provides the maternity hospitals with hand knitted outfits and wraps for tiny babies.

"I had a chance to wash my daughter and to dress her in the clothes that I had bought for her to come home from the hospital in. This was important to me as it was the only chance I would get to do these things for her. It was my chance to be her mother."
Mother

Photographs

The midwife or nurse caring for you will usually offer to take photographs of your baby. You can also take your own photographs. A digital camera is best because it produces lasting images that can be copied and stored on a disk or on a computer. Polaroid photos fade over time. Féileacáin provides single use cameras to each unit so that you can take pictures of your baby if you do not have your own camera with you.

If you are unsure if you want photographs, the midwife or nurse may ask you if she can take some and keep them in the mother's hospital notes. You, the mother, can

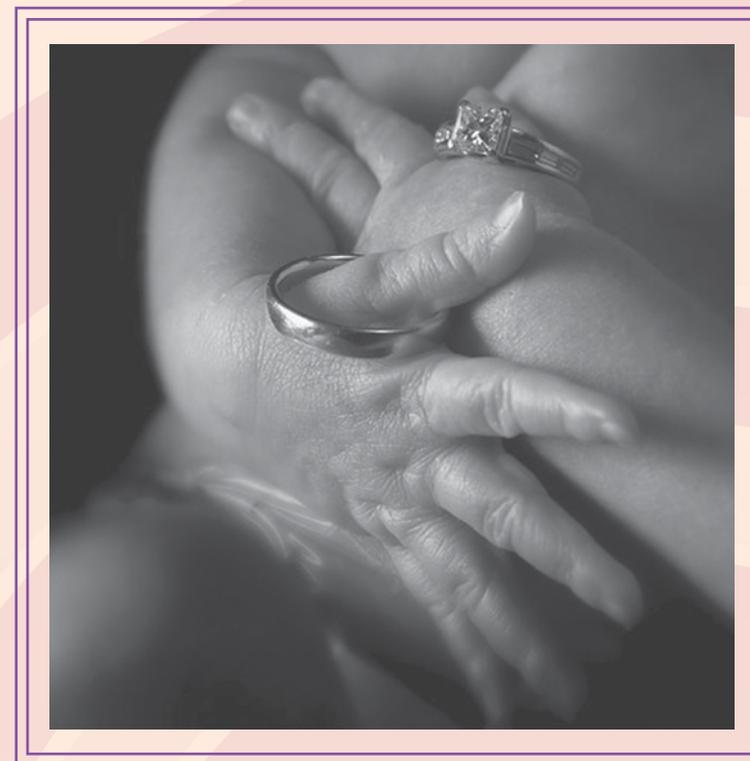
ask for them at a later date if you decide that you do want them. Again, this is a very personal choice. If for any reason you don't want photographs taken, just tell the hospital staff of your decision.

"Deciding whether or not to take photographs was very hard. I knew that some people wouldn't be comfortable looking at photographs of our son, I wasn't sure if I would be comfortable with them. In the end we decided that it was better to take the photographs. Even if we never looked at them, at least we had them and could make a choice about looking at them or showing them. If we had decided against taking photographs at the time that was something we could never change our mind about." Father

If you do want photographs, you may also want some of you or your partner with your baby, or all three of you together. Some parents include other family members such as other children and the baby's grandparents. You may also consider taking photographs just of your baby's hands or feet. If your baby was one of twins or more, you may want photographs of the babies together. This could be important in the future for the surviving twin or triplet.

Contained in our Memory Box is a leaflet explaining how to take photographs of your baby in our hospital pack and a customised envelope for developing your photographs from the single use camera. This service is provided free of charge by bereaved parents whose firm specialises in film development. For more information see leaflet.

Throughout 2015 Feileacain plans to provide every hospital with at least two digital cameras for use by both staff and families to take pictures of their baby over their stay in hospital. The images may then be uploaded to our special website for free processing. Additional leaflets will be included in the Memory Boxes as this service becomes available



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Feileacáin

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society of Ireland
(SANDAI)

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